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## THE CONSERVATIVE PROGRAM IS A WOMEN'S ISSUE

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### ABSTRACT

The Conservative program strikes deeply at the institutions that support the economic independence and security of women. This paper reviews social welfare budget cuts, the relaxation of affirmative action and workplace health and safety rules, and the social issues agenda of the New Right for their impact on women's economic, social and political status. It describes how the Reagan Administration's economic recovery program victimizes women, especially minority women. Not only is the "feminization" of poverty intensified, but women are sent from the paid labor market back to unpaid labor in the home, aided and abetted by the social issues agenda of the New Right. The Administration's domestic program is analyzed in the context of its broader strategy for coping with the current economic crisis. It is viewed as part of a long range plan to redirect capital into the private sector by redistributing income upwards and weakening the political power of women, minorities and organized labor whose empowerment and demands for an improved standard of living have become too costly for business and government.

The conservative program is a women's issue. The social welfare cuts, the relaxation of workplace protections and rights and the social issues agenda of the New Right, all strike deeply at institutions that support the economic independence and security of women. They also reverse gains that women, along with minorities and organized labor have fought for and won since the 1930s.

The domestic features of the conservative program, to be discussed here, are best understood as part of a broader strategy designed to combat the deepening economic crisis facing the United States since the mid-1970s. Like Nixon, Ford and Carter before him,

Reagan is trying to promote economic recovery by directing larger amounts of capital into the private sector. Known as Reaganomics, the plan includes: (1) tax and spending policies that redistribute income upwards from the poor and middle classes (Pear, 1982c) and (2) efforts to curb the political power of women, minorities and organized labor, whose empowerment and demands for a better standard of living have become too costly for business and government (Weisskopf, 1981; Campen, 1981).

Few today deny that Reaganomics benefits the "haves" at the expense of the "have-nots." Less widely understood are the ways in which the conservative program undermines the economic and social condition of women. This paper argues that women are primary, but not exclusive, victims of the Administration's strategy to cope with a seriously troubled economy. Part I examines how social welfare budget cuts promote an upward redistribution of income by lowering the standard of living of many women. Part II explores how the relaxation of anti-discrimination, affirmative action, workplace health and safety rights, along with the social issues agenda of the New Right weakens the political power of women, minorities and organized labor, and reinforces patriarchal values and institutions.

#### SOCIAL WELFARE BUDGET CUTS

Reaganomics includes both supply-side tax cuts and domestic budget cuts. Both redistribute income from the poor and working class to wealthy individuals and large corporations. The tax cuts intentionally favor the wealthy whom it is believed are most likely to save and invest. Social welfare cuts reduce the economic resources of the poor, in hopes that larger amounts of capital will flow into the private sector.

Indeed, Wall Street and many politicians see domestic cuts as the best way to cut government costs, but also to limit the federal government as a competitor with private enterprise for investment capital believed to be scarce (Friedman, 1981; "Why Wall Street Worries," 1981; "Why Moneymen Worry," 1981). The cuts, it is argued, will reduce government spending and shrink the federal deficit. A smaller deficit in turn limits the need for federal borrowing to finance it, causing interest rates to fall and making more and cheaper money available for investment by private corporations. That is, less government spending will make room for more private economic activity and greater profits.

Whether or not social welfare cuts actually stimulate more private economic activity, they are lowering the standard of living of the poor. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) reported recently that more than half of the 16 million families living near or below the poverty line will lose some income as a result of Reagan's budget

cuts (Crittenden, 1981). When spending cuts are combined with supply-side tax cuts, the CBO predicts that by 1985, the net effect of the Administration's economic recovery plan will be to reduce the income of the poor while increasing that of the well-to-do (Pear, 1982c).

This upward redistribution of income helps lower women's standard of living by (a) furthering the "feminization" of poverty and (b) channeling women from the paid labor market back to unpaid labor in the home.

### The Feminization of Poverty

Women are especially victimized by the upward redistribution of income achieved through domestic tax and spending cuts as they are already overrepresented among the poor and working poor. The 1980 Report of the National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity observed that "the feminization of poverty has become one of the most compelling social facts of the decade." It predicted "that by the year 2000, the poverty population will be comprised solely of women and their children" (National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity, 1981).

In 1980, women were twice as likely as men to be poor, and female-headed households were five times as likely as two-parent households to have incomes below the official poverty line of \$8414 for a family of four. One fourth of white female-headed families and half of those headed by minority women fell below the poverty line (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980c: 27).

Older women are the fastest growing poverty group in the country. While only 59 percent of the population over 65 is female, 72 percent of the elderly poor are women. The poverty rate for women over 65 is 60 percent higher than that for men of the same age (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1979, 1980b).

Even among the 51.1 percent of women over 16 who work, the risk of poverty is high. The 1981 median income of women (\$11,591) employed full-time and year-round was 60 percent that of men (\$19,173) (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1980c: 19-20). Despite equal opportunity laws, this gap has widened since 1965 when women earned 65 cents for every dollar earned by men (NASW, 1980). Moreover, fully-employed women with one-to-three years of college earn less, on the average, than men who have not graduated from elementary school (U.S. Women's Bureau, 1980). Throughout the post-war period unemployment among women of all races has exceeded that of men. It is greater for minority women, who are twice as likely as white women to be jobless (U.S. Department of Labor, 1980a: 67-80).

