

Pay equity myth

Average earnings for university graduates:
Men: \$36,266
Women: \$24,380

Statistics Canada, 1982
There are three kinds of lies — lies, damned lies, and statistics.

Mark Twain (Samuel L. Clemens), *Autobiography*
On the surface, the statistics above are shocking — women earn only 67% as much as men with an equivalent education. How awful! Cries of "Wage reform!" ring throughout the land.

Mark Twain's comment, however, reveals the truth. These particular statistics are worse than damned lies — they are incomplete facts, a misuse of numbers. The statistics are not based on degree earned, length of time spent on one job, or a hundred other vital points. They are so general as to be absolutely meaningless.

"Statistics" such as these, however, throw many people into a tizzy of guilt over the oppression of women. The U of A, for example, has embarked on a brave new attempt to rid the world of injustice. The administration is presently investigating a pay equity proposal for its support staff.

Pay equity, also known as equal pay for work of equal value, is a euphemism for legislated equality. The main goal of such a scheme is to close the 'wage gap' between low paying, traditionally female jobs and higher paying, traditionally male jobs, where both jobs require equivalent levels of education and skills.

However, government programs to do this are inevitably unfair, unworlable and ultimately of benefit only to bureaucrats. The question arises, of who will decide what jobs are of equal value, and how the gaps between these jobs will be closed (Who gets a pay cut? Who gets a raise)?

The fact remains that legislating equality is a Band-Aid solution. The problem in society is not that women are being paid less than men, but that women have ghettoized themselves into low-paying, low-prestige, semi-skilled jobs.

Historically, these jobs offered flexibility, but skills were not advanced and wages were low.

Today, most women opt for careers of their own. Distressingly, most are still choosing safe, 'feminine' careers. For example, 89% of the students enrolled in elementary education at the U of A in 1986-87 were female. Women made up only 9.3% of the engineering students last year.

Many intelligent women are limiting their own futures by choosing traditional careers. The choice is, of course, theirs to make.

However, these women consciously decided to take low skilled, high demand (read low-paying) jobs. They cannot then turn around and demand higher pay, merely because a man chose a low prestige, uncomfortable, low demand job and is making twice their wages.

Pay equity is a false panacea. The only way to get women making the same amount of money as men is to have them doing the same jobs. If a secretary is still feeling that \$7/hour is inadequate, perhaps she should pick up a wrench and learn to become a mechanic.

People must realize that it is up to individuals to achieve equal rights. It is the choices of men and women that ultimately decide the status of the sexes, and no amount of government spending on pay equity schemes will ever change that.

Roberta Franchuk

The Gateway



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Just kidding

Attention Todd Brandy, D. Hook, R.C.G. Poole and Nancy Thormann, (I trust that you are the only ones so narrow minded as to take my letter seriously).

LOOSEN UP — I WAS JUST KIDDING! It must be terribly boring to take things so literally. You're probably the same people who think David Letterman is a jerk. Do you guys also -hit marble?

Maybe this passage from Webster's will help you out:
irony/irane/: humor, ridicule, or light sarcasm that adopts a mode of speech the intended implication of which is the opposite of the literal sense of the words.

If there is anyone else, first years in particular, who was hurt or offended by my article, I apologize. In fact, if you want to borrow my notes or go for coffee or maybe talk about family problems, I would be more than happy.

Jim Steiner

South Africa

As the latest Commonwealth Summit Conference unfolds in Vancouver, the major issue on the agenda again proves to be what policies should be adopted to hasten the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa. While all would unanimously agree that racial segregation is repugnant and must go, not all will agree on the best means to be used to achieve this end. Some contend that renewed diplomatic initiatives will encourage the South African leaders to engage in constructive dialogue with the legitimate representatives of the black majority. Others will suggest that various punitive sanctions are necessary to compel white South Africans to negotiate with the blacks, who will accept nothing less than one man, one vote. Still others, such as Britain, will argue that sanctions are essentially counter productive and that the black's interests would be better served by granting military assistance to the so called front line states — Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana, Mozambique and Angola. It is Britain that is on the right track.

As the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group initiative has displayed, the

diplomatic prodding of the South African government is a futile endeavour. Nothing more than a fact finding mission can be expected from these types of initiatives. Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's suggestion that Commonwealth foreign ministers attempt essentially the same thing will be destined to the same fate as the previous initiatives. The reason for the ineffectiveness is because attempts by foreign countries to prescribe solutions or agendas for other country's domestic afflictions have invariably been met with increased intransigence and, in many cases, outright belligerence. Although this option is politically attractive to most, it is nevertheless inconceivable to suppose that South Africa would allow foreign countries to meddle with its domestic affairs.

Much the same type of reasoning may be applied to the implementation of punitive sanctions or embargoes. These policies, however, have other inherent disadvantages. For sanctions or embargoes to be successful, they necessitate the cooperation of all countries; commonwealth or otherwise. Even within the Commonwealth, who commit themselves to unity of action, Britain remains steadfast in her contention that these options are counter productive. So Britain and other less sympathetic countries will always be prepared to fill the economic vacuums left by sanctions or embargoes. Canada's selective sanctioning still permits a significant amount of trade with South Africa and established sanctions have enough loopholes for Canadian companies to trade unabated. Then, without global cooperation, sanctions will fail.

Britain is also correct in her belief that punitive sanctions are counter productive. They merely harm those intended to be served by them: South African blacks. South Africa's response to earlier sanctions has been the expulsion of workers from the front-line states. The result is even more unemployment and economic devastation of these already depressed states. Finally, U.S. sponsored embargoes of arms and nuclear technologies has had the effect of resource endowed South Africa becoming self-sufficient in these areas. Clearly punitive sanctions or embargoes against South Africa are ineffective means to hasten an end to

apartheid.
So what then can be done to foster constructive change in South Africa? Leave South Africa to herself in setting the pace and agenda for change. As she matures (economically more and more blacks will experience the upward mobility that necessitates change. Yet at the same time, we cannot allow South Africa to be given a free hand in facilitating the political and economic disruption of the front line states. Military assistance would purge the respective insurgent groups from these states and help create political stability and reduce their economic dependency on South Africa. The unstated policy of divide and rule has long been applied by South Africa as evidenced by their assistance to Renamo in Mozambique. The re-opening of the crucial transportation lines and Mozambican ports would be the first objective of such a policy. With economic and political stability the front line states may effectively create a unified regional front ostracizing South Africa, and serve as an example of how black ruled states can be just as productive as any white one. Finally, remember that it was as much a result of regional political and economic isolation of Rhodesia that established Zimbabwe as the effectiveness of Mugabe's guerrillas.

Unfortunately, military assistance is the least politically attractive option. It is even more unfortunate that those who vehemently condemn South Africa for apartheid apparently lack the political will necessary to do something about it.

Steth Brundlie

Letters to the Editor are encouraged and always welcome.

If you have a comment which would be of interest to the students of the University, please do not hesitate to send it in. All we require is your name, address, and phone number, and student ID if you are a student. We will not print letters missing any of these.

Letters should be no longer than three hundred words.

Mail or deliver your letters to Room 282 SUB, or drop them in at any SU information booth.