In this issue:

- Domestic Worker Victory!
- Laws Protecting Breastfeeding Benefit Infants’ Health

UNIONS WIN IT!

WHAT: Donated Leave
WHERE: Michigan
WHO: United Automobile, Aerospace & Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW) Local 6000 & State of Michigan

Employees of the State of Michigan represented by UAW Local 6000 can donate and receive annual leave to and from employees within their department. The donated leave bank supports employees who have exhausted all their leave credits and face financial hardship due to serious injury to themselves or the prolonged illness of their immediate family. The leave donations must be for a minimum of four hours and a maximum of 40 hours annually and it must be in whole hour increments. If the receiving employee returns to work with unused donated hours, those hours are transferred to the leave bank.

BARGAINING FOR FAMILY TIME

Winning in a Tough Economy

BY JENYA CASSIDY

In a tough economy, unions are fighting harder than ever for bread and butter issues like wages and health benefits. With so many people struggling over the basics, it might seem like a hard time to fight for the right to take paid time off. A recent survey on Career Builder highlights the negative impact the current economy has on work family balance: Those continuing to work are working longer hours, taking work home and are less likely to request time off even for illness or family needs. But members of UFCW Local 21 say that now it is even more crucial to have the right to paid time when your family needs you.

UFCW Local 21 is one of the unions on the front lines of the national fight for paid sick days. Members have been in a contentious battle with the major grocery stores over the stores’ sick leave policy. “People are shocked when they find out I don’t have paid sick days!” says Janella Enamorado, a shop steward and member of the bargaining team. Janella works for QFC, a Kroger Grocery Store which provides paid sick days only after a worker is out 3 consecutive days with an illness. “Many of the grocery store workers work such part time schedules – 3 days can be an entire week’s pay,” explained Local 21 Communications Director Tom Geiger. “That’s rent for a lot of workers.”

Janella speaks about what a hardship this is for members of the bargaining unit. She herself was out for three days with pneumonia recently. She lost pay and even got her benefits temporarily cut off. Janella also tells stories of workers coming in sick because they can’t afford a day without pay. One woman came into work with a 102 degree fever; another sick worker collapsed in the parking lot as he was forcing himself to come into work because he couldn’t afford another day without pay. “It’s horrible for us, but how does the public like having a deli worker with a fever? It’s a public health hazard!” Janella said.

Grocery store workers aren’t the only ones fighting for paid time off in a down economy. In a recent historic contract victory, 6,500 postdoctoral researchers (postdocs) at the University of California won wage increases and the right to paid time off and family leave in their first union contract represented by the UAW. Postdocs provide valuable research on important issues like stem cells and climate change. But, according to their spokesperson, they were working under sub-par conditions and had to stand together and involve the larger community in order to finally settle the contract.

The bargaining team members of Local 21, inspired by the victory of the postdocs and the national push for paid sick days, say they won’t quit. Janelle Enamorado explains that paid sick time is one of the top issues as many workers in her store are single mothers. “It just isn’t possible to come into work when your child is ill. And, when you are trying to raise children single-handedly, you are even less likely to be able to afford to miss a day,” says Janelle who has an almost one year old daughter.

Tom Geiger confirms that UFCW Local 21 members are committed to this fight. “If we don’t get all of our demands met, we will by the next contract. And we know we need a political solution in the long run. That’s why we’re involved in the state and national fight for paid sick days. If we win in bargaining, that’s just a handful of workers winning the right to paid sick days. This has to be a right for everyone.”

Janelle Enamorado, a working mom and shop steward, is on the bargaining team for UFCW Local 21. The union is conducting a very visible and lively campaign to get QFC Grocery (one of the Kroger chains in Washington State) to provide paid sick days to their workers.
ON THE ROAD TO RESPECT:
Domestic Workers Organize to Win

“Maria” is a Central American woman in her mid-sixties who works as a domestic worker in New York City. Maria came to the United States to support her family. She has a son with diabetes, and she could not make enough money in her home nation to cover his costly insulin treatments. When she arrived in New York, she found a job as a caregiver for a child with a disability. In addition to the “full-time” work, it took to provide him with care, her employers required her to do the cooking, cleaning, and ironing for the entire household. Maria worked 18 hours a day, six days a week for less than $3 an hour. She lived in the basement of her employer’s home where a broken sewage system flooded the floor by her bed. She had to collect cardboard and wood from the street so she could use them as stepping-stones to reach her bed at night. After three years of living and working in these conditions, Maria’s employers fired her without notice or severance pay. Her employer offered no explanation. “I asked her for permission to stay in the house that night so I could go out and find another place to live. I could not even sleep thinking about where I would go next. No one can imagine what I went through that night.”

