P.S. to the NEWS
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LONGER WORK WEEK, LOWER LIVING STANDARDS

Are Americans facing a future in which the family breadwinner must work an 80-hour week in order to pay the incoming bills? And even then must accept a lower standard of living? That's what the current gloom-and-doom forecasts add up to.

The economists don't call it an 80-hour work week. They just say in one breath that an additional eleven million wives will soon migrate into the labor force, and in another breath that Americans will see their standard of living drastically reduced in the 1980s.

After the industrial revolution spread through the western world in the early 1880s, an 80-hour week, more or less, was fairly common: 12 hours a day for six or seven days a week. The dramatic rise in U.S. living standards, and the equally dramatic decline in the work week necessary to produce those living standards, were the result of our steady increase in productivity, or greater output per man-hour.

Historians of the future may look back and see that the climb in U.S. productivity and in living standards peaked about the time Jimmy Carter moved into the White House, and it has been all down hill ever since. In the second quarter of 1979, productivity fell at an annual rate of 5.7 percent, the biggest quarterly decline ever recorded in U.S. statistics.

This decline in productivity caused the Joint Economic Committee of Congress to warn that the average American is likely to see his standard of living reduced in the 1980s. The Committee said this means that, even without oil price increases, few Americans will be able to afford a decent home and other necessities of life.

However the work week required to support the average family, even at a lower level of real income, will no longer be 40 hours, but closer to 80 hours. The wives will be putting in the additional 40 hours, doing half the manual work in the labor force (in addition, usually, to most of the traditional "women's work" at home).

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The experience of Sweden, which during the 1970s moved nearly all its wives out of the home and into the work force, is that, at first, a two-income family appears to gain in real income. But once this migration is completed, the economy seems to settle down; families aren't living any better than they once did on a single income, but the wives are locked into the labor force.

The biggest factor causing the movement of women into the labor force is, of course, inflation. A bipartisan House Task Force on inflation recently issued another gloom-and-doom report warning that "our free system of government" is threatened by a runaway inflation that may make today's dollar worth only 13 cents in 30 years.

This group, headed by Rep. Paul Simon (D-Ill.) projected that, even if our current 13.6 percent inflation rate is cut in half, consumer prices will still rise so fast that today's $8,000 car will cost $61,000 in 30 years.

In order to reverse our current decline and start on the way up again, we need economic policies which reward private savings rather than profligate spending, and which channel profits into capital formation rather than into the nonproductive federal bureaucracy. We need an end to the burden of government over-regulation by bureaucrats who care nothing about the high prices they cause or the jobs which are lost when companies go bankrupt. We need policies which permit employers to hire and promote the most qualified and efficient workers rather than policies which require employers to hire and promote based on percentage quotas of those "minimally-qualified".

An example of what American private enterprise can do is our tremendous lead in silicon chip technology, the foundation of modern computers. Immense amounts of data can be put on tiny silicon chips, smaller than a fingernail. A new book published in London, "The Mighty Micro," states that we have a ten-year lead over the Russians in this very important technology.

We can be thankful that Texas Instruments and other computer experts have given us this one big economic lead in an otherwise declining economy. Private enterprise can meet the productivity challenge of the 1980s if government will get out of the way.

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