WORKING DRAFT
THE NEW PARADIGM: Women, Men, Work, Family and Public Policy

International Conference: What Public Policies For Work in a Global Era?

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Francine Moccio
Cornell University
School of Industrial and Labor Relations
Institute for Women and Work

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This paper presents some of the insights that emerged from a five year project funded by the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations on transforming feminist ideals and practices into addressing societal priorities through public policy and reforming workplace practices for working women and their families. The project was co-directed by Betty Friedan, the renown author of *The Feminist Mystique*, the book which ignited the U.S. based women’s liberation movement in the 1960s, and Francine Moccio, Director of the Institute for Women and Work at Cornell’s ILR School. By engaging scholars, experts, practitioners and representatives from labor and business from opposing viewpoints, this national and international project addressed the emerging trends of a rapidly changing American workplace and its transformative effect on the quality of working women’s jobs and lives. In addition, the project attempted to maintain a healthy skepticism and an interdisciplinary analysis of today’s debates on such euphemistic yet culturally loaded definitions of family life, family values and work/life balance. Over the course of the project, an overlapping concern emerged for transforming old identities, based on social movements for equality from the 1960s and 1970s, into new thinking, rhetoric and strategies that transcend status quo identity politics and better reflect the relations of the sexes to the labor market. In particular, these changes were viewed within the context of an emerging new managerial enterprise culture adapted onto the world stage by globalization.

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1 The ILO has been working in this area and has recently released a plethora of new studies and articles linking women’s growing work force participation to gender mainstreaming and issues of equality in the labor market, see LABORDOCs online at: [http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/lib/elists/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/lib/elists/index.htm).

2 Particular attention was paid to defining a multiple bottom line of success for corporations and critiquing the current inadequacy of corporate social responsibility in the global economy.
This paper summarizes New Paradigm discussions and proceedings resulting from the project into three themes. Themes 1 and 2 relate to women and their workplace status in the U.S. economy and society while Theme 3 reports on the results of a recently held international conference on comparative work/life issues in the U.S., EU and Eastern Europe in Bellagio, Italy, funded by The Rockefeller Foundation and co-sponsored by the Feminism and Legal Theory Project. All three themes intend to provide a broad background for discussion on the new economy in the U.S. and Europe and its influence on women’s position at work, home and on the job by: (1) clarifying the issues, (2) bringing theoretical and analytical rigor to the debate, and (3) discussing new workplace practices and public policies. The themes are as follows:

**Theme 1: Renegotiating the Social Contract: Winners and Losers in the New Economy**

Discusses the economic and cultural impact of the new economy on women, taking into consideration issues of economic privilege among women, changes in industrial practices, the growing income gap, and welfare reform.

**Theme 2: Braving the New World of Work and Family Life: Some Cultural Implications**

Focuses on the ways in which new economy technology, such as telecommuting, and the proliferation of such nonstandard work as – temporary, contracted out, and part-time – intersect with changing roles in the American family.

**Theme 3: Gross Domestic Product vs. Quality of Life: A Comparison of EU countries and the United States**

Highlights the major findings of the recent Bellagio Study Center Conference in Bellagio, Italy, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and co-sponsored by The Feminist and Legal Theory Project at Cornell University’s School of Law. This section will also report on pre-conference meetings with scholars, activists, policy makers
and union leaders at the Institute for Women and Work’s Washington D.C. office at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (held in co-sponsorship with Harvard University’s JFK School of Government and Public Policy) and at the Sorbonne University. 3

**Theme I - Renegotiating the Social Contract: Winners and Losers in the New Economy**

The new economy is having profound effects on women’s incomes, job opportunities and quality of life. Highly educated professional women are better positioned to advance in this new economy, which is characterized by globalization, corporate downsizing, the growth of part-time work, technological innovation, and a premium on labor flexibility. But women with less education, from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, are quickly becoming part of an underclass of workers – working increasing hours with fewer benefits in a growing sector of low-income service work. 4 Current changes, therefore, in the workplace necessitate a shift in focus, particularly when considering priorities for educational and public policy interventions. Ways must be found not only to ensure economic parity for women as a homogenous group, but to distinguish between the needs of low-income and higher paid professional women.