Given this "feminization" of poverty, it is not surprising that the majority of social welfare recipients are women. In recent years,

80 percent of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1980a: 1), 70 percent of Food Stamp (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1980: 16), 66 percent of Supplemental Security Income (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1980d: 358), Social Security (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1980b: 127-128), Medicaid (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1980a: 7), and Public Housing (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1980a: 5), 45 percent of CETA (Title VI) (U.S. Department of Labor, 1980b: 174) and 35 percent of Unemployment Compensation (U.S. Department of Labor, 1979b: 56) recipients were women.

All of these programs, on which millions of women rely for minimum levels of income of food, shelter, clothing, jobs, and health care, were cut sharply in Reagan's fiscal 1982 budget and are likely to be cut further in 1983.<sup>1</sup>

Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) originated in 1935 to help maintain and strengthen family life. By 1981 this \$11 billion program provided cash benefits to 3.5 million families, more than 80 percent of whom were female-headed. Although benefits vary widely by state, the average AFDC family receives \$271 a month or \$3,253 a year (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980d: 354).

The fiscal 1982 budget lowered AFDC expenditures by \$1.2 billion or 11 percent (Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1981c). Since entitlement funding by law cannot be reduced by lowering appropriations, these savings were achieved by tightening eligibility requirements, lowering benefit levels, reducing work incentives and otherwise restructuring the program. As a result, nearly 700,000 recipients are expected to lose their benefits or have them reduced (Weinraub, 1981a, 1981c). If fiscal 1983 proposals to convert AFDC into a state administered block grant and/or further lower its support are accepted the program will shrink even more.

The current Food Stamp program was enacted in 1964 to feed the needy and aid farmers by using up surplus agriculture products. In 1981, it subsidized the purchase of food by 22.5 million low-income persons, or 7.8 million families (Pear, 1981a; Roberts, 1981). Again, rather than reduce funding directly, program rules were changed to cut \$1.7 billion of the \$16.4 billion Food Stamp program in 1982. Tighter eligibility standards and denial of aid to boarding house residents and strikers forced one million people off the program (Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1981b). Nearly all the remaining recipients had their benefits reduced. If plans to defederalize food stamps succeed, even greater contractions can be expected (Raines, 1982).

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1. At the time of this writing, the Fiscal 1983 budget was stalled in Congress.

Changes in school lunch and other food programs further assaulted food budgets of the poor. Three million children and 400 hundred schools dropped out of the school lunch program after \$1.4 billion in cuts raised food costs ("Still Cutting School Lunch Corners," 1981). Pregnant women lost out when the \$1 billion Supplemental Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) was capped (Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1981c).

Medicaid enacted in 1965 to finance the purchase of medical services by the poor and working poor served 18.3 million people and cost of \$18.5 billion in 1981. The fiscal 1982 budget reduced Medicaid payments to the states by \$1 billion and another \$2.1 billion cut was requested for 1983 (Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1981e). Women and children will be especially hard hit. Although two-thirds of Medicaid recipients are women and 36 percent of households enrolled in the program are female-headed, 65 percent of all Medicaid payments go to a minority of elderly recipients in nursing homes and hospitals (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1980a: 7; Weinraub, 1981b). The states are less likely to reduce aid to this minority of program recipients, leaving women and children to take the brunt of the cuts.

Support for other health care programs also fell when the Administration converted many of them into state administered block grants and cut them by 25 percent across the board. Fiscal 1983 budget proposals intensify this trend (Raines, 1982). Ironically, health care cuts, like many others may cost the federal government more than it saves. A 1978-1979 Harvard study found that for each \$1 spent on prenatal care, \$3 was saved in hospital costs because fewer babies were born at low weights (Burros, 1981). More recently the New York City Task Force on Adolescent Pregnancy reported that "for every dollar spent on Family Planning, three are saved from other human service programs" (Brozan, 1981).

Until the Reagan cuts made \$11.6 billion fewer federal dollars available for public housing and subsidized rents, these programs served 2.4 million families, two-thirds of whom were female-headed (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1980a: 15). Fiscal 1982 cuts sharply limited the construction of new public housing units, reduced Section 8 low-rent subsidies, restricted eligibility for public housing and raised rents from 25 percent to 30 percent of family income (Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1981b).

Proposals for 1983 redirect federal housing aid from the construction of low-income housing units to "vouchers" which aid individuals to secure shelter on the open market ("Panel Urges Shift in Housing Policy," 1981; Pear, 1982d). Critics fear that families who qualify for vouchers because of their low income, may have no place to use them due to discrimination against poor, minority and female-headed families, housing shortages and/or high rents (Pear, 1982d).

Elderly women, who are 72 percent of the aged poor, face cuts in Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security and Medicare benefits, as well as a loss of Food Stamps. Although the Administration failed to eliminate the \$122 minimum Social Security payment for current recipients, it succeeded for those eligible after January 1982. About 75 percent of those affected are women, almost 90 percent if survivors and dependents are included (Miller, 1981). The Administration suggests they apply for SSI, a public assistance program for the aged, blind and disabled poor whose already low monthly benefits were also cut (Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1981d). But analysts predict that many will not (Miller, 1981).

