

NATIONAL POST

New feminist demand - Higher Taxes

By Andrea Mrozek, Published April 7, 2011

If you won the lottery tomorrow, would you treat that extra money as a burden - a coercive force pushing you out of your workplace and into your home? Or would you treat it as a blessing, something that allowed you to do the things you've always wanted?

Kathleen Lahey, an avowedly feminist tax professor at Queen's University Faculty of Law, would appear to embrace the former position. To be fair, the issue she discussed in her April 1 National Post column, "Bribing Women To Stay At Home," wasn't winning the lottery; it was family taxation, a policy that allows a couple to share income for tax purposes, and thereby lower their tax burden. But the principle is the same: Like a lottery win, a policy of family taxation - such as the income-splitting arrangement discussed by Stephen Harper's government - would mean a small windfall for families through lower taxes, which in turn would allow spouses greater flexibility to pursue their dreams.

Lahey calls income-splitting one of the "huge hidden barriers [on] the road of women who have their own incomes." Her reasoning is that when families are able to access a reduced combined tax load, by splitting a single wage-earner's income, the result will be that "women [leave] paid work to earn huge tax bonuses for working in the home."

What Lahey glides over is the fact that women who do follow this path are doing so by choice. In effect, Lahey is literally arguing for the right to pay higher taxes, specifically for women - so that they will be forced, as a matter of economic necessity, to stay in the work force.

It's safe to say that Revenue Canada will not complain with Lahey's reasoning: The right to pay higher taxes is a right that many bureaucrats would endorse. For the rest of us, however, family income-splitting is simply common sense.

The larger question is why feminists such as Lahey have staked out their odd position. One answer is that many feminists believe that maximizing female participation in the workplace is a pre-eminent social goal unto itself - never mind what lifestyle choice individual women actually want. Lahey clearly believes that tax policy should be applied toward this goal.

But the issue runs deeper. On a more basic level, family taxation is a problem for many feminists because it starts with heterosexual marriage, an institution many ultra-progressive academics think is inherently suspect and inequitable - a trap that encourages women to become mothers as opposed to, say, law professors.

Germaine Greer, author of *The Female Eunuch*, called marriage a form of legalized slavery. Simone de Beauvoir, author of *The Second Sex*, considered one of feminism's foundational works, wrote that "[marriage] almost always annihilates woman . she finds herself alone, forlorn, a subject; and she finds nothing to do with herself."

Beauvoir advocated for children to be in some form of state sponsored care, "signifying not that [children] would be taken away from their parents, but that they would not be abandoned to them" (emphasis mine). Beauvoir also declared - with words that eerily echo the spirit of Lahey's op-ed: "No woman should be authorized to stay at home and raise her children. Society should be totally different. Women should not have that choice, precisely because if there is such a choice, too many women will make that one."

Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique* called family "a comfortable concentration camp." And more recently, in her book *Get to Work: A Manifesto for Women of the World*, Linda Hirshman wrote that "home [life] is not good for women and it's not good for the society. The women aren't using their capacities fully; their so-called free choice makes them unfree dependents on their husbands."

If marriage marks the start of a prison sentence for women, it's not hard to see how feminists might believe that government policy should be used to make domestic life impossible for them. That research shows marriage is actually a positive benefit for both men and women is not part of the standard feminist dogma. (More to the point, the reality that family taxation is gender-neutral is lost on feminists because they take it for granted - in somewhat sexist fashion, I might note - that women always will be the ones staying at home.)

Feminists are locked in a pre-1970s time warp, in which all women who stay at home are victims of someone else's choice. The "problem" with family taxation isn't that it "bribes" women to stay home. The problem, as Professor Lahey perhaps privately admits to herself, is that many women are only too thrilled to take some time off from paying work to raise their children, provided that option is economically realistic. Her problem is that the extra money (read freedom) provided by family taxation might mean "too many" women (as she, in her wisdom, defines it) make the "wrong" choice.

Should Lahey ever accrue the benefits of family taxation, she's free to give the extra cash right back to the government. That is her right. The rest of us, meanwhile, will merely enjoy the freedom that extra money in our pockets affords us.

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