

**Report of the  
CWA National Women's Committee  
to the  
67<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention**



**Communications Workers of America  
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The CWA National Women's Committee met in Seattle, Washington, on April 12 and 13, prior to the CWA National Women's Conference. Approximately 225 CWA activists, local officers, staff, and National Executive Board Members attended the conference.

In addition to workshops, this year's conference concluded with the second "mock convention" chaired by Dina Beaumont, executive assistant to the president. Dina called the convention to order with the same gavel she used at the first "mock convention" held in 1978 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The convention gave participants a chance to use skills gained or enhanced in the workshops and further provided opportunities to make motions and speak on them, including resolutions honoring Dina for her dedication and years of service to CWA members and women in particular, Social Security and others. We were pleased to have two CWA members, Zach Hudgins and Jean Godden, who both hold elected office, encourage us to get more involved in politics and run for office, as they had. In addition, Congressman McDermott was pleased to address the conference and sign on to the Pledge to Protect Social Security.

The Committee would like to recognize and thank Paula Terveer, executive vice president Local 2202; Jan Rich, president Local 4107; and Jennifer Case, vice president Local 6320, for their service on the Committee and welcome Linda Miller, executive vice president Local 2001; Tami Drollinger, president Local 4371; and Jacqueline Fields, vice president Local 6505, to the Committee.

Our report highlights some, but not all, issues of importance to women and gives recommendations for actions, some which are already underway. We encourage locals to follow the fine example of President Bahr, who throughout his career did so much to advance issues of importance to women in our Union and the larger labor community. Thank you for your leadership, Morty, and we wish you well.

**Equal Pay - What Can We Do?**

Since the Equal Pay Act was signed in 1963, the wage gap has been closing at a very slow rate of less than half-a-cent per year. In 1963, women working full-time earned 59 cents on average for every dollar earned by men. In 2002, women's earnings were 77 percent of men's. However that gap widened in 2003, dropping to 76 percent.

The wage gap exists in part because many women are still segregated into low-paying occupations. More than half of women workers hold sales, clerical and service jobs. Another factor in the wage gap results from differences in education, experience or time in the workforce. A significant portion of the pay difference cannot be explained by any of those factors.

What can we do to eliminate wage discrimination? The Women's Committee makes the following recommendations to CWA Local leaders to assist in eliminating pay inequity:

Encourage bargaining committees to make sure employers evaluate and compensate jobs based on their skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions and not on the people who hold the jobs.

Educate members, especially the ones in traditional women's lower-paying titles, about the education and training programs available to them. Many of these programs have been bargained for by CWA. These include Next Step for Verizon employees; The Alliance for AT&T, Avaya and Lucent employees; Pathways for US West employees; CWA/NETT, and NACTEL. Members should be encouraged to use the programs to become qualified for the higher-paying, traditionally male jobs. It is critical for women in endangered jobs, such as operators and call center positions, to become qualified for these jobs as soon as possible to increase their odds of staying employed as their jobs are eliminated.

Finally, participate in the national observance of Equal Pay Day. The Equal Pay Day is organized annually by The National Committee on Pay Equity to raise awareness about unfair pay for women and people of color in America. Equal Pay Day is observed in April to indicate how far into the next year a woman must work to earn as much as a man earned in the previous year. Tuesday symbolizes the day of the workweek when women's wages catch up to men's wages from the previous week. In 2006, Equal Pay Day will be observed on Tuesday, April 25.

### **Workplace & Family Balance**

When employees in surveys or focus groups are asked what would reduce the work-life conflict they experience or help them manage better, they are most likely to ask for workplace flexibility. As far back as 1998 in a survey of 614 companies, half of the companies ranked workplace flexibility as a most effective retention tool. (The survey was Watson Wyatt Worldwide).

Other surveys show that when jobs have an opportunity for flexibility, employees have more commitment to the employer, are more satisfied with their job, are more likely to stay with the current employer, and report fewer mental health problems. CWA has long recognized the need to bargain over family care and balance issues.

Negotiated contracts across the CWA family have language for workplace flexibility and family care. Some examples are:

- ◆ Flextime that allows employees to select the starting and quitting times within a range of core operating hours. Flextime to also be utilized during the lunch hour.
- ◆ Compressed Work Week allows employees to work their full-time schedule by working four 10-hour days each week rather than five 8-hour days.
- ◆ Alternative Vacation Schedule, Shift Trades, Two-Hour Vacation Increments, Voluntary Part time Assignments.
- ◆ Family Care Leaves including Care of Newborn Child Leave, Gradual Return to Work after Care of Newborn Child Leave, and Family Care Leave.
- ◆ Emergency Backup Family Care (child and elder), Family Care Resource, Homework Hotlines, and Kids in the Workplace.