The new economy is also accentuating racial differences among women. Women of color and white women enter the work force from different points of privilege. While

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3 The Institute for Women and Work gratefully acknowledges the participation and provision of meeting space at the Sorbonne University for this pre-conference session which hosted leading EU scholars and policy makers through the generous efforts of Professor Martha Fineman, Director of the Feminist Legal Theory Project.

white professional women still experience discrimination based at times on gender alone, professional women of color experience discrimination based on both race and gender.\(^5\) Moreover, low-income women may experience barriers based on gender, race and nationality, but the overarching concern is their lack of skills and education vis-à-vis the changing work force.\(^6\)

The economic division between higher income and low-income working women may also cause ideological rifts. Professional women depend increasingly on paid labor to care for their families and households. The privatization of caring for dependent children or adults at home decreases the incentives for higher income families to pay additional taxes for support of such public entitlement programs as public daycare, parental leave, and public education. For such families, the vast array of entitlements that seek to socialize the costs of caring labor become superfluous.\(^7\) What renown economist Kenneth Galbraith terms “the culture of contentment” may develop among professionals who are sympathetic to the needs of low-income workers, but who can privately pay for services that the latter are forced to seek from government subsidies.\(^8\)

Nationally, there has also been a growing concern about health disparities among vulnerable workers, such as immigrants and low-wage women workers. Differences in health insurance coverage are likely to be linked, at least in part, to socioeconomic inequalities. N. Moss has recently written that “Poverty and affluence are intrinsically entwined with gender and ethnicity and race as well as with marital status and household

\(^7\) Goodwin, Neva. “The Household Economy and Caring Labor” in Ackerman et. Al., 1998, p. 308. Neva states an example of the backwardness of the US in this respect, “all industrialized countries except the US provide family allowances based on the number and ages of children to allow mothers to choose to stay home.” In addition, virtually every modern national has undertaken social welfare programs.
configuration.” In 1998, female-headed households had a median income of $24,393 compared to $54,276 for married-couple families, while 29.9 percent of female-headed households fell below the federal poverty level. In 1998, the poverty rate for whites was 8.2 percent, but it was 25.6 percent for Hispanics and 26.1 percent for African-Americans. Among female-headed households, 43.7 percent of Hispanics and 40.8 percent of African-Americans are below the poverty line compared to 24.9 percent of whites. One-third of African-American women are considered poor, with the brunt of poverty falling on single parent, female-headed households – their median income was only about $17,737 as of 1998.

The overall aim, therefore, is to appraise how the forces that are shaping the new economy – rapid technological change, international competition, privatization, deregulation, and subcontracting out – are affecting our society. And it is important to pay special attention to the differential impact of this new economic system on educated, higher income and professional women, and their less educated, low-income and poor counterparts. Open debates and investigations into these issues can potentially result in expanding a collective awareness of new priorities to address low-income women’s rights.

(a) Background: Emerging Trends

The social contract between workers and owners has been renegotiated. The

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globalization of both capital and labor markets has led companies to search for greater flexibility in the organization of work. Companies seek increased competitiveness through such cost-saving measures as hiring smaller numbers of permanent “core” employees and expanding “temp jobs.” Other cost-cutting strategies include cutting wages, increasing technology and downsizing human resources while hiring new workers with different skills. The relationship between employer and employee has changed in a fundamental way. Now white-collar workers share the impact of marketplace volatility with blue-collar workers. At the same time, individuals have also sought flexible solutions to work and family conflicts in response to the new norm of dual-wage earning and single-head of household families in American society. It is debatable, however, whether flexible arrangements, such as telecommuting and alternative work schedules, have really made work any easier, and whether such arrangements have truly affected the majority of the workforce, not just high-level employees and professionals. Further, globalization has resulted in a transfer of unskilled jobs to other countries where labor is cheaper, while technology has placed a rising premium on skilled, highly paid labor in the United States. The net effect has been widening income disparity.

