

Women workers: Does recession threaten them?

By Ellen Goodman
Globe Staff

Louise and Ted are a couple in their mid-thirties with two kids, one parent, a house, a car and a heating bill to support. They do it together. She is a suburban teacher and he is a programmer and by pooling their incomes — hers is \$13,600 and his is \$14,200 — they make ends meet. They even put away a little for college and go out to dinner five or six times a year.

When you ask Louise how she thinks they'd be living without her income, she says, "Oh my God, I can't even visualize it. What would we do? I suppose we could go and live on a farm or something. But I don't know. It's just not something we ever even think about."

That, in a nutshell, is one of the major differences between the Depression of the 1930s and the recession of the 1970s in terms of women's employment.

In the 1930s, Louise and Ted would have just been legislated out of half their income. Then, married women teachers were forbidden to take jobs if there was a man who needed it. Until very recently women workers were considered a group that could be called out and sent home again at as the economy and the government dictated.

Today, more than half the married couples in this country are working partners. Thirty percent of all family income is produced by women, and in 15 percent of the families the female worker brings in the chief income.

"In other words," says MIT economist Dr. Mary Rowe, "You can't tell 35 million working women to go home."

But how will the current recession affect female workers who have long been the "last hired, first fired?" How will it affect women's gains in non-traditional jobs and promotion into management and professional areas?

"During the 1930s, there were laws that prevented women from getting jobs if there were men who wanted them. It reflected the general social attitude that a man 'needed' a job."

Now, two things have changed. One is that it's illegal to have to make such a choice, and more important is the fact that women are

such an important part of the labor force that it would be unrealistic," says Carolyn Bell, a Wellesley professor and second female member of the Executive Committee of the American Economic Association.

Still, while massive ejection of women is unlikely, the unemployment figures reflect the fact that female unemployment is larger and growing faster than male unemployment.

In December of 1973, when there was a 4.8 unemployment rate (seasonally adjusted), male unemployment was 4.0 and female unemployment was 6.2. Last month with the higher rate of 7.1 (seasonally adjusted), male unemployment was 6.2 and female unemployment was 8.6.

The unemployment among women is primarily in the female job ghettos, i.e. among clerical workers. Dr. Barbara Bergman, a Washington economist and University of Maryland professor, says that "the unemployment rates for women are directly the result of sex-segregated jobs."

She notes that the 80 percent increase in the number of women in the labor force during the last 20 years has been almost exclusively in female job categories and that currently the supply outstrips the demand. Hence, unemployment and low wages.

"The most important thing we can do for change is for women to get into non-traditional jobs," she says.

But it is precisely these breakthroughs that are most threatened in the present economy.

Despite the publicity given to "first women," in non-traditional areas such as police forces, the major blue-collar industries have neither recruited nor welcomed large numbers of women. The consensus is that they are less likely to do so in a shrinking economy.

"It is always easier to bring about social change, in an expanding economy, says Prof. Bell.

Carmen Maymi the director of the Women's Bureau in the US Department of Labor puts it this way: "The resistance has been here for many years before the economy got into trouble. Now, of course, it's more difficult to open the doors where men are being laid off. When you get a tough market for men, it gets tougher for women."

Both Bergman and Rowe are united in thinking the boom years were not so terrific for women anyway.

Says Dr. Rowe: "It's hard to prove that there have been any gains that we have to worry about losing. The wage gap has widened since 1965 when women earned 63 percent of what men earned. Now it's 57 percent. With statistics like those, it will be very hard to tell if things get worse."

Dr. Bergman says: "You can exaggerate the importance of a recession for women in employment. Prosperity hasn't brought them any more. The economic situation provides only the most marginal effect. The amount of the labor turnover is always pretty large and there are always openings. The difference is that in a recession there are a larger number of candidates."

But most economists agree that the toeholds women have achieved through voluntary integration, suits, Affirmative Action and the spectre of sex discrimination litigation could be virtually wiped out if the pressure is let up.