The Administration also wants to lower retirement benefits for 1.4 million Social Security early retirees, the majority of whom are women (Weaver, 1981; Miller 1981). Although temporarily postponed, these and other changes in the Social Security program are under review by a task force appointed to investigate the solvency of the Social Security Trust Fund.

Medicare cuts increase the cost and reduce the availability of health care services to the aged by limiting federal reimbursement for both hospital and physician services (Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1981d). Backburner plans exist to replace Medicare with a voucher to be used for the purchase of private health insurance or enrollment in a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO). Since vouchers may not cover all HMO costs, this promises to further restrict the ability of the aged to secure necessary health care services (Demkovich, 1982).

The fiscal 1982 and 1983 budget cuts cannot be taken lightly, even though the Administration's political support seems to be waning. Indeed, the conservative legacy of Reaganomics may outlast Reagan's presidency. From the outset, the Administration made its antipathy to entitlement programs clear. In the Spring of 1981, David M. Stockman, Director of the Office of Management and Budget stated:

The idea that has been established over the last ten years, that almost every service that someone might need in life ought to be provided and financed by the government as a matter of rights is wrong. We challenge that. We reject that notion (Rosenbaum, 1981b).

Since then tax revenues have been lowered and entitlement programs restructured in unprecedented ways and amounts, leaving domestic programs smaller and more vulnerable. Eligibility restrictions now limit social programs to the poorest of the poor, while lowered benefit levels increase both program and recipient stigma. Both smaller and weaker constituencies and heightened stigma make social welfare programs more difficult to defend against future cuts. So does the transfer of

federal responsibility for social welfare to the states which have historically been unresponsive to the needs of minorities and the poor and whose currently ailing treasuries leave little room for change (Herbers, 1981). If these and other plans succeed in undermining the concept of entitlement, social welfare programs will be even more vulnerable to future attacks.

Moreover, as was noted above, many social welfare cuts were made by enacting new laws rather than merely reducing program funds. Since cuts made by lowered appropriations can be restored more easily than those achieved through statutory change, the recent cuts are more likely to persist. The combined effect of increased vulnerability to future cuts and statutory change suggests that the impact of Reaganomics may be difficult to reverse (Abramovitz and Hopkins, 1982).

#### Channeling Women From Paid Labor Back to Unpaid Labor in the Home

The social welfare cuts not only further the "feminization" of poverty but they encourage women to leave paid work for unpaid labor in the home. Although the Administration holds that economic recovery requires an increased work effort by all, the call seems to be aimed primarily at men. Many features of the conservative program actually discourage paid employment among the 44 million working women who are nearly 50 percent of today's labor force (U.S. Department of Labor, 1980a: 6, 9).

Regulating women's labor force participation to solve other problems is not new. Indeed, women frequently have been called upon to work and sent back home on an as needed basis (Grossman, 1981). It is well known that during World War II, when more women were needed to work in the defense plants, the federal government subsidized day care centers and Rosie the Riveter became a wartime heroine. Immediately after the War, when the returning soldier needed work, the nurseries were closed and Rosie the Riveter was displaced by the "feminine mystique."

Sharp economic fluctuations also create strong pressures for and against women's employment. This helps explain the rapid growth of the female labor force in the generally prosperous years following World War II. The simultaneous expansion of social programs, fast food chains, laundramats and other commercial domestic services employed many women and helped to free others for paid labor outside the home (Rothchild, 1981).

But in periods of economic difficulty when the economy cannot use all available workers or when cheap and available (i.e., unemployed) labor helps keep wages from rising, forces often combine to channel women back into the home. Back in the home they raise children, keep employed husbands ready for work and stabilize the family system



(Sokoloff, 1974: 14-15). Moreover, their child care, housekeeping, food preparation, health care, teaching, counseling and other services, previously paid for by the government or private enterprise, command no wage at all. This unpaid labor of women lessens the charge upon industry for male wages and lowers the cost to government of providing comparable services (Gardiner, 1978). The savings are not inconsequential. The market value of women's domestic labor is estimated at one-quarter of the GNP (Kreps, 1971: 67-69) or one-half of the income of her employed spouse (Kreps and Clark, 1975: 72).

The Administration's economic recovery program discourages women's paid employment through policies that (a) increase unemployment rates of all workers, especially those in the public sector, (b) weaken work incentives contained in income maintenance programs, and (c) intensify women's household responsibilities by shrinking social services that free them for paid work outside the home.

Greater Unemployment. Reaganomics includes expansionary supply-side tax cuts but also restrictive monetary policies which seek to squeeze inflation out of the economy by inducing a recession. Because women are not employed in industries most sensitive to swings in the business cycle, their unemployment rates do not increase as fast as those of men during recessions. But Department of Labor employment data (payroll and household surveys) suggest that during recessions women employed in manufacturing industries<sup>2</sup> and blue collar occupations, lose their jobs disproportionately, the 1980 recession excepted. Minorities and youth are similarly vulnerable in these recession-sensitive industries (Bowers, 1981).

