The Feminists Seek Unfair and Unattainable Goals

February 15, 1996 by Phyllis Schlafly

The aging feminist leaders gathered in Washington earlier this month amid self-doubts about whether they are relevant any more. "We want to end this discussion about the death of feminism," proclaimed the organizer of this Feminist Expo '96 and its most voluble spokesperson, Eleanor Smeal.

Feminism is in its death throes because it seeks unattainable goals at variance with reality, common sense, and fairness. In the 1970s and 1980s, the feminists sought a "gender-neutral" society; their goal was to be treated exactly like men.

The feminist "party line" today is obsessed with victimology as the problem and affirmative action as the solution: they see the world as one gigantic male conspiracy against women. The feminists' goal is reverse discrimination quotas for women in hiring and promotions.

We hear endless whining about "equal pay for equal work," but that's been the law of the land for 33 years. What they really want is reverse discrimination quotas to give women equal pay for unequal work.

The feminists use "Glass Ceiling" as a code word for quotas for professional and executive women, and "comparable worth" as the code word for quotas for skilled white and blue collar jobs. (Unskilled jobs are never on the feminists' radar screen.)

The feminists' mantra is, "a woman earns only 72 cents for every dollar a man earns." That statement is false on its face, first, because of the dishonest use of the word "every." It might be correct if the sentence read, "The average woman earns 72 percent of the earnings of the average man," but that would be meaningless because it's unrelated to how much work the average man or woman does.

Americans don't believe in equal pay for everyone (that's a Marxist notion). We believe in equal pay for equal work.

When you relate earnings to work performed, male and female gender profiles are very different. A recent research paper by the Pacific Research Institute of San Francisco provides overwhelmingly persuasive documentation.

The slogans "wives have to work" and "it takes two incomes to support a family today" obscure public understanding of the powerful effect that marriage has on workforce earnings, and 81 percent of women do marry. As the scholar Thomas Sowell has shown, marriage has exactly the opposite effect on the earnings of men and women.

Married men with children earn the most, while married women with children earn the least. As the number of children increases, a married man works more hours in the workforce and a married woman works fewer hours.

In 1994 only 55% of women worked 40 or more hours a week compared to 75% of men. While 16% of men worked 55 or more hours a week, only 6% of women did. It's ridiculous to compare earnings without relating them to whether produced by full-time or part-time employment.

For the benefit of feminists who need to have the obvious stated: people who work more earn more, and they should. The principal income gap is not between women and men, but between married women and everyone else, and that is primarily the result of a voluntary domestic division of labor, not labor-force discrimination by a conspiracy of men. Women who remain single, invest in education, stay in the labor force, and work long hours fare about as well as men in the labor market.

The feminists' next line of attack is to assert that, even when you compare levels of education, or highest college level attained, Bureau of Labor Statistics figures show a sizeable differential (they call it discrimination) between men's and women's earnings. But comparing incomes by the highest degree earned reveals individual choices made by women, and correlation does not prove cause.

In 1992, one out of four women who earned Ph.D.s did so in education, whereas one out of five men earned a Ph.D. in engineering. The mean monthly income of education majors is $3,048, and of engineering graduates is $4,049 (a third higher). Personal choices produced those results; no gestapo forced women to major in fields that pay less.

Looking at master's and doctor's degrees conferred in 1992, we find that women earned 75% of the advanced degrees in education, 65% in English literature, and 63% in ethnic and cultural studies. Men

earned 85% of the advanced degrees in engineering, 75% in physical sciences and science technologies, and 60% in mathematics.

As of 1990, women held 73% of all college degrees in education, 61% of degrees in liberal arts and humanities, and 81% of degrees in nursing and pharmacy. Men held 91% of degrees in engineering, 74% in physical and earth sciences, and 67% of degrees in mathematics and statistics.

All professions have costs and benefits, pluses and minuses. Investment bankers make more money than school teachers, but teachers have frequent and much longer vacations.

The proper role of government is to provide equal protection of the laws and opportunity, not preferential treatment based on warped social theory, especially when that theory is so demonstrably false.