

Zerbisias: Child care still big stumbling block ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

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Whether it's getting up before dawn to walk five kilometres to find fresh water or to pack the kids' lunches and get them ready for school, what is commonly seen as "women's work" has no value.

Not according to any generally accepted economic measure such as GDP (gross domestic product) anyway.

The GDP counts as positive, in its Byzantine way, all the money changing hands in and around the Alberta tarsands, no matter how devastating to the environment, but completely ignores domestic cooking, cleaning, diapering, wiping noses, running after the toddlers and all the other countless tasks that usually fall to mothers - and keep society functioning.

Despite the fact that the Vanier Institute of the Family reports that some two-thirds of two-parent Canadian families are dual-income, up from 53 per cent in 1980, little has changed on the home front.

According to StatsCan, in 1986 men were averaging 2.1 hours per day on unpaid chores while women 4.8 hours.

In 2005, men increased their share of home work to 2.5 hours while women saw their load decrease to 4.3 hours.

And then there's the wage gap, which still sees women get paid less.

Yes, that's partly because some women work part-time, and partly because they're not out swinging from oil rigs.

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But it's mostly because of the lack of child care options. Women just don't get a chance.

"We're in the same spot as 30 years ago," laments Kelly Chalmers, 34, a risk management project administrator, and mother of Jack, 20 months.

He's in a toddler program at one of Toronto's hard-to-score-a-spot daycare centres, which costs Chalmers \$1,150 per month.

"It's almost not worth working," she says, concerned that rates will rise some \$80 per month.

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Needless to say, Chalmers doesn't think much of the Conservative government's taxable \$100 monthly child care pittance, which it claims is about "choice."

Really? Choice?

Then why did status of women minister Helena Guergis tell Canadian delegates at the 54th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women this month that Israel has such "strong family values there that they don't need a national daycare plan! Wouldn't it be great to figure out how they're doing that?"

On Monday, at the most heavily covered Status of Women Committee

meeting ever, Liberal status of women critic Anita Neville tried to pin the beleaguered Guergis down on what she meant by "family values."

She triple-lutzed away.

In any case, as she emphasized, child care is not her ministerial responsibility.

But how do you separate child care from women's status, economic well-being and security?

You can't.

That despite how, as many, um, more traditional Canadians claim, if women want kids they should take care of them and stay home as their mothers did and not make the taxpayer foot the bill.

Fine, if you're into that - how did the Nazis put it? - Kinder, KÃ¼che, Kirche (children, kitchen, church) thing.

But what does it do for the economy?

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"We're the driving force of the economy now," Chalmers tells me. "Even if I wanted to stay home, I couldn't."

In fact, as she emphasizes, referring to pickup times at schools and other parental responsibilities, "The world hasn't adjusted to women coming into the workforce."

Not surprising.

Women's work.

Man's world.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Canada ^[2]

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