The attack on big government also increases female unemployment as large numbers of women have found work in the public sector since the early 1960s (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1980d: 279, 320). Although the final figures on public sector layoffs are far from known, in the fall of 1981 the National Association of Social Workers reported that 7,000 Health and Human Service workers and 1,000 from the Community Services Administration were scheduled to lose their jobs. So were thousands of state and local government employees. In Massachusetts, for example, 40-60 percent of the school social workers, 20 percent of those in the Department of Public Health and many employed by private agencies dependent on state contracts have already been laid off (NASW, 1981).

Women lost still other jobs when 300,000 CETA public service slots were eliminated. Low income women trying to move from welfare into the labor force held close to 45 percent of these jobs (U.S. Department of

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2. In 1979, 30.6 percent of all workers in manufacturing were female (U.S. Department of Labor, 1980a: 151, 159).

Labor, 1979a: 42; 1980b: 177). CETA cuts also mean fewer services for women as CETA workers staffed many rape crisis centers, battered women's shelters, day care and senior citizen programs.

The Administration's argument that public sector cuts release employees for work in the more productive private sector is belied by mounting unemployment rates, but also business's response to the cuts. Early on, The Wall Street Journal reported that despite newspaper ads exhorting New Jersey's businessmen to hire 16,000 displaced CETA workers, "only 18 employers offered a mere 20 job leads." The private sector, says the business press, "has been slow to come to the rescue" (Lubin, 1981).

Weakened Work Incentives. Ironically, the conservative program also discourages women's employment by relaxing work incentives built into income maintenance programs. Until now, AFDC mothers who worked kept the first \$30 of earned income and one-third of the remainder. Moreover, welfare agencies deducted itemized work and child care expenses before the AFDC benefit was calculated. To save dollars, the fiscal 1982 budget limited the \$30 and one-third formula to the first four months of work and replaced itemized work and child care expenses with a flat \$75 deduction. As a result, many employed AFDC mothers are left little better off than those who do not work (Rosenbaum, 1981a). Proposals for 1983 worsen this disincentive to work. The University of Chicago reported that while "last year's changes reduced the income differential between working and non-working welfare recipients," the proposed 1983 changes "would make it clearly more profitable for most poor people to rely entirely on welfare and food stamps than to work at the low wage jobs available to them" (Pear, 1982b). Likewise, work incentives are threatened in the 1983 Food Stamp program proposals (Pear, 1982a).

While discouraging paid employment, AFDC regulations now permit states to re-introduce "workfare." Workfare requires welfare recipients aged 15-65 (except mothers of young children and full-time students) to "work-off" their benefits without additional pay. Clients who refuse assigned jobs can be denied benefits. Workfare is neither new nor known to be effective. Not only are many AFDC clients unsuitable workfare candidates,<sup>3</sup> but both clients and workers have resisted the coercion involved ("Workfare and the Work Ethic," 1981).

3. In 1977, for example, 50 percent of AFDC clients in the nation were at home as full-time homemakers or were incapacitated. Of the 27 percent already in the labor force, 15 percent were employed, 11 percent were actively seeking work and one percent was awaiting recall from layoffs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1980a: 2).

More Household Responsibilities. Whether they work or not, women carry the primary responsibility for children and housework. The time involved is enormous. Although the gap has declined somewhat, it is estimated that women spend over 25 hours a week doing unpaid domestic labor compared to 10 hours for employed men (Stafford, 1980). Social service programs reduce the household burdens of women, enabling them to combine work and family tasks more easily. Thus, today's cutbacks also effectively discourage women's employment.

Day care services are clearly most critical. Over 8 million children under age 6, or 45 percent of all preschoolers had a working mother in 1981. Fifty percent of single mothers of children under age 6 were employed (Grossman, 1982). Even though day care is currently available to only a minority of these women, the Administration did not spare child care centers (Twentieth Century Fund, 1975; U.S. Bureau of Census, 1980: 360, 403). The 25 percent cut in Title XX funds will shrink day care centers by one-third, leaving 700,000 current users with no place to go. Other children will be withdrawn due to higher fees and/or curtailed services. The elimination of CETA jobs, 25 percent of which were in day care centers, also deprives an estimated one million working mothers and their children of needed services (Pear, 1981a; Bedell, 1981a). Meanwhile, the maximum \$75 child care deduction for employed AFDC mothers falls far below day care costs, estimated by the government to be \$30 per child per week (Pear, 1981a; Bedell, 1981a).

The work disincentive is clear. A New Jersey mother of three had planned to take a full time job as a sales clerk in a women's department store, but had to forgo it when her neighborhood day care center closed. "The closing of the center," she told the New York Times, "will just make me stay home and collect welfare" (Pear, 1981b).

Food program cuts will make it more difficult for low-income mothers to provide nutritional family meals. Shopping for a nutritional diet on a poverty income already requires ingenuity beyond the capabilities of a skilled dietician. Fewer food stamp dollars, more expensive school lunches, lowered WIC funding can only make it more difficult. The daily per capita intake of key nutrients by the poor, already below that of the non-poor, will fall (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980d: 132). The deferred social costs of poor nutrition will show up in poor school performance, more illness and greater health care expenses years from now. More immediately, these problems will intensify the work women must do in the home, making employment more difficult to seek or sustain.