Maria’s story provides a telling illustration of the experiences of many domestic workers in this country. Domestic workers — who care for some of the most important elements of our lives like our families and our homes — are among the most vulnerable workers in the United States today. There are an estimated 2.5 million women who labor as domestic workers. Domestic workers serve as nannies, housekeepers and caregivers for the elderly. They leave their homes early in the morning, often in the dark, in order to arrive at their work sites before their employers leave for work. Some even live in their employers’ homes, caring for these families throughout the day and night.

WORK FAMILY IMBALANCE

Domestic workers have a severe imbalance of work and family as the more hours that they spend working in their employers’ homes, the fewer hours they have to give their own children – making them nutritious meals, helping them with homework or reading them bedtime stories. Many domestic workers have to leave their own children behind in their home countries. And, even though the entire economy rests on their work, domestic workers have long been taken for granted. Historically associated with the unpaid labor of women in the home and with the poorly paid labor of Black and immigrant women, domestic work today remains undervalued and invisible.

THE NEW YORK STATE DOMESTIC WORKERS BILL OF RIGHTS

This bill is the first of its kind in the US and guarantees basic labor standards and workplace protections to domestic workers in the state of New York. These rights and protections include:

- overtime pay for work over 8 hours a day
- a minimum of one day a week resting period
- protection from harassment and discrimination
- a minimum of three days of paid leave a year

Domestic Workers United is engaged in efforts to pass similar legislation in other states.

Domestic workers are organizing and reaching out to unions and community organizations for support.

One problem domestic workers have in trying to improve their situation is that U.S. labor laws have explicitly excluded them from protection. This exclusion is rooted in the history of slavery and early labor legislation when the majority of domestic workers were African American. In the 1930s, Southern members of Congress — who feared the emergence of an African American labor movement — blocked the inclusion of farmworkers and domestic workers in federal labor laws.

The structure of the industry also has made it difficult for domestic workers to organize a union and enforce basic labor standards. The workplaces are unmarked private homes. The terms of employment and working conditions are negotiated house by house. With no clear standards or laws to ensure basic rights, workers...
To RESPECT:
ON THE ROAD

New York. than 200,000 domestic workers in
minimum of three days paid leave per
protection from discrimination, a
Bill of Rights provides overtime pay,
law of its kind, the Domestic Workers
Paterson signed it into law. The first
York Legislature and Governor David
many told them was impossible. In
and many others they achieved what
support of labor unions, employers
by telling their stories and building the
The campaign took over six years, and
became the basis for
Domestic Workers United (DWU)
in New York helped to organize indi-
ual support campaigns for workers
like Maria who had been mistreated by
their employers, were owed wages or
survived trafficking. Using a combina-
tion of legal pressure and direct action,
DWU has helped to recover over
$450,000 in stolen wages for workers
like Maria. As the work evolved, it
became clear that grassroots worker
education and case-by-case fighting
wasn’t going to give workers the
protection they needed. Legislative
changes were necessary.

NEW YORK VICTORY
In 2003, DWU helped bring
together hundreds of domestic workers
from over a dozen different countries
to develop a unified vision for quality
jobs with respect. They prioritized
issues that would become the basis for
the Domestic Worker Bill of Rights. The
campaign took over six years, and
by telling their stories and building the
support of labor unions, employers
and many others they achieved what
many told them was impossible. In
July 2010, the bill passed the New
York Legislature and Governor David
Paterson signed it into law. The first
law of its kind, the Domestic Workers
Bill of Rights provides overtime pay,
protection from discrimination, a
minimum of three days paid leave per
year and other basic benefits for more
than 200,000 domestic workers in
New York.

