

**LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT WOMEN'S RIGHTS****Whig Article Jan 25/09.****Alia Hogben**

“A woman’s work is never done.” I don’t know who originally said that but it is so true. Today is not the first day of my life in which I have felt overwhelmed with all the work I have to do. I know I am not alone as many women can empathize with me.

Because we are told that women are so good at “multi tasking,” we end up taking pride in doing five things simultaneously. But rarely do we consider the cost of such frenzy. Was it always so, or have our society and our own high expectations driven us to a place from which we cannot retreat?

Is this trait common to women of all cultures or is it limited to us in the West? Certainly the issues for other women will be different as some are facing problems which are much greater than those I ever face – of wars, poverty or class – but I think we would all agree that a woman’s work is never done.

Some will immediately lay the blame on the feminist movement for our present day quandary, insisting that if women had been content to stay home as wives and mothers, and not demanded equality, then I would not be whining about my situation. The implication is that our mothers were not overwhelmed and had plenty of time for themselves.

As for me, I salute those women who proudly called themselves feminists. They were not all hostile, but did want equal rights for men and women. As today’s women, we don’t give enough credit to the achievements of the previous generation. We benefit from what they won for us, and sadly nowadays too many of us shy away from even the term feminist.

Feminism led to far more substantive changes in society than the perception that it was all about strident screaming, bra burning or anti- male bashing.

We do have more “rights” now, but these are difficult to practice. For example in employment, women can be employed on an equal basis but if there is no equal pay for equal work or no universal quality child care then the stress on working women is increased.

I did not have the option to stay at home as I had to work because of family responsibilities. But at least I had the choice to help my family to have a standard of living we wanted. It is a matter of choice and so if some women want to contribute to society through other means, rather than as a mother and wife only, they should be able to do so.

There are some women who want a return to the time when everyone agreed on “traditional family values” based on the Judeo-Xtian patriarchal family model, with

defined roles for men and women. These values meant that women were content to stay at home as homemakers, wives and mothers, when there was no “easy” divorce and when the law of the land followed some religious edicts that life was sacred at conception and birth control was not a good idea.

Ah! Can we return to those halcyon days when women knew their place, had the “father” look after their needs, and homemaking was a craft and an art? Were men really happier to be burdened with most of the responsibilities of dependent wives and children, even if this meant more power and control? Were families and children more physically and mentally healthy in traditional families? I don’t think there is a simple clear cut answer to that.

There is an organization, REAL women - Realistic, Equal, Active for Life – whose motto is anti –feminist, pro- traditional family values based on the Judeo/Xtian religions, and who seek “equality” in some way which is not defined. They encourage women to stay home and have the men venture out for employment.

I am sure they believe that my problems would promptly vanish if I returned to the traditional family values and did not strive for equality or choice.

There are other groups who would agree with REAL women, such as the more traditional Muslims who have no problems with a patriarchal model for the family and for society itself. I wish Muslim men would consider how much more empowered they would feel if they did not bear the responsibility of taking care of all their women-folk, and the village, and the community, and the government, and ...

So many of the issues that arise for women are directly related to the fact that they allow men to be in charge of them, rather than partners sharing the burdens and joys. The honour of the family and family laws are examples of male dominance over women. Fortunately for us there are wonderful, self confident men who prefer equality and collegiality with women.

The world has moved on. Women like me want families but want more than the role of mother and wife, want males in our lives, want independence, and definitely want equality under the law. We want choices and access to opportunities, whether we be brown, black or multi-coloured, Muslim or non- Muslim, and not least because we are women.

So is there a solution for me? Should I ask the world to stop and let me off? So I want too much? I want it all? Why do I think I can play a part in improving the lives of Muslims, particularly Muslim women? Am I not allowed to carp that women’s work is never done?

Off I go to cook dinner, welcome my grandchildren, go to Ottawa to discuss women's issues, write a proposal, and be passionate about what is happening to Islam and Muslims.

Wish me well, and send some sympathy my way!