Less obvious is the likelihood that food program cuts will adversely affect local economies and increase the time and cost that daily shopping takes. Food Stamp purchases now account for 35 percent

of the food sold in the poorest neighborhoods, reports John Loeb, chairperson of Hillmans, a Chicago supermarket chain. Loeb predicts that food stamp cutbacks will force many small neighborhood groceries to close (Rosenbaum, 1981b). With fewer neighborhood stores to shop at, shopping will take longer and/or travel and child care costs will be added to the already high cost of food. A New York Times reporter recently accompanied a welfare mother through a typical day. She observed that:

The 40 year old mother scoured advertisements for the coupons she clips, picked through bins of damaged goods at bargain stores for clothing for her children and walked more than a mile for a bargain on detergent (Rule, 1982).

Mothers of the millions of children denied school lunches will also have to spend more time and money preparing lunch and assuring nutrition.<sup>4</sup>

Medicare and Medicaid cuts increase the cost of and decrease access to medical services (Pear, 1981a, Hildredth, 1981). Since mothers and wives traditionally care for family members who become ill and arrange for medical care, these cuts too will intensify women's household responsibilities. This is compatible with the Administration's philosophy. Prior to becoming Secretary of Health and Human Services, Richard Schweiker stated that, "Medicare could save money if more people were looked after at home" (Rothchild, 1981).

Similarly, public housing cutbacks which reduce the stock of low-income housing and raise rents promise to increase women's work in the home. Affordable housing for the poor already is scarce, since each year one million low-income units disappear due to rent inflation, condominium conversions and the abandonment of older buildings (Congressional Budget Office, 1981). A smaller housing stock, discrimination against poor, minority and female-headed households (Pear, 1982d), and the growing unwillingness of many landlords to rent to families with children (Institute for Social Research, 1980), will make finding a suitable place more burdensome. In many families, women will absorb this time-consuming task along with that of managing a household budget shrunken by

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4. The Department of Agriculture reports that needy children rely on school lunch programs to supply one-third to one-half of their basic nutrients compared to one-quarter for children of the middle class (Brody, 1981).

newly raised rent <sup>5</sup> and caring for family members whose physical and emotional health may suffer due to increased dangers and health hazards that typically accompany poor housing.

Finally, reduced community health and mental health services, citizen centers and social service programs used by families under stress can only increase women's "emotional work." As stress among women themselves grows, the social service cuts leave them with few or no places to go for relief.

#### RELAXING GOVERNMENT PROTECTIONS

If channeling women back into the home undermines their economic security and challenges their economic independence, the Administration's systematic relaxation of civil rights, affirmative action and workplace health and safety regulations risks lowering women's standard of living and eliminating needed protections against the dangers and inequities of living and working in a capitalist economy. This "de-regulation" of the workplace, along with the domestic budget cuts, promises to reverse many political and economic gains fought for and won by organized labor, civil rights organizations and women's liberation groups since the 1930s.

Social welfare benefits and government protections strengthen the political power of women, minorities and organized labor. They provide both a minimum level of economic security and a sense of entitlement. Perhaps more significantly the fight for these benefits and protections, over the years, gave rise to trade unions, civil rights groups and women's liberation organizations. These groups pressed for a larger share of available resources and politicized the process of income distribution through collective bargaining and government and tax and spending programs (Weisskopf, 1981).

While the economy grew and prospered, it was not difficult to accommodate the claims of all classes. Moreover, meeting them helped assure the social peace. But since the economic crisis surfaced in the mid-1970s, demands for a rising standard of living by empowered groups have become too costly for both business and government to meet. To reduce corporate costs and limit resistance to the entire conservative program, social welfare programs and government regulations are under attack; and the political strength of women, minorities and organized labor is being curbed (Weisskopf, 1981). The weakening of civil rights, affirmative action and workplace health and safety laws is a step in this direction.

5. The New York City welfare mother described earlier, pays \$110 of her \$370 AFDC check for rent in public housing, leaving her \$2.55 in cash plus \$1.28 in food stamps a day for each member of her family of three (Rule, 1981).

Among the first to go were provisions of Executive Order 11246 which outlaws discrimination by employers receiving federal contracts and requires approval of affirmative action plans prior to receipt of federal funds. The Office of Federal Contract Compliance (OFCCP), which previously covered companies with 50 or more employees and contracts of \$50,000 or more, now exempts firms with fewer than 250 employees and contracts of less than one million dollars from these affirmative action standards. Nearly 4,000 of 17,000 companies doing business with the federal government will no longer have to report on women and minorities in their work force or show plans for corrective action if they are underrepresented. Larger contractors must still affirm they are equal opportunity employers, but less often and in abbreviated form (Shribman, 1981; Hunter, 1981; Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1981f). In addition, the budget of the OFCCP was cut by 20 percent further limiting the agency's ability to enforce its rules (Stasz, 1982).

