

# Young Workers in Free Fall: 1/3 Under 35 Live with Parents

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Posted on September 3, 2009, Printed on September 4, 2009

<http://www.alternet.org/story/142386/>

So much for the economic independence that's supposed to come with young adulthood.

But when unemployment among young men workers is the highest it's been in 61 years, as noted by *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert, it's little wonder that workers under 35 are facing so many economic obstacles.

On Tuesday, the AFL-CIO released the results of a disturbing new Peter Hart survey, "[Young Workers: A Lost Decade](#)" that found that about a third of workers under 35 live at home with their parents, and they're far less likely to have health care or job security than they were ten years ago. Even then, in a 1999 survey, when they faced [economic insecurity](#), they still had reasons to be hopeful.

Those days are long gone. A quarter of young workers say they don't earn enough to even pay their monthly bills, a 14% rise from the last survey. As [Richard Trumka](#), the presumptive incoming president of the AFL-CIO, said in a press conference today:

*We're calling the report "A Lost Decade" because we're seeing 10 years of opportunity lost as young workers across the board are struggling to keep their heads above water and often not succeeding. They've put off adulthood - - put off having kids, put off education - and a full 34 percent of workers under 35 live with their parents for financial reasons.*

*Thirty-five percent are significantly less likely to have health care than older workers, only 31 percent make enough money to pay their bills while putting anything aside in savings, and almost half are more worried than hopeful about their economic future.*

That's one reason that Trumka and other labor leaders announced this week a new [outreach campaign](#) to recruit young workers -- and a [stepped-up drive](#) for the Employee Free Choice Act and health care reform. They're using the upcoming Labor Day, with the expected involvement of 100,000 union members in just the AFL-CIO alone in events and actions, as a launching pad to spur Congressional action.

As Trumka declared in a speech Monday at the Center for American Progress (via [Working In These Times](#) [blog](#)):

*The challenge facing unions isn't just to change the way labor laws work; it's to change the way we work.*

*It's to reconfigure ourselves to respond to the needs of a new generation of working Americans....*

*Younger workers ought to have health care. They ought to have paid sick leave and paid vacations. They ought to have pensions. They ought to have union representation.*

*But when they look at unions too often what they see is a remnant of their parents' economy -- not a path to succeed on their own. This is the issue that will decide the future of the American labor movement.*

*We all hear a lot about unions coming back into the AFL-CIO -- and that's a personal priority of mine - but, ultimately, it won't matter how many unions are in the AFL-CIO if we fail to capture the imagination of millennials.*

*Now, we ought to be clear: the problem isn't that they have some deep-seated hatred of unions; they don't.... They think we do a lot of good things for our members; the problem is that they don't think we have much to offer them.*

The union movement hopes to change that perception by offering them the concrete gains unions can offer them in the workplace, and as *These Times's* David Moberg observes, they're potentially open to progressive appeals:

*They primarily blame Bush, Wall Street/banks, and corporate CEOs and see job loss, inadequate wages, and healthcare costs as working people's biggest economic problems.*

*They strongly prefer public investment to create jobs over reducing the deficit. And by a 50 to 23 percent margin, they think workers are better off with a union. They support Obama and identify with Democrats much more strongly than older workers.*

But the future now looks particularly bleak, especially if the "jobless recovery" continues at its relatively slow pace, and the level playing field for union organizing remains blocked by opponents of the [Employee Free Choice Act](#)

At the media conference on Tuesday, one 31-year-old worker, Nate Scherer, explained his all-too-common plight:

*After getting married, my wife and I decided to move in with my parents to pay off our bills. We could afford to live on our own but we'd never be able to get out of debt. We have school loans to pay off, too. We'd like to have children, but we just can't manage the expense of it right now...so we're putting it off till we're in a better place. My [work] position is on the edge, and I feel like if my company were to cut back, my position would be one of the first to go.*

Nate at least has a job, but he represents an economic *tsunami* for young workers that offers a profound challenge to the country -- and our economic future. As Bob Herbert, looking at both long-term joblessness and the problems facing young workers, summed up recently in his column "[A Scary Reality](#)":

*For those concerned with the economic viability of the American family going forward, the plight of young workers, especially young men, is particularly frightening. The percentage of young American men who are actually working is the lowest it has been in the 61 years of record-keeping, according to the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University in Boston.*

*Only 65 of every 100 men aged 20 through 24 years old were working on any given day in the first six months of this year. In the age group 25 through 34 years old, traditionally a prime age range for getting married and starting a family, just 81 of 100 men were employed.*

*For male teenagers, the numbers were disastrous: only 28 of every 100 males were employed in the 16- through 19-year-old age group...*

*This should be the biggest story in the United States. When joblessness reaches these kinds of extremes, it doesn't just damage individual families; it corrodes entire communities, fosters a sense of hopelessness and leads to disorder.*

The union movement's leaders are hoping that by engaging young workers and increasing its power in more workplaces, they can start turning around this crisis and making up for "[The Lost Decade](#)."

Art Levine also co-hosts "[The D'Antoni and Levine Show](#)" on BlogTalk Radio, which last week hosted Roger Hickey of the Campaign for America's Future talking about the politics of including a public option in health reform.

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