Domestic workers are now gearing
up to win a Domestic Worker Bill of
Rights in California. This year,
grassroots organizations across the
state collaborated on a California State
resolution that recognizes the abuse
and discrimination domestic workers
face, and also values their contribu-
tions to our society. Domestic workers
organized an informational hearing
in Sacramento on the industry, and
educated state legislators about their
working conditions. “Through my
work on [California]’s campaign, I
have learned that the work that we do
as women should be recognized,” says
Luz Sampedro, a domestic worker in
San Francisco, California. “I don’t feel
like my work as a mother and wife or
as a domestic worker in other people’s
homes is valued. Sometimes I feel
like I am seen as just another piece
of furniture in the house. But this
injustice motivates me to struggle so
that our voices are heard, our work is
recognized, and our rights are respect-
ed. The work has to begin with us as
women. We have to respect ourselves
and our work first and then demand
that respect from everyone else.”

Courageous women like Luz
Sampedro are organizing across
the country. California will be the
next state to correct the legacy of dis-
crimination against domestic workers.
Domestic workers are organizing and
reaching out to unions and community
organizations to build a strong base of
support for their growing movement.

Andrea Cristina Mercado is the
Lead Organizer and Political Education
Coordinator of Mujeres Unidas y Activas
and Ai-jen Poo is Executive Director of
Domestic Workers United. Special thanks
to them for contributing this article
Labor Family News.

Labor Project’s newest addition.
Welcome the newest addition to the Labor Project Family! Sahir Samad Mehra,
born July 1, 2010 to Labor Project Communications Director Vibhuti Mehra
and Bari Samad. The proud parents are taking paid family leave to
stay home and bond with the new baby.

Domestic Workers March in New York City.
The Domestic Workers Victory in New York!

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an online network featuring resources and contract language on work family benefits

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AFSCME Local 2700
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Coalition of Labor Union Women - East Bay Chapter
CWA Local 9000
CWA Local 9410
Five Counties Central Labor Council
IBEW Local 6
IBEW Local 302
IBEW Local 1245
IFPTE Local 17
IFPTE, Local 20
ILWU Northern California District Council
North Bay Labor Council
OPSEU Local 29
Plumbers & Steamfitters
Local 159
Sacramento Central Labor Council
San Bernardino-Riverside Counties CLC
San Francisco Central Labor Council
San Mateo County Central Labor Council
South Bay Labor Council
Teamsters Joint Council 7
Teamsters Local 70
Teamsters Local 315
Teamsters Local 350
Teamsters Local 853
UFCW Local 101
UFCW Local 101
UFCW Local 1428
United Educators of San Francisco
United Labor Bank – San Francisco Branch
Weinberg, Roger & Rosenfeld

It saddens me greatly to tell you about our dear colleague and friend, civil rights attorney Joannie Chang, who died of stomach cancer on July 31st at the age of 41. Joannie was a true champion for working families. Joannie and all of us at the Labor Project trained countless union members together in California on the Family and Medical Leave Act in the 1990’s and soon realized that unpaid family leave was not enough. And, in 2001, Joannie and I worked on laying the groundwork for a Paid Family Leave bill in California. She was a critical member of the coalition which helped pass the law in 2002, and she worked on its implementation in subsequent years.

Joannie was a vigilant attorney who paid attention to the details of the drafting of the bill. But she was also thoughtful about reaching out to underrepresented organizations to be part of the campaign. After Paid Family Leave passed, she worked to ensure that immigrant workers were aware of the benefit and educated about their rights.

It’s hard to describe Joannie’s style. She was serious and thorough but also passionate about fighting for the things she believed in. As hard as she worked and as tough as she was, Joannie had a light touch with people, smiling, laughing and making everyone else comfortable. She was generous and had a lot of energy, too. We were very impressed with her efforts to raise money each year by participating in the long AIDS bike rides from San Francisco to Los Angeles and one year in Hawaii.

Last year, newly pregnant, Joannie moved to New York with her partner. She was so excited about having twins and joked about the irony of leaving California for New York which has not yet passed Paid Family Leave.

We were shocked to learn that Joannie died of stomach cancer 5 weeks after giving birth to her twin girls. We will miss her more than I can say. But Joannie would want us to struggle on, winning paid family leave and other basic labor standards for all US workers.

We carry on in Joannie’s spirit.

Denny Steinberg