These and other changes substitute voluntary compliance for government enforcement of anti-discrimination policies and reduce fears of losing a federal contract or facing a law suit among employers who discriminate. The exemption of government contractors from affirmative action rules, contends Karen Nussbaum, director of Working Women, a national organization of office workers, "will exempt hundreds of thousands of employers from compliance, lessen hiring and promotional standards and cut back protections against sex discrimination" (Stasz 1981).

Redress for victims of sex and race discrimination will be more difficult now that the budget of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has been cut by 12 percent (Stasz, 1981). Plans also exist to freeze the filing of new lawsuits and the issuance of new guidelines; to remove restrictions on employer use of pre-employment and biographical histories; and to require complainants to present proof of their employers intent to discriminate (Affirmative Action Coordinating Center, 1981). If approved, such changes will effectively nullify a host of laws passed to ensure equality of employment in the U.S.

Workplace rights are also jeopardized by efforts to weaken both the standards and the enforcement power of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). While not well enforced, OSHA regulations did establish a legal right to a safe and healthy work environment and stimulated unionization around the nation ("De-regulating Workers Health," 1981). Occupational health hazards are commonly associated only with "mens" work. But many women are employed in industries with higher than average injury rates and work day losses. Almost two million women work in the fifty industries where a substantial number of hazardous substances are commonly used

("Facts About Women Workers," 1979). Moreover accidents, infections, chemical poisoning, and physical dangers are common in the hospitals, offices and laboratories where women traditionally are employed (Stillman, 1977).

Nonetheless, Secretary of Labor Donovan, hopes to exempt thousands of manufacturing firms from routine safety inspections, concentrating only on those with above average injury rates. Some of the most effective enforcement procedures, such as surprise visits and fines for hazards, will be limited (Bedell, 1981b).

The Administration's outright assault on these government protections makes more sense when it is remembered that women, minorities and organized labor are being asked to bear the brunt of the economic recovery programs. If production costs of business are to be lowered by cutting the standard of living of workers, minorities and women, their resistance to cutbacks must be forestalled and delegitimized. Current policies are having this effect. High rates of unemployment and fewer social benefits to rely on make these groups more vulnerable. Joblessness becomes a more effective mechanism of employer control of labor and weakens the bargaining power of unions as the recent contract negotiations in steel, rubber, automobile, airlines, printing and trucking industries demonstrate (Raskin, 1982).

Civil rights and women's groups have also been placed on the defensive leaving them less able to protect their constituencies. Rather than continuing to identify and combat institutional sexism and patriarchal practices in new arenas, the National Organization of Women, the National Abortion Rights Action League, and other women's organizations must devote scarce resources just to protect previously won rights. They are fighting to enact the ERA and against the loss of Medicaid abortions, the constitutional amendment banning all abortions, erosion of gay and lesbian rights and the Family Protection Act. Since these issues constitute the core of the social issues agenda of the New Right, its role in supporting Reaganomics, both practically and ideologically, needs to be understood.

#### PROMOTING PATRIARCHY: THE AGENDA OF THE NEW RIGHT

The New Right's program which favors economic retrenchment and military build-up supports the Administration's economic recovery policies that redistribute income upwards and redirect capital into the private sector. It's social issues agenda, yet to receive full attention by Reagan, also reinforces the Administration's assault on the rights of women, minorities and labor. Not only does the New Right encourage domestic cutbacks, but it legitimizes them by arguing that "big government" and the gains women have made are threatening to the stability of American family.

The social issues agenda of the New Right is embodied in the Human Life Amendment (HLA) and in the Family Protection Act (FPA). The Human Life Amendment seeks to reverse the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion in the early months of pregnancy. It states that "the paramount right to life is vested in each human being from the moment of fertilization without regard to age, health, or condition of dependency." If it succeeds, abortion will be murder in the eyes of the law and "women's bodies, health, work and even lives," would be subordinated to "fetal survival" (Copelan, 1981). Not only could doctors and hospitals refuse to do abortions, but many forms of contraception such as the IUD and diagnostic procedures such as amniocentesis could become illegal.

The FPA, a melange of provisions intended to "protect" the American family was first introduced into the Senate in 1979 by Paul Laxalt, a leader of the Moral Majority and twice chair of the Reagan for President Committee. The FPA was re-introduced to Congress in 1981 by Senator Roger Jepsen (R-Iowa) who stated the act "marks another major step in the vital process of strengthening the traditional family structure in America and minimizing the harmful Federal intrusion in our nation's churches, schools and families" (U.S. Congress, 1981, S6344).

For the New Right, the traditional two-parent family is "the bedrock upon which our whole nation as well as our society is based" (U.S. Congress, 1979: S13579). Not surprisingly, it sees the rise of female-headed families, teenage sex, unmarried couples, open homosexuality and greater employment and autonomy among women as problematic. Seeking political support from sectors of the white middle class who may feel that these changes threaten their traditional values, the New Right claims that the family is "breaking down" rather than restructuring itself in response to changing economic conditions. According to Congressman McKay from Utah, the family as a societal "keystone" has been slipping.

...and America has been reaping the results of the slippage. Predictably aimless children raised in fragmented homes--often become aimless adults. Many become social deficits, costing society vast sums of money, time and talent spent on programs designed to clean up the mess that failed homes left behind (U.S. Congress, 1980: H4527).

