

(UK)

workers. The campaign points to statistics showing that vacation time is of proven benefit to employers and employees, but is being reduced or eliminated by many American companies, with Take Back Your Time executive director Lisa Stuebing saying: 'What we're asking for is quite modest when you consider that residents of most industrial countries get five or six weeks off and that the absolute minimum in Europe is twenty days of paid vacation after the first year on the job.' Take Back Your Time website and news release.

**Enforcing balance** : The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is examining work/family balance and federal anti-discrimination laws, as it considers developing new enforcement guidance. EEOC vice chair Leslie E Silverman highlighted the 'maternal wall' that may act as a barrier to the career advancement of women with children, and the plight of the 'sandwich generation' for whom the term 'caregiver' has taken on a new meaning - workers who hold jobs while also caring for children, aging parents or other family members. EEOC website and news release.

**Euro teleworking** : The number of people who are teleworking and working away from the place of work is on the increase across Europe, according to a new study from Eurofound's European Working Conditions Observatory (EWCO). About half of the working population in the EU works at their place of work all of the time, results from the recent Fourth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) show, and it concludes 'employees who work from home either predominantly or partly report a better work-life balance and, as a result, higher levels of job satisfaction.' Eurofound news release and full report, Place of work and working conditions.

**Stopping harassment** : Europe's unions and employer organisations have signed a framework agreement to fight against harassment and violence at work. Negotiated over ten months, the text commits the signatories - BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC - to combat by April 2010 all unacceptable behaviour that can lead to harassment and violence at the workplace. ETUC news release. Framework agreement on harassment and violence at work [pdf].

**Flex-i-bull** : The Australian federal government's argument that workers are getting more flexible hours and family friendly working conditions has been shot down after national union body ACTU obtained official data showing that threequarters of the new 'AWA' individual contracts do not provide family friendly work provisions. ACTU president Sharan Burrow said: 'Secret figures that the government has previously refused to release show that the vast majority of AWA individual contracts provide no specific entitlement to flexible working hours or job-sharing arrangements that could make it easier for parents to balance their work and family responsibilities.' ACTU news release.

**Karoshi time** : Relatives of victims of karoshi - death from overwork - have held rallies in Tokyo to protest at Japan's long working hours, which top 2,000 hours a year. Japan's parliament is discussing legislation to limit excessive overtime, but has angered unions and campaigners by suggesting white collar workers should be exempted from its provisions. Japan Times.

**Deadly burnout** : The family of a young Australian call centre worker wants to sue telecommunications giant Telstra for allegedly contributing to her suicide. Sally Sandic, 21, took her life in January this year after months of mounting pressure on staff at a Telstra facility, with her family and work colleagues describing how the once top salesperson with a vibrant personality was turned into a nervous wreck by unrealistic performance targets. The Herald Sun. Hazards worked to death webpages.

**Speaking up** : US Speaker Nancy Pelosi has called for more progress towards equal pay for women. She said: 'Working women now earn about 77 cents for every dollar earned by men, adding: 'For many, closing the wage gap is not just a matter of equity, but survival.' Office of the Speaker news release.

**Cash balance** : In the US, 24 April this year was Equal Pay Day, the day that marks how far into the calendar year a woman must work to earn as much as a man earned last year. AFL-CIO president John Sweeney and AFL-CIO executive vice president Linda Chavez-Thompson commented that the best way for women to gain pay equality is by joining a union. AFL-CIO Now. Institute for Women's Policy Research news release [pdf] and wage ratio factsheet [pdf].