Emerging trends in the work force also include a rapid and intensive drive toward management practices such as outsourcing, deregulation and privatization. For

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13 Ackerman, Frank et al. 1998. The Changing American Workplace. Island Press: Washington D.C., p.217: on why globalization puts pressure on companies to be more flexible. Because of space constraints, I will not explicate this here except to say that the need to attract and retain highly skilled workers in a faster-paced economy is a primary motive behind these policies. Another pattern among companies has been to “lean” their labor costs by hiring as few permanent employees as possible; thereby avoiding fringe benefits and regulatory employment policies. “Temp jobs,” in this way, have served as a buffer for firms that find it costly to adjust their permanent employment levels.
corporations and government, these have become the primary strategies for coping with increased competition and fiscal crisis. The move to outsource jobs formerly performed by a permanent work force, to deregulate airlines, utilities and other industries, and to privatize public sector work is spurring greater conflict in labor relations. The consequences of these new management practices on women workers’ job security, unionization rates, legislative protections, families, and communities challenge employers, policy makers and advocates to develop a combination of alternative strategies. New solutions and strategies to address some of these concerns might include: analyzing successful examples in other countries of reconciling global competition and economic growth with social welfare systems; searching for ways in which people outside the United States are dealing with market pressures, tensions between job and family life and between the sexes, as well as employees’ desire for nonstandard work arrangements.

(b) The Income Gap: Widening and Why?

Income inequality despite a tight labor market is still a growing concern. Although income inequality grew a little slower in the 1990s as compared with the 1980s – about one-half to two-thirds the rate – it, nevertheless, continues to grow, in part because of globalization and the restructuring of jobs. This gap in incomes becomes particularly problematic given that the U.S. labor market is close to full employment and for many workers, such as young adults and low-wage earning women of color, the economy is about “as good as it gets.” Contrary to conventional wisdom, adults over the age of twenty rather than teenagers from upper-income families working after school

account for 70 percent of minimum wage workers.\textsuperscript{17} And, of those teenagers who do earn the minimum wage, more than half live in families with below average income.\textsuperscript{18}

Raising the minimum wage is tremendously important for working women. Some sixty percent of workers who would benefit from a one-dollar increase in the minimum wage are women.\textsuperscript{19} Low-wage women’s earnings fell about 20 percent over the period of 1979-1989 because of a 30 percent decline in the minimum wage.\textsuperscript{20} As the minimum wage goes, so go the economic fortunes of low-wage earning women, particularly women of color. The minimum wage disproportionately affects Hispanic Americans and African-Americans. The 1.6 million African-American workers that would benefit from a minimum wage increase account for 16 percent of all hourly-paid African-American workers, while the two million Hispanic workers earning minimum wage make up 21 percent of all hourly-paid Hispanic-American workers.\textsuperscript{21} More generally, wage convergence between men and women has decelerated from the rate of the 1980s. The phenomenon of income inequality necessitates consideration of such important questions as the impact of gender and race, women’s greater labor force participation, increased hours, and even higher earnings. Currently, the narrowing of the gender wage gap is stalled and many researchers are explaining this due to discrimination patterns at work which according to the EEOC are on the rise.\textsuperscript{22}

The increased participation rate of women entering the labor force in the 1980s, and their increased working hours actually lowered income inequality for working

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} EEOC Report, April 2007
families.\textsuperscript{23} Had wives stayed home, income inequality would have increased at a time when men’s wages stagnated. Largely because married women went to work, a middle-class family in America with children worked 19 percent more hours, approximately six weeks more of full-time work, between 1979 and 1999. Low- and middle-income American families experienced the biggest increases in hours worked mostly because wives worked.\textsuperscript{24} And while work is contributing to the economic independence of women, time spent on the job is creating stress particularly among low-income single women and low-wage dual wage earning families. A recent report on American workers’ attitudes toward work by Rutgers University reports that workers feel a great deal of anxiety about conflicts brought on by work and family obligations, despite high job satisfaction and a low unemployment rate. Workers across economic brackets rate the ability to balance work and family as the most important aspect of a job next to job security.\textsuperscript{25} For working poor and low-wage women workers, however, this balance has always been a challenge because of the high costs of private child and elder care.\textsuperscript{26} It is estimated that 40 percent of mothers receive free day care from relatives. Day care costs, however, for the remaining 60 percent are expensive, on average $7,000.00 per child each year.\textsuperscript{27} Mandatory work requirements for women receiving welfare have aggravated the problem of finding affordable dependent care among low-income women as the demand for such care is exceeding the supply.


