



Just Jobs

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American legal-feminist attention to employment has focused mostly on the *quality* of paid work: access to jobs, conditions in and around worksites, protections against wrongful termination, *Ledbetter*-style wage parity, and equal opportunity generally. *Quantity* of paid work is a legal-feminist issue too. I suggest here that feminist activists consider speaking up more in debates about macroeconomic policy regarding job creation (and related federal-level interventions like trade legislation), even though their time and energies are scarce and something always has to give. In particular, I encourage them to support both a direct WPA-style government job creation scheme and legislation that discourages American employers from eliminating jobs or shipping them overseas. Feminist voices have been heard in, for example, the Obama administration's announcement about "shovel ready" jobs--they asked whose hands get to hold the shovel--but the issue may have appeared remote to people who care about gender fairness. It is fundamental. "Just Jobs" explores the connections between increased quantity and increased quality of work, with particular attention to the interests of women.

Efforts launched by Martin Luther King, Jr. and his colleagues point up the centrality of jobs to progressive agendas. Civil rights activists put jobs at the fore of a demonstration that became famous in the annals of racial justice--they zeroed in on jobs when they named it the "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom"--and shortly before he was killed in 1968, King declared that employment should be "guaranteed" by the government "for all people who want to work and are able to work." Striving to provide financially for oneself and one's family unites individuals who are diverse in other ways, which makes jobs a coalition-builder and from there a source of social change.

Material, political, and legal benefits would follow if the number of jobs in the United States were to increase. Higher levels of employment promise quantity gains for workers of any gender: more per capita income, more jobs to choose from, and lower total dollar volumes of consumer debt. Life improves for (most) female workers in particular. Assuming women have fair access to an enlarged job market, they can expect more power in their family relations and more access to better work. The traditional priorities of feminist legal theory related to employment, especially statutory prohibitions of workplace discrimination, get stronger when the number of jobs increases: Having another job at hand can be necessary for an individual to risk protesting pay inequity, wrongful deprivation of a new position, wage theft, and other shortfalls on the quality side. Because employers have to do more to please workers when jobs grow more plentiful, more jobs could be a means to longstanding feminist employment goals like paid maternity leave, onsite child care, and accommodation of caregiving work.

"Just Jobs" will not cure every social ill. It is not cost free for women even on its own terms. Increased wage income for an individual woman might stir up domestic violence against her, for example, and a new job for an American female worker could come at the expense of a woman located outside the United States. But the endeavor offers an opportunity for feminism to achieve good ends while strengthening its alliances with other movements.