The FPA strives to strengthen the American family in various ways. All involve reducing government involvement in family life. One way the FPA hopes to strengthen the family is to increase parental authority. To this end the Act, (a) bans federal funds for any program or organization that gives contraceptive devices or abortion services to any unmarried minor, unless the parent or



guardian is notified; (b) permits parental review of textbooks prior to their classroom use, (c) cedes federal responsibility for monitoring child abuse and wife abuse to the states and (d) re-defines child abuse to exclude corporal punishment applied by a parent or someone authorized by the parent to perform this function (U.S. Congress, 1981, S6324-S6344). By strengthening parental authority over children and weakening child abuse and wife abuse laws, the FPA creates support for a more authoritarian, male dominated household.

The New Right also hopes that less government intrusion in family life will strengthen it by promoting family cohesion. Explaining the need for the FPA, Senator Laxalt stated, "it is becoming increasingly apparent that the federal government itself, although ostensibly aiming at helping the family, is often working counter to its best interests" (U.S. Congress, 1979: S13549). Government involvement in family life is "frequently disruptive," Laxalt argued, citing that federal health and welfare programs reduce interaction between elderly parents and children and encourage placement of aging relatives in nursing homes away from their families. Likewise, federal aid to schools has removed parents from their children's learning process.

Therefore, the FPA replaces reliance on government programs with reliance on one's own family or the market. For example, it offers a \$250 tax credit for families who care for aging relatives at home instead of placing them in a nursing home and a \$1,500 tax deduction for establishing a retirement fund for a non-salaried spouse, an incentive for women to remain in the home. In these ways Senator Laxalt suggests that the FPA encourages family members,

....to decide crucial issues for themselves instead of leaving them to government. Parents will be encouraged to stay with their children, to actively participate in their children's educational, moral and religious upbringing. Children will be encouraged to care for their aged parents. All generations will be encouraged to live together and share living experiences, enriching the lives of each member (U.S. Congress, 1979: S13550).

These means of strengthening the family assume that and/or provide incentives for women to be in the home. Who else will supervise children's educational, moral and religious upbringing and care for aging parents. Jepsen confirmed this expectation when he told Congress that,

...with the eroding away of the values of the man-wife, the mother-father, sister-brother relationship, the family as a basic unit, there is also the eroding away

of the value and the beauty of women being a mother and homemaker (U.S. Congress, 1981: S6328).

Still another way the FPA seeks to support the traditional family is to restrict information about other ways of living. It is disturbed by new broader definitions of the family when they extend its meaning "to include anyone and anything from group marriage to homosexual and lesbian couples who want to adopt children" (U.S. Congress, 1981: S6327). The Act bans federal funding for educational materials that "denigrate, diminish or deny role differences between the sexes;" and to individuals or programs that "present male or female homosexuality as an acceptable life style." However, schools may "limit or prohibit the intermingling of the sexes in any sport or other school related activity" (U.S. Congress, 1981: S6326). The FPA also denies federal funds to Legal Aid Programs that litigate cases dealing with divorce, gay or lesbian rights, abortion and school segregation. (Not discussed here are other ways in which the FPA attacks the civil rights of minorities). Combined with the Human Life Amendment and the New Right's general opposition to social welfare programs, the FPA makes it clear that the New Right not only wants women back in the home, but defines the family in traditional patriarchal terms --comprised of a dominant male breadwinner and a passive female wife and mother. As Laxalt says, the FPA will cause a "rebirth of the American family."

With just a little help--just removing the governmental barriers and allowing the traditional family roles to reassert themselves--I am convinced that we will see a renaissance of the family and the resultant gains for all Americans (U.S. Congress, 1979: S13550).

The rationale for the FPA, including its patriarchal underpinnings has been widely publicized in Wealth and Poverty (1981) written by George Gilder, New Right and supply-side theorist. In addition to arguing that biological differences between the sexes condition social role behavior (Gilder, 1981: 89, 164-165) Gilder, blames the gains women have made for the problems faced by American families today.

For example, Gilder argues that because "men make the sacrifices necessary to reach the higher reaches in the American economy chiefly to support the wives and families," when "the wives earn more, the men feel a decline of urgency in their work and a loss of male nerve and drive" (Gilder, 1981: 180). Employment by women is also responsible for rising divorce rates and other social problems. When women accept full-time work, Gilder maintains,

...both husbands, and wives suffer new strains of pure fatigue together with tension over the change in formerly settled sex roles. These strains are not an illusion as is attested by an increasing body of census statistics

that show a sharply rising rate of divorce and separation after wives submit to full time work responsibility (Gilder, 1981: 17).  
(emphasis added)

When marriage fails, Gilder continues, "the man often returns to the more primitive rhythms of singleness. On the average, his income drops by one-third and he shows a far higher propensity for drink, drugs and crime" (Gilder, 1981: 90). Since women's employment causes divorce, it implicitly is responsible for this male degeneration.