\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{26} Bergmann, Barbara 1999. “Child Care Costs and Rising Poverty Rates Among Women.” Presentations at the \textit{New Paradigm Symposium} at the Carnegie Endowment Center for International Peace, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
Working women in the United States also confront a gender wage gap that is one of the widest in the world, especially for women of color. This disparity between the sexes is puzzling if we consider that the qualifications of American working women are generally higher than those of women elsewhere, and that the United States has a longer and stronger commitment to anti-discrimination than other countries. It is also puzzling to account for what labor economists refer to as “swimming against the stream,” or the narrowing of the male-female pay gap during the past 20 years when income inequality in the United States has actually been increasing.28 There are several explanations for the pay gap. Some economists focus on differences in occupations, or so called occupational segregation, and more recently on differences in human capital – differences in experience, education and skills – which may be due to the different social roles women, are assigned by society.29 The other gender-specific explanation accounting for the pay gap is discrimination.30

Researchers have also found that in countries with more centralized wage policies than in the United States there is a compression of wage rates and wage inequality decreases. Union contracts and minimum wage laws also tend to compress the gap by bringing up the bottom. For example, Sweden has a much narrower wage inequality than the United States and also a narrower pay gap between men and women. Sweden also has greater centralized wage policies, is more highly unionized, and maintains a stronger government presence in the labor market.31

30 Ibid.
(c) Welfare Reform: Women’s Right to a Living Wage Job

In 1996 President Clinton signed The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which is the harshest attempt to move families from welfare to work. The legislation imposes a lifetime limit of sixty months or five years during which a family can receive cash aid. The law also gives states greater authority to institute mandatory participation in work-related activities for recipients, to change benefit levels and even to reduce the lifetime limit of sixty months. Approximately two million families and 3.8 million children are running up against this time limit. Although it is unclear what effect the time limits will have on the incentive to work, what is clear is that this legislation is disproportionately affecting young mothers on welfare. Of the recipients who will reach the 60-month limit, 70 percent started receiving benefits when they were less than 22 years of age, 75 percent have never been married, and 97 percent have children younger than 3 years old.32

The challenge before us is to devise adequate programs for those who are not in jobs. The 1996 law gave states authority to assist low-income families in joining the permanent paid work force, but few states have expanded their services to this end. Individuals who have found jobs were more likely better equipped for the labor market, while the less skilled, less educated remain on welfare.33 Strategies, such as linking work-related TANF requirements to postsecondary education without risking penalties under the law’s work-participation requirements, should be explored further.34

34 Senator Paul Wellstone had proposed a federal amendment to the Higher Education Reauthorization Act, which would have allowed states to count two years of postsecondary education as a work activity under TANF without penalties.
Moreover, current rules give little or no incentive for state policy makers to compete for high performance bonuses. The measures are influenced by demographic and economic differences between states. A state policy maker from a state with a high unemployment rate can do little to raise the job entry rate. The measures also discourage innovation and keep resources away from those services that are of greatest importance to low income families: access to child care, transportation, training and education.35

The current system challenges us to consider why innovative proposals are encountering resistance. We should also examine whether or not such programs will make it possible for single mothers to leave welfare and to join the mainstream workforce. More fundamentally, an analysis is timely regarding the cultural reasons that Americans view assistance to needy families and other life cycle dependency needs as failures of the individual, while other publicly subsidized programs, such as national defense, escape similar stigma.36

New policies and creative thinking are also needed if low-income women or women on welfare are to find the many blue-collar jobs that are available in the post-industrial city. These women can qualify for jobs in professions as diverse as construction, transportation, fire fighting and policing, that do not require formal education and where workers can learn on the job. And these are jobs that not only offer a living wage, but also unionized benefits and opportunities for advancement. Since

