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DOES MOM HAVE TO WORK?

ABC-TV Network and Barbara Walters are lobbying for government, instead of parents, to assume the responsibility of taking care of babies. That's the conclusion we can draw from ABC's recent 20/20 program called "When Mom Has To Work."

Barbara solemnly announced that a debate about "whether mothers should work is no longer relevant" because most mothers "have" to take a paid job. She said that only 10% of moms stay home any more, and that most families need two paychecks.

Barbara didn't check her facts carefully enough. The latest figures show that only half of mothers with children under age two have paid jobs. Barbara pretends that the other half doesn't exist, but in fact those millions of fulltime homemaker/mothers really do exist.

The ABC program showed three employed couples, each with two preschool children. Barbara commiserated with them -- over their problems with hired child care, the guilt the mothers feel (she called it the "pain" of a deeply-felt emotional conflict), the way the husbands feel neglected, the long hard-working hours, and the strains on marriage.

The program showed how the parents had to wake up the children at 5:30 or 6:00 a.m. so they could be fed and dropped off at a child-care center before the mother reports to her job. The little children looked woefully unhappy at being forced to accept this unnatural schedule.

The program was obviously designed to arouse sympathy for the "mom who has to work," but it evoked much more sympathy for the preschool children who were dropped off and picked up each day like a bag of laundry. One pathetic youngster said, "Mommy, I wish you didn't have to work. You're always so tired."

Women's lib has been telling us for years that fathers should be sensitive and loving, supportive of their wives' careers, and willing to do half the housework and baby tending. Indeed, these three husbands are supportive and caring. But when Barbara added up the hours, the wives were putting in a seven-hour day of domestic work on top of their

full-time jobs, while the husbands were doing only four hours a day of domestic work.

The wives felt put upon because they had too little sleep and too much stress. Yet the husbands still felt neglected because their wives are always so tired and flop into bed exhausted at 8:00 p.m. The husbands discreetly shared their complaint with the nationwide television audience that their wives had no time or energy for romance.

After these probing invasions of the privacy of three young families, Barbara Walters told us what we are supposed to think about all this. First, she berated the United States for being "the only industrial nation without a day-care policy." Then she proposed an ambitious action program.

Barbara told us that we should make helping these couples "a national priority." And who is the "we"? Well, she wants the taxpayers to provide good all-day care for preschoolers, presumably beginning in infancy, and she wants the schools to provide baby-sitting services for schoolchildren until their parents can collect them in the evening.

In addition, she wants the government to force employers to guarantee paid maternity leave to mothers, and also allow mothers to work "flexible" hours. That means choosing your own hours to accommodate yourself rather than your employer.

Before you start shedding tears about the plight of these unhappy couples or writing your Congressman to urge legislation, there is one thing you should know that Barbara Walters didn't tell ABC viewers. Each of the three couples has an annual income between $50,000 and $57,000.

It's no wonder that the ABC scriptwriters and editors neglected to mention this important fact because it blows the whole argument that the moms "have" to work and that the taxpayers or employers "should" pay or subsidize the costs of child care.

It is unfortunate that the feminist movement has taught young women that they should put their own career above every other value including caring for their own children, and that their time is too valuable to waste on being a fulltime mother. One of the mothers frankly said, "I want to work."

They've made their choice, as they have a right to do in a free society. But they have no right to ask the taxpayers or their fellow-employees to finance that choice.