FROM: Phyllis Schlafly

68 FAIRMOUNT, ALTON, ILLINOIS 62002 / (618)462-5415

RELEASE: FEBRUARY 7, 1984

TRYING TO MEASURE THE UNMEASURABLE

We are indebted to the Washington Monthly for the publication of an article by Geoffrey Cowley which shows why the notion of setting wages according to "Comparable Worth" (CW) is a ridiculous idea. He analyzes the "point-factor job evaluation systems" which are the linchpin on which CW rests and on which Federal Judge Jack Tanner indulged in an expensive flight of judicial fancy.

His decision ordering the State of Washington to pay back-wages and remedies estimated to cost $1 billion in new taxes was based on a point system which found a 20 percent wage gap between male and female state employees. For example, the evaluation concluded that laundry workers, who were mostly women, were paid 41 percent less than truck drivers, who were mostly men, even though their jobs had "comparable worth."

Mr. Cowley dissects the exercise of figuring out how much a laundry worker is worth. The CW system is based on "a cheerfully mathematical view of qualities that you would think would be hard to quantify."

CW assumes that the worth of any job, from circus clown to key-punch operator, varies in relation to its "knowledge and skills," "mental demands," "accountability," and "working conditions." Each of these components is further broken down into two or three subcomponents, and points are awarded on the basis of each.

Under "accountability," you can win points for your "freedom to take action" as well as for the nature and size of your "impact." How do you quantify "impact"? CW consultants reply, "The simplest way to look at Size is to say the job most clearly impacts on something BIG, or on something LITTLE, or on something IN-BETWEEN."

The "knowledge and skills" component breaks down into "managerial," "interpersonal," and "technical" dimensions, each with its own rating. "Mental demands" come in two varieties: "judgment" and "problem solving."

The process works like this. A "team of metaphysicians" interviews workers, and, after solemn mutual consultation, assigns each job a score. Thus, a clerk-typist in the Washington study became a 152 (made up of 106 on "knowledge and skills," 23 on "mental

demands," 23 on "accountability," and 0 on "working conditions."

Mr. Cowley then asks some delightful questions which show the silliness of the whole exercise and "the nightmarish society that might result." "Children would have new ways to taunt one another in the sandbox: 'My daddy's a 634!' 'Oh yeah? Well, my daddy's a 723, and he says if he can harmonize subordinate subfunctions three more times this week we can go to Bermuda!'"

"A beginning licensed practical nurse scores 158 comparable worth points, while an Information Specialist III -- an experienced PR flack -- scores 324. Or look at a janitor, who scores 101, while an Advisory Sanitarian II -- someone who doesn't actually clean anything himself, but makes sure local hospitals and nursing homes do -- scores 395. Why on earth should our society value people who issue press releases or fill out reports all day long more than people who save lives and do the dirty work?"

Why is an advisory sanitarian any worthier than a janitor? Because, according to CW, "advisory sanitarians have an M.A. in public health, environmental health, or a closely allied field, and you must be registered as a sanitarian." But, Mr. Cowley wryly comments, the only advantage of that affiliation "might be that its monthly four-color newsletter, Sanitarians Today, advertises cheap charters to Luxembourg."

"Maintaining a standard as vague as 'worth' could make quantum mechanics look simple," Mr. Cowley continues. "In order to determine whether a Lockheed audit-machine operator II was legally entitled to the same pay as a senior steam-dryer maintainer, the EEOC would have to haul in a committee to perform a company-wide worth analysis."

"The courts, too, would have to evaulate the working of an entire industry every time they heard a discrimination suit. Major civil rights battles would turn on such questions as whether error-free typing is a greater corporate asset than leak-free plumbing, or whether sitting at a VDT places greater strain on Betty's eyes than pipefitting places on Jack's back. And does Doris, the floor manager at Sears, 'most clearly impact on something IN-BETWEEN as opposed to something LITTLE?'"

Mr. Cowley concludes that, sure, "there will still be bosses who look upon their underpaid -- and more intelligent -- secretaries with condescension and perhaps lust." But Comparable Worth won't help end inequality, "it will enshrine it ... through the use of questionably 'scientific' means to measure what is ultimately unmeasurable."