35 In a recent testimony by Lynda Meade of Catholic Charities she noted that a survey of 1700 TANF recipients showed that the two most common responses to the question “What is the biggest problem keeping you out of work?” is lack of affordable transportation and childcare.” Testimony given before the House Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources by Lynda Meade, The Director of Social Concerns, Catholic Charities in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.
36 In an interview with Asa Regner, Special Advisor to the Swedish Prime Minister on Gender Equality, she stated that estimates for child poverty in Sweden are almost non-existent and children score very high on reading and math tests. There is also parental insurance for both maternity and paternity leave in Sweden. This allows fathers and mothers to split between themselves up to 450 days of paid vacation or paid leave when a child is born or adopted. Parental insurance also covers sixty days of paid leave to care for sick children. The Swedish childcare policy is one where parents are considered to be the prime agent but not the sole agent for the development of the child. Interview by Francine Moccio, July 25, 2007.
these occupations, however, are mostly white male dominated, recruiting takes place primarily through informal social networks and women are often excluded.\textsuperscript{37} We need new strategies to strengthen affirmative action and link women with employers and joint industry boards for such living wage jobs.\textsuperscript{38}

\textbf{Theme 2 - Braving the New World of Work and Family Life: Some Cultural Implications}

Women are transforming the U.S. workplace, undoing old gender assumptions and hierarchies, and raising new concerns about how to balance the responsibilities of work and family. At the same time, competitive pressures and new technologies, which decentralize decision-making and encourage teamwork, are spawning a new organization of work. There is now plenty of evidence to suggest that nonstandard work arrangements are quickly becoming the norm, rather than the exception, in the brave new world of work.\textsuperscript{39} But this shift toward more flexible and contingent work, namely, temporary, contracted out, and home-based jobs, may merely represent the front wave of a reduction in wages and benefits and the evasion of union protections. Becoming one’s own boss, escaping the frustration of the glass ceiling, cutting childcare and commuting costs are alluring to working women, who are still responsible for the bulk of domestic and child care responsibilities.\textsuperscript{40} Still, we should consider if in this virtual workplace women are

\textsuperscript{37}Women’s participation as compared with both white male and to some extent minority men has remained stagnant since the Executive Order #11246 was issued in 1978. At least 50 percent of skilled blue-collar jobs are living wage jobs with unionized benefits that could significantly increase the living standard of welfare to work mothers.

\textsuperscript{38}Joint industry boards are committees of unions and employers that set the ground rules and oversee recruiting and hiring in industries and occupations as diverse as skilled manufacturing, construction, communications, among others.


\textsuperscript{40}Work Trends Survey, Rutgers University, Winter 1999
unwittingly being used as the front edge of a trend that generally places all workers – men and women – outside the reach of traditional legislative protections. There are new emerging trends to examine. Will this new pattern of combining work and family in the name of individual control and power ultimately cause people to lose the real power associated with social policy and collective action? And we must examine how this shift in new ways of working affects people across race, gender and nationality.

Researchers and social policy makers are concerned that trends such as the growth of contingent work, or what historians refer to as “out work,” spells lower wages, fewer benefits and a loss of job security especially for low-income women workers. Others, such as temp and personnel agencies that recruit and market temporary employees contend that the trend is not all that great. In fact, “free-agent moms” can work anywhere from 15 to 40 hours a week while caring full-time for their children see these kinds of arrangements as beneficial. The truth is that although the BLS in 1995 and 1997 account for the contingent work force at nine to ten percent nationally, there has been no systematic collection of data on these types of arrangements until only recently. We do know that since the early 1980s, agency temporaries, who are predominantly women, have grown from about one half percent of the work force in 1982 to over two percent today. Other forms of contract labor have increased in recent years as evidenced by surveys conducted by the Bureau of National Affairs in the early eighties and by the BLS on selected industries. In the United States, a recent survey reported that businesses increased their use of contract workers by 17 percent over the past five years for

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assignments previously performed by full time staff.\textsuperscript{44} Companies, as well as not for profit organizations, actively encourage this trend. Surfing the web, it is not unusual to come across marketing ads from virtual pied pipers luring “stay at home moms” to take advantage of the wide variety of job opportunities in almost every sector of the economy. Even universities have entered the fray by soliciting part-timers online as adjutant lecturers and home-based clerical workers.