Carmen Maymi says: "We have a problem with employers feeling the pinch. They may want to slow down Affirmative Action. But in government we are not going to be less aggressive in our program of commitment. We're as committed to enforcing Affirmative Action as ever."

MIT Sloan School economist, Prof. Phyllis Wallace, is pessimistic about promotion and employment gains. "I think it will be very difficult for women to move up. In many white collar jobs. Affirmative Action plans are really voluntary. I believe at the present time where you may have a lot of experienced males available it will be more difficult for women to move. Since the recession has intensified so swiftly, we suddenly have people who planned manpower programs for their firms scrapping the plans."

In companies where women have made inroads and made them with court-ordered or voluntary Affirmative Action plans, layoffs have pitted union seniority rules against women and minorities again.

There are currently two cases working their way up the court ladder in situations where Federal anti-discrimination laws come into conflict with union contracts. Prof. Wallace and Bell explain that Federal law will take precedence over a contract (since a contract that violates the law is invalid).

In one lower court ruling in New Jersey the judge maintained that when layoffs occurred the racial balance of the employees had to be maintained.

But, Prof. Wallace notes: "Even for white collar jobs where there isn't the union problem, employers still follow the rule of length of service in reducing the labor force."

Many have said that in the conflict over the shrinking job pie, the most important consideration will be attitude — the attitude toward women workers as family supporters, and male backlash.

As an example, Washington Post columnist William Raspberry recently wrote that maybe it was time to reserve the jobs for men.

Dr. Rowe can see no cause for



Opportunities for women will be speaker's topic

Dr. Phyllis Wallace, professor of management at the Alfred P. Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, will be the featured speaker at the 46th annual Valparaiso University Guild Convention to be held on the campus this weekend.

Dr. Wallace has done extensive work to promote equal education,



Dr. Phyllis Wallace

employment and housing opportunities for women and for racial minorities. She is also on the Board of Directors of a Boston bank, Valparaiso's honorary Doctor of Laws degree.

Professor Wallace will speak at the Saturday evening banquet which will be held in the Great Hall of the Union at 7 p.m. The banquet, a feature of the three day convention, will also include special music with a Southern theme, presented by dramatic soprano Carolyn Staley of the VU music faculty, toastmistress Phyllis Schuessler of St. Louis, Mo. and decorations representative of the state of Georgia provided by the Atlanta Chapter of the Guild.

The convention will officially open at 10 a.m. Friday, with Mrs. Jacqueline Jungemann, Maywood, Ill., national Guild -president, presiding.

Business sessions on Friday and Saturday will be interspersed with various luncheons, presentations by VU president A.G. Huegli and Dr. Richard Brauer of the VU art department, a King Tut's great treasure-filled bazaar, musical performances and a bus tour of the campus.



Dr. Phyllis A. Wallace, an economist and researcher into manpower and equal employment policies, has been appointed a professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Sloan School of Management. A visiting professor since 1973, she is the first woman to hold a full professorship at MIT. (AP)

First black trustee

Wallace joins MFA board

Phyllis Ann Wallace yesterday was named to serve on the board of trustees of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Named by museum president Howard W. Johnson, Wallace is the first black to serve on the museum board.

She is a distinguished scholar in the field of eco-

nomics, and for the past three years has been professor at the Sloan School of Management, MIT. Prior to her arrival at MIT, she was a senior economist with the government.

Professor Wallace serves on a variety of advisory groups, panels and boards. Among them are the board of directors of the State Street Bank and Trust Co., the Brookings Institution, Congressional Budget Office, American Economic Association and the Economics Advisory Panel. She

is also on the Visiting Committee of Harvard's Graduate School of Business Administration.

Named with her as museum trustees were Lawrence E. Fouraker, dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration, and Richard Devereux Hill, chairman of the board of the First National Bank of Boston. William A. Coolidge and Ralph Lowell were elected at the board's annual fall meeting to the position of honorary trustee.



PHYLLIS WALLACE
... new trustee

TODAY AT 2 & 8 P.M.
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Kelly, Globe

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