These types of negotiated items are extremely helpful to our members, but some need strengthening to weigh on the employees' side rather than "needs of the business" or "subject to supervisor approval." For additional information on these items, contact Janine Brown, CWA Representative at [jbrown@cwa-union.org](mailto:jbrown@cwa-union.org) or 202-434-1149.

Eldercare, along with childcare, is still normally unpaid time to the employee. An estimated 22.4 million U.S. households are currently providing some type of informal care to a relative or friend age 50 or older. Baby Boomers (ages 40-59) more often have eldercare responsibilities.

Fifty-three percent of women under the age of 45 who do not currently have children but expect to at some point in the future are "very optimistic" they will find a job that will allow them to be successful at work and succeed as a parent once they have children. However, oftentimes, this is still very difficult and there is still opportunity for improvement in these areas.

The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) that became law in 1993 continues to be attacked by business groups that want to weaken the law by redefining what would qualify as a serious health condition. One such assault would weaken the law by covering only illnesses serious enough to require 10 or more days off. Other pieces of the law under attack are occasional time off and proof of illness. Choosing between an employee's or family member's health and the paycheck is unacceptable.

There are eleven states that have family leave laws that are more expansive than the FMLA. One example requires employers with fewer than 50 employees to grant leave for newborn childcare, adoption, family member, or their own medical health condition. Also, the State Family Leave Laws allow time to attend school-related or routine health care activities of an employee's child. California has a paid family leave plan.

Locals are encouraged to learn more about these laws and work to improve existing laws. Collective bargaining agreements also should be reviewed to determine where family-friendly and flexibility language could either be added or improved.

### **Domestic Violence**

Approximately 4.5 million women are physically assaulted and mentally abused by their partners each year. Domestic violence crosses all ethnic, geographic and social boundaries with its far-reaching and devastating effects on women and children. Abusers exhibit behaviors of verbal and emotional abuse, control of finances, isolation, sexual, and physical abuse as ways to dominate and control their partners.

It is imperative that we, as union leaders, have the knowledge to recognize the signs of domestic violence and help provide avenues of assistance, protective shelter options and education to our members and their families.

Interventions made by CWA representatives include approaching management to make accommodations that our members may need as a result of an abusive situation. A member may need flex scheduling, spur-of-the moment time off, alternate work duties or a change of reporting location, protective housing, coordination of childcare issues, and counseling needs.

Locals in District 1 and Local 4371 in District 4 have joint union-management training, awareness and education programs on domestic violence. Local 9509, in District 9, has a grassroots program started by men dedicated to teaching male youths within our CWA families and the surrounding communities that domestic violence is wrong.

These types of training courses give CWA representatives the tools to identify and assist domestic violence victims. But additional steps need to be taken to spread knowledge and heighten awareness for our CWA family.

The Committee recommends that we increase our efforts to further educate all our brothers and sisters within the Local leadership structure. We propose adding domestic violence awareness training to the CWA education and training programs – at all levels. The ability to recognize and provide quick and effective intervention to our members who are victims of domestic violence/abuse is a valuable leadership tool that could greatly benefit our members.

### **Women in Our Union**

According to an AFL-CIO sponsored report, "Overcoming Barriers to Women," unions are facing a crisis in women's leadership. Women now comprise 43 percent of union membership; women are more likely than men to say they would join a union, to support workers over management and to believe that corporations should be held accountable. However, lack of leadership at the highest levels of our unions is viewed as a barrier to organizing and growing our unions.

Although working women support unions, membership is declining overall. Women's positive views toward unions have declined since 1999. Women who are not in unions say that "unions are for men," they don't see women as leaders and don't associate unions with working on issues of importance to them, according to recent research associated with the report.

There is no denying that CWA has made much progress with regard to women and their participation in our union at all levels, however, in order to grow our union, CWA leadership needs to reflect our diverse demographics and target audiences. Our membership is about equal between men and women but our Executive Board is only 25 percent women. The historical path to elected office on the Executive Board of our union is through staff and administrative positions. While we have made

great strides with regard to diversity particularly at the staff level, more needs to be done regarding administrative positions. CWA leadership should examine the hiring practices for administrative positions to help encourage diversity in our union leadership. There needs to be a commitment by top leaders to discuss, promote and implement changes to encourage diversity in leadership positions.