The growth of contingent work represents just one of the troubling trends in the new economy for low-wage women workers. The “time crunch” for low-income working families, and job security also rank high among employee concerns. The media, however, prematurely herald the return of women back to the family by exaggerating the recently reported cutback of work hours by a few affluent women as a full-fledged retreat from the public world of work. Proponents of “stay at home” moms, boast that women are finally coming to their senses, trading their briefcases in for recipes, and surrendering themselves into the arms of hearth and home. Since women are allegedly better suited for raising children and taking charge of household responsibilities, some traditionalists argue that women at home provide men with a “haven in a heartless world.”\textsuperscript{45} Working parents’ desire for more time with their children is often times misconstrued in the press as a desire on the part of “every woman” to return to a “golden age” of “motherhood.” The double standard is clear. While conservative thinkers applaud upper class women for cutting back on hours at work to spend more time for family, mothers on welfare who stay at home with pre-school children are denigrated as the “pathologically lazy” who should be forced out to work. Mythology aside, the data shows that women’s labor force


\textsuperscript{45}Christopher Lasch first used this term in his 1970s classic work, \textit{Haven in a Heartless World}, which described the function of the stay at home mother and male breadwinner during the rise of industrialization.
participation rates remain steady at 46 percent with no indication of a decrease in the near future. Rather, the opposite has occurred. As recently reported in The Wall Street Journal, this spring’s new BLS data document that “reverse traditional families,” with dads at home full time while moms work, rose to 5.1 percent in 1994 from 3.4 percent in 1990.\textsuperscript{46} The trend is engendering a cultural backlash. Just the other day, a radio commentator remarked that a stressed out father depicted in a recent television car commercial advertising a turbo engine, attempting to juggle his time between his two children at their simultaneous but geographically dispersed sports events, is the “fault of the feminist movement.” “Where’s the mother?” asked the announcer. “If this guy’s wife was home taking care of the kids like she’s supposed to and he was bringing home the bacon, turbo dad wouldn’t be recklessly running across town in the first place.” What the announcer fails to consider is that most likely turbo dad probably does work. But like most dual wage earning couples that sequence their time between work and family, it is his turn on the family shift, while his wife rotates out to work.

Single parent and dual wage earning families increased by 30 percent over the past twenty years, with women actually increasing the number of hours they work, according to the Council of Economic Advisors Report to the President on the Status of America’s working families. This has had a profound effect on American families. On average, both parents experienced a decrease of 22 hours per week of personal time, that is, a 14 percent decrease in the time that was available outside of paid work that they could spend with their children.\textsuperscript{47} Despite this dramatic rise in working hours, however,

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid.

the incomes of middle- and low-income have remained virtually flat. Young parents are doing especially badly. The Northeastern University’s Center for Labor Market Studies states that 37.5 percent of young families with children are living on near-poverty incomes, compared with 14 percent of all families. Welfare to work programs are responsible for much of this disparity as they are moving more low-income and single parents into jobs that either pay minimum wage, or are temporary, contracted out, or part-time; jobs with few or no benefits, and virtually no advancement opportunities.

New work patterns, such as contingent work, account for only one of several such strategies in the new economy. In their desire to optimize flexibility while satisfying customer demand, employers are curtailing their commitment to full-time workers in blue-collar manufacturing industries by instituting practices such as mandatory overtime among core employees. Working longer hours, however, robs many parents from participating in their children’s lives. School plays and family weekend picnics go unattended. In one case, a worker was almost prevented from attending his own wedding. Luckily, a note from the priest ultimately excused his absence on the Sunday overtime shift at the plant. We may either be witnessing the evolution of a new type of family values, or perhaps a return to pre-New Deal workplace practices where the motto was “if you don’t come in Sunday, then don’t come in Monday.”

