

# BCR REPORTS

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## Poverty IS The Link

by Ann Withorn and Fred Newdom

**O**n the last day of the BCRS conference we began an important conversation about how to fight the assault on poor people while also building alliances with the non-poor. Some folks wondered whether the Society couldn't broaden its approach to "economic justice," or some other term which would not narrow our focus just to welfare and the most poor. This, it was argued, would allow us to make more direct links to labor, religious folks or even social workers who felt disconnected from the issues surrounding "welfare reform." We set up task forces to try to create material and focus around such new directions.

We are very concerned about this broadening of focus for our activism for at least three reasons:

1. On a practical level, we are a small organization with a limited budget. It is hard for us to do anything that will be noticed by anyone. Over the past few years, our priority on developing materials and pushing activism around welfare has given us an identity and direction that would be hard to maintain with a much broader focus. (We could see us, however, moving to expand our focus to talk more about the assault on all people living in poverty, in order to include the bigger withdrawal of social security from immigrants, disabled people, low waged workers, some of the elderly). As always, though, we must weigh our best sense of what needs to be done alongside of what we are best able to do. Our role, as we see it, is not to come up with a grand vision for the

Left – rather, we need to get clear on what the BCRS is uniquely able to do and how we can build on the progress we have made.

2. Still on a practical, but also on a political level, our focus on welfare reform has begun to help us build bridges that still have to be maintained and nurtured. Members of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union, as well as Diane Dujon, Cheri Honkala, Michelle Tingling Clemmons and even **Marian Kramer (uninvited)** came to our conference because of our proven record of real work and real attention to welfare rights, not because we are another nice Left organization committed to economic justice. Everyone agreed that their presence added immensely to the meaningfulness of discussion at the conference. If we want to keep and expand this critical energy within our ranks, we must maintain our commitment to fighting the welfare fight – to "passing the ammunition" to poverty activists, as Ethel Long Scott urged us to do at our 1990 conference in San Francisco.

This means that we should keep a special fund for activism around poverty issues, continue to buy and distribute *Survival News*, and to support the NWRU, as well as to continue to create and/or distribute material that will help people understand and make the critical arguments necessary in order for social workers and other community activists to fight for the rights of poor people.

3. On a more strategic and even, dare we say, theoretical level, we are

distrustful of arguments that lead policy oriented progressives and political activists to subsume poverty issues under more *universal* concerns. Certainly, we can frame the fight to keep poor people alive and to maintain basic welfare commitments as "economic justice" and surely we need to build alliances with labor, social work and other more mainstream groups. But if we do this too much, and don't talk directly about the profound costs of poverty and of abandoning any basic entitlements for poor people, we are missing a critical point: that increasingly large numbers of people in this country are in jeopardy of being poor, and that the greater the numbers, and the worse the conditions of poor people, the worse it is for everyone.

When we speak about welfare rights to labor groups, or church groups, or community groups, or even social work organizations, etc., we don't focus primarily on how bad it is for welfare recipients. Instead, we talk about how the loss of basic security threatens everyone – and how the cuts and pullbacks of commitments to poor people are harbingers of losses for others. "You're Next" is a basic theme. We have found that labor folks, and people of color, are especially able to get this point, when it is made directly. But we have to start by talking about what the welfare cuts mean to women, their children and to people who could be in *anyone's* family. In the 1930's, liberals allowed a Social Security Act to be enacted that sacrificed women

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## Poverty IS The Link

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and people of color to the interests of more acceptable groups, in the effort to create a so-called "universal entitlement." During this round of social politics, we cannot make the same error. The best policies, and the best progressive strategies will come from a starting point