In quoting the CWA Committee on the Future Report (1983), "It is important that we remember that women's issues are not just women's issues. They're everyone's issues. What affects women affects men....children....the family....the community...the entire workforce...and our union."

### **Fair Trade and Women**

Despite the best efforts of the AFL-CIO and many CWA members and activists, the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) passed and will do much more than just reduce barriers to the flow of goods and services. It reduces protections for workers' rights that employers will use to violate the right to organize – further eroding wages and working conditions.

CAFTA will negatively impact the agricultural sector in Central America, which will force women to the cities to find work. CAFTA contains no meaningful labor standards and will allow widespread problems of discrimination, sexual harassment and physical abuse. Although the number of cases of women being dismissed while pregnant is decreasing, in El Salvador, 70 percent of women surveyed are still forced to take a pregnancy test. Women are subjected to sexual harassment ranging from sexual comments to unwanted touching, mostly by factory supervisors. It is believed that nine out of ten sexual harassment cases go unreported. A large percentage of women are subjected to physical violence and verbal aggression.

Health and safety issues will continue to plague working women in the five Central American countries and the Dominican Republic. Women workers have to contend with working long hours and unpredictable schedules. They are paid poverty wages that make it nearly impossible for them to find and afford adequate childcare and provide food, basic clothing and a home for their families. These low wages will also impact workers in the United States as we, too, will be forced to find low-paying nonunion jobs.

Union organizing can cost women their jobs. Workers are routinely intimidated, fired, threatened, and blacklisted for trying to exercise their most basic rights on the job. In El Salvador, workers fired for union organizing have no right to be reinstated. Because of the overly formal union registration requirements, officials deny legal recognition to legitimate trade unions.

Here at home, CAFTA threatens U.S. jobs by making it harder for American businesses and farmers to compete with countries that have excessively low wages and deficient working conditions. We have lost 2.8 million manufacturing jobs since President Bush took office. CAFTA doesn't solve the jobs problem; it only digs the hole deeper. Under the rules of NAFTA and now CAFTA, "free trade" has, and will continue to, devastate our communities as companies close or export jobs while millions of skilled workers cannot find living wage work. Under CAFTA, multinationals will continue their race to the bottom on wages and worker protections.

What can we do to help our sisters and brothers affected by CAFTA and any future trade agreements without rules that protect the basic rights of workers?

Join and participate in the CWA E-Activist campaigns, the AFL-CIO's Campaign for Global Fairness and other social, community and labor organizations such as STITCH-Women Organizing for Worker Justice, and the Coalition and the International Gender and Trade Network. Educate our members about the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and other trade agreements.

### **Social Security and Women**

Social Security provides a defined income that is guaranteed. Regardless of how long you live, the benefit cannot run out or be spent before you die.

Women would especially be hurt by privatization. They are the majority recipients and less likely than men to have pensions or substantial savings. For older women, it would be especially devastating as they more often depend on Social Security for their retirement income.

Women benefit from Social Security's progressive benefit formula. Women face wage discrimination in the workplace and tend to be paid less than men. Women are more likely than men to be in temporary or part-time jobs, and interrupt their careers to care for children and elderly parents. As a result, women earn less than men during their working lives. Social Security's progressive benefit formula helps women because it provides benefits of a higher percentage of earnings to workers whose lifetime earnings are lower.

Privatization would open up Social Security to corruption and waste, would explode the U.S. budget deficit, and burden our children with \$4.9 trillion in debt in the first 20 years alone.

We must strengthen Social Security without slashing benefits, require Congress to pay back the money borrowed from the trust fund, and end the wealthy wage exemption (cap) so CEOs pay the same Social Security taxes as we pay.

Take the Pledge to Strengthen Social Security seriously by doing your part. If your representatives haven't signed the Pledge, available at (<http://www.unionvoice.org/campaign/sspledge>), encourage them to do so.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ann McCauley, Secretary-Treasurer  
Local 1106  
CWA District 1

Jacqueline Fields, Vice President  
Local 6505  
CWA District 6

Linda Miller, President  
Local 2001  
CWA District 2

Susie McAllister, Secretary - Treasurer  
Local 7704  
CWA District 7

Debra Brown, President  
Local 3706  
CWA District 3

Rosa Bernal, Secretary - Treasurer  
Local 9588  
CWA District 9

Tami Drollinger, President  
Local 4371  
CWA District 4

Carol Coultas, Executive Vice President  
Local 13500  
CWA District 13