Blue-collar work has always been plagued by insecurity, while the terms and conditions of the work have been arbitrary and hazardous. For the first time in American history, however, these characteristics also accurately describe the work of middle class white-collar professionals. No longer are they immune to the time crunch and job insecurity. Educated professionals are working longer hours as compared with their implications, administration policies in this regard, the policy and budget process.
European counterparts. They are also subject to employer misclassification as independent contractors, who perform the same jobs as regular full time employees but with little or no benefits or job security. This practice is increasing and is probably going underreported. Incentives to misclassify workers are many, while sanctions are almost nonexistent. Employers can avoid labor standards, health and safety regulations, and the payment of benefits, pensions and payroll taxes. As *perma-temps*, many of these professionals work upward of five years for one company. It is no wonder that unions – once the sole terrain of such heavy industries as steel and construction – are emerging in professions as diverse as medicine, law, and information technology. The Washington Technology Association or WashTech is a prime example of a Seattle based group of misclassified *techies* turned union.\(^{48}\) Recently affiliated with the Service Employee International Union of the AFL-CIO, they are on the cutting edge of professional workers’ response to company practices that enhance flexibility by curtailing more traditional full time employment.

Despite the economic fallout of September 11\(^{th}\), and a current increase in layoffs, economists predict signs of recovery over the next several months. Although work will not “disappear,” the traditional *workplace* site with its one employer/one employee relationship is rapidly changing. Today’s employers view contingent work (that is, contacted out services, temporary work) and virtual workplace trends, such as telecommuting and home-based computer work (or what has been historically referred to as *out work*)\(^{49}\) as ideal cost cutting measures. This new paradigmatic transformation in


the workplace appears ideal on the surface because it may offer women workers a way to address the age-old conflicts between home, jobs, and caretaking. There is, however, the habit of history repeating itself. Like the doomed Bill Murray in the popular film, *Groundhog Day*, who repeatedly awakens to the same day until he learns how to set his priorities, we are destined to relive the mistakes of our pre-regulatory past if the new world of work goes unregulated. Since we have passed this way before, here are some caveats and suggestions for consideration: First, in an era marked by political dormancy and by the desperation of parents (same sex and heterosexual) to resolve the time crunch of work and family conflicts, the conventional wisdom that the privatization of work at home is beyond regulatory policy can open the way for increased exploitation. Second, as firms employ new technologies to facilitate greater flexibility of labor and capital across international markets, nonstandard work arrangements render current labor law obsolete. As a result, unionization moves beyond the reach of contract and other nonstandard workers, thereby, provoking the need for creating new models of organizing. Third, since the majority of American women and men in families are working harder and longer without any real economic gains, only swift action on policies, such as paid family leave, universal health and dependent care, will alleviate the stress of working parents, whether they are opposite or same sex partners or spouses. And if policy action is not taken to equalize the treatment of part-time and contract workers with salaried employees, employer flexibility may very well become synonymous with employee disposability.

In the previous century, collective bargaining helped promote workers into the middle classes by providing some redistribution of accumulated wealth through private

50 The author has observed a growing number of “Work at Home” advertisements both online and on the street.
contracts. In light of the old adage, “united we bargain, divided we beg,” collective bargaining is one way to make positive changes for working families. But hard-won bargaining gains on balancing work and family life will only come from a strengthened and enlarged labor movement. With the unionized work force hovering around 10 percent, educational and training programs; as well as public policy interventions become critical in ensuring women’s rights.

And ideology still matters. As new work patterns become the norm, Americans must also confront “common sense” notions of individualism, privacy, and family values that obscure the underlying relationship between political power, the structure of our jobs and our private lives. When considering work and family issues, the question inevitably arises – where does the boundary lie between work and private life? Time for family has never been just a matter of the heart. In the U.S. today, this brave new world of work increasingly unveils the private as public and the personal as political.51

51 Sara Evans first coined the prophetic term, “the personal is political” in her groundbreaking work of the same title in the early 1970s.