THE CHANGING WORKPLACE:

Union Women Build Power

BY VIBHUTI MEHRA

The American family and workforce are undergoing a sea change. Women now make up almost half of all workers in the United States. And mothers are the primary breadwinners or co-breadwinners in nearly two-thirds of American families. Yet workplace policies on hours, wages, benefits, and leave continue to assume that the American worker is a male breadwinner with no family caregiving responsibilities. But the growing number of women in the labor movement may influence unions to push for policies that better reflect the current reality.

In October 2009, California First Lady Maria Shriver and the Center for American Progress (CAP) released The Shriver Report: A Woman’s Nation Changes Everything bringing to light the dramatic transformation of American society, family and workplace. The report shows that:

- Only 21 percent of families with children at home are “traditional” families (a married couple with the husband as the sole breadwinner).
- While an increasing number of women are primary and co-breadwinners, they continue to get paid 23 cents less than men for every dollar earned.
- Our current laws and programs are either outdated or inadequate in guaranteeing family friendly workplace benefits for both women and men with caregiving responsibilities.

1983-2008 projects that by 2020 women are expected to be the majority of union workers. “When you have a majority of women in the labor movement, issues like work-family balance, paid sick days and paid parental leave become more important,” said John Schmitt, Senior Economist and co-author of the report (Associated Press, November 2009).

Anna Burger, Chair of Change to Win, agrees that women in the labor movement will make the difference: “Because of women, we don’t just talk about raising wages, but about creating family friendly workplaces with sick leave, child care, and family and medical leave. We don’t just talk about out-of-control insurance costs, but about the fact that women pay more than men strictly because of their gender.”

UNION WOMEN CAN CHANGE EVERYTHING

The American labor movement is also witnessing a demographic shift in its rank and file and this presents a huge opportunity to address the issues highlighted by The Shriver Report. Women now comprise over 45 percent of unionized workers. A November 2009 report by the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) entitled The Changing Face of Labor,...
Looking for good work family contract language? Have some of your own to share? Get ideas, find resources and share your successes at www.learnworkfamily.org

THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

The Great Recession has had a significant impact on American workers of all ages, but it has taken its greatest toll on young workers. The Millennial Generation - young adults roughly between the ages of 18 and 29 - entered the recession at a disadvantage and continue to trail behind workers of all other age groups. The economic challenges for Millennials are staggering: highest rates of unemployment and underemployment; largest percentage without health insurance; most likely to hold jobs without employer provided health insurance, pensions and other benefits; and skyrocketing student loan debt. And the Millennials are the biggest generation in size, already exceeding the number of baby boomers. Though they face the uncertain prospect of being the first generation in recent history to be worse off than their parents, one thing is certain - Millennials are sure to have an impact on the American workplace.

WORK FAMILY CONFLICTS FOR YOUNG WORKERS

Given the economic challenges young workers face today, an agenda that prioritizes job creation, education reform and universal health care clearly speaks to the needs of the Millennial Generation. It is a common belief that young workers lack family obligations and do not prioritize workplace support like family leave, sick time, child care and flexible scheduling. But the Millennials’ attitudes toward work and family, and the rising level of work family conflicts that young men and women report, tell a different story. The experience of Lilly Flores, Organizing Director of United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), Local 1428, exemplifies how important work family balance is to young workers. At 21 years old, Lilly worked as a lead manager in a grocery store. For two years, Lilly was scheduled to work every holiday, and cover workers who called in sick or took vacations. “I understood the demands of the industry, but sometimes I felt discriminated against as a young worker. I felt obligated to work and prove myself in the workforce because of my age. Just because I was young, they assumed I didn’t have any children or family responsibilities,” said Lilly.

ORGANIZING MILLENNIALS: SOME CONCRETE STEPS

- Promote worker-student solidarity by reaching out to college students. APALA convened workers and students at their national convention, Generations United: Organizing for Change.
- Survey young members and workers about their work family responsibilities. For a sample survey, visit www.learnworkfamily.org.
- Build programs for mentoring and leadership development of young workers in your union. AFSCME’s Next Wave gets young union members active and ready for future union leadership.
- Include young workers in bargaining committees and bargain for benefits young workers need to balance work and family.

But Lilly did have family responsibilities – during those two years she was supporting a daughter as a single parent. Some of her coworkers knew she was a parent, but her managers assumed these issues didn’t apply to her. “Everyone needs time with their family no matter what age they are. Most of the time, young workers just don’t talk about it.”

MILLENNIALS’ ATTITUDES TOWARD WORK

According to a 2008 report by the Center for American Progress (CAP), the Millennial Generation has more progressive views about economic issues than any other generation today and previous generations when they were younger. Their views about issues from universal health coverage to...
The Millenials are challenges for young adults roughly between the ages of 18 and 29. The economic challenges for Millenials are staggering.

Young workers have good reasons to be engaged in the labor movement, and their attitudes toward unions show it. The Millenial Generation is more supportive of labor unions than older people today and previous generations at the same age. In the over 40 year history of CAP polling on union support, Millenials show the second highest level of support for unions of any age group or generation. 18 to 35 year olds comprise a quarter of union membership today, and these members have greater upward mobility than their peers. The Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) reports that young workers in unions have 12.4% higher wages than their peers, are 17 percentage points more likely to have employer-provided health insurance, and 24 percentage points more likely to have a pension plan. Unionization supports upward mobility for young workers at a time when young workers face dire economic challenges.

As unions develop strategies for organizing more young workers, and fostering the leadership of young workers in unions, the importance of work-family issues should not be ignored. Young workers care about universal health care, green jobs, and other pressing social issues, but research and experience shows us that young workers also prioritize building a new workplace that respects their family responsibilities. According to Lilly Flores, “There are young people in the workforce and in unions, the challenge is how to make them activists for the labor movement. Organizing is not only about getting your message out, it is about finding out workers’ needs and helping them address it. Young workers care about wages and working conditions, but they also care deeply about their families.”

**MILLENNIALS SUPPORT UNIONS**

**POLICY BRIEF**

- **NEW BRITISH DADS CAN NOW TAKE PARENTAL LEAVE.** Britain's mothers get up to a year of maternity leave with 39 weeks of it paid; now the government says they can transfer up to six months' leave, three of them paid, to their babies' fathers. BBC News, 9-15-09, WFC Resource Newsbrief October 2009

**UNBELIEVABLE**

- **THE USE OF TELEWORK IS INCREASING AROUND THE COUNTRY** as employers look for more ways to save money. Some companies, like American Airlines, are even requiring certain employees to work from home as they shut down local call centers to cut costs. The Hartford Courant, 8-23-09

- **MANY EMPLOYERS ARE IGNORING MINIMUM WAGE AND OVERTIME LAWS** and those who do are rarely caught or prosecuted, according to Broken Laws, Unprotected Workers, a new report out of University of California, Los Angeles and City University of New York. The study found that Latino foreign-born workers suffered the highest minimum wage violations, women were significantly more likely than men to experience violations and, among US born workers, African Americans experienced three times the violation rates. For the full report, go to www.nelp.org

**NEWS WORTHY**

- **FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, JOB LOSSES HAVE BEEN CATASTROPHIC.** In August 2009, the unemployment figure was 9.3% for those without disabilities, but for the disabled it climbed above 17%. A 2008 Department of Labor report found that companies often fear that hiring disabled workers will lead to higher costs and lower profit margins. But other studies, including a recent study by Job Accommodation Network, found that 67% of companies with active disability employment programs enjoyed higher morale and better retention overall. BUSINESSWEEK, 10-2-09; WFC Resources Newsbrief 2009

---

**VIITAL STATISTIC**

Married working couples struggle to get ahead

Couples with and without a working wife saw income grow at about the same pace from 1949-1973, but only those with a working wife saw income growth after 1973.
Find the Inside Story on:

- Organizing Millennials - Focus on Work Family Balance

Visit our newly designed website
www.working-families.org
to download resources on organizing, bargaining and advocating for work family issues.

STAY CONNECTED!
If you are not on our mailing list and would like to receive Labor Family News, send an email to info@working-families.org or call us at (510) 643-7088.
Include your name, organization and full address including zip code, phone number and email.

SUPPORT US!
Donate online at www.working-families.org or mail a check to the Labor Project for Working Families 2521 Channing Way, #555 Berkeley, CA 94720

OUR SPONSORS INCLUDE...
Champion ($7500-$9999)
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees

Leaders ($5,000-$7,499)
California Teachers Association International Brotherhood of Teamsters
Laborers International Union of North America
Service Employees International Union
United Automobile, Aircraft, Aerospace & Agricultural Implement Workers of America

Partners ($2000-$4999)
AFL-CIO
Association of Flight Attendants - CWA
California Nurses Association/National Nurses Organizing Committee
SEIU Local 1000, CSEA
Office & Professional Employees International Union
SEIU Local 1021
United Food and Commercial Workers

Organizers ($1000-$1999)
AFT Guild Local 1931
California Faculty Association
California Federation of Teachers
CA Laborers – Strategic Committee on Public Employers
California Labor Federation
Communications Workers of America
CWA District 9
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers

Visit our newly designed website www.working-families.org to download resources on organizing, bargaining and advocating for work family issues.