Similar consequences obtain when women rely on social welfare benefits. This Gilder asserts, "destroys the father's key role and authority." Unable to feel "manly in his own home" he "turns to the street for male affirmation." In the street men "find an atmosphere that does not make the larger and deeper claims of familial and sexual love which are hard for men to meet without a sense of male dominance (Gilder, 1981: 164). Nothing, Gilder observes, is so destructive to male confidence, authority, sexual potency, respect from his family and motivation to work than "the growing imperious recognition that when all is said and done his wife and children can do better without him." The man has the

....gradually sinking feeling that his role as provider, the definitive male activity from the primal days of the hunt through the industrial revolution and on into modern life has been largely seized from him; he has been cuckolded by the compassionate state (Gilder, 1981: 140).  
(emphasis added)

The implication of both these views and the provisions of the Family Protection Act is that if women would just return to their traditional roles in the family, sacrifice essential social services and newly won rights, stop working, stop demanding control over their bodies and stop pursuing sexual and sex-role freedom, their families would be happy, would restabilize and male productivity would not decline. Indeed, women are being asked to bear responsibility for the economic crisis that neither business nor government can resolve, by "taking up the slack" through acceptance of stereotyped sex roles and economic dependency. By encouraging the belief that family problems and the current economic crisis are the fault of individuals, the New Right "blames the victim." In so doing, it diverts attention from the underlying causes of the problems faced by each and provides an ideological rationale for the Administration's economic recovery program.

## CONCLUSION

The Conservative program is consistently anti-women. It undermines their economic independence and security, abolishes painfully won rights and protections, and subscribes to the view that a woman's place is in the home. This is not the first time that sexism (the unequal treatment of people on the basis of sex) and patriarchy (the acceptance of male supremacy) have contributed to a definition of women's labor as marginal to the economy.<sup>6</sup> Both posit differences between the sexes that inevitably determine the roles and behaviors of each. Together they define women as inferior, subordinate and dependent. These "biology-as-destiny" arguments condone violence against women, permit women to be relegated to accessory and dependent roles in the family and the economy and to be denied full and equal rights in society. They encourage the channeling of women out of the labor market into the home and/or into low-paid, low status often part-time "women's" jobs.

Although consistently anti-women, the Conservative program contains numerous contradictions. If implemented as planned, it cannot fulfill its own stated objectives. The budget cuts, meant to reduce the federal deficit, promise increased federal costs as cuts in one area produce new needs and expenditures elsewhere. Not only is the government-induced recession raising unemployment compensation and welfare costs, but public sector cutbacks are making more women eligible for welfare and other income maintenance programs. Meanwhile, massive military expenditures and supply-side tax cuts deflect funds needed to offset the mounting federal deficit.

Likewise, the Administration's program for protecting the family actually threatens its viability. Cuts in income maintenance, food, health, family planning, housing and social service programs can only generate greater economic pressures, more child care responsibilities, increased care for the aged and an intensification of women's household management tasks. Unwanted pregnancies, child and wife abuse and certainly more family stress can be predicted. In today's economy, weakened social welfare programs, subject many American families to greater economic distress and possible dissolution (National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity, 1981: 38).

Similarly the Administration's belief that an increased work effort by all is needed to stimulate production is contradicted by its programs which discourage women's employment. A shrunken public sector, the elimination of CETA jobs, and weakened affirmative action

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6. Likewise, the labor force participation of minorities is marginalized using racial and/or ethnic distinctions.

programs will remove literally thousands of women from the labor force and prevent others from entering it. Loss of day care centers, a smaller AFDC child care allowance and lowered benefits for employed AFDC mothers are causing many welfare mothers to stop working. Likewise, income maintenance and social service cuts, by requiring women to spend more time caring for family members and managing their households, will prevent them from looking for or sustaining full-time work. At home, women will once again provide, without pay, services similar to those they previously delivered as government and private sector employees.

Loss of workplace safety and anti-discrimination protections can only lower women's employment opportunities and status. Those who remain at work, will be promoted less often, occupy more part-time jobs and continue to be concentrated in low-paid, low-status, dead-end women's occupations.

These contradictions "make sense" once it is recognized that the domestic budget cuts and the regulation of women's labor force participation is part of a broader plan. To cope with the current economic crisis, the Administration is: (a) directing larger amounts of capital into the private sector through tax and spending policies that redistribute income upward; and (b) trying to curb the political strength of women, minorities and labor to restrict them from increasing their claims upon social resources and/or resisting policies that undermine their standard of living.

The social issues agenda of the New Right, reinforces the Administration's social welfare strategy pragmatically. More importantly, it justifies it ideologically. By arguing that a woman's place is in the home, and blaming women for the problems faced by both the family and the economy, it diverts attention away from the underlying causes of each. In so doing, the conservative program fails to recognize that the re-emergence of feminism in the late sixties was a consequence not a cause of economic change and that as a result, feminism cannot be made to disappear.

To the extent that the Administration's program is implemented, many women, minorities and workers will suffer badly. Perhaps they will also resist. Signs of both are appearing as more people fall below the poverty line, and as the militance of organized labor, civil rights organizations and women's liberation groups re-surfaces. The time may be right for these traditionally isolated groups to submerge their special interests and join forces against the conservative assault which jeopardizes them all. Should this occur, it may be the conservative program's most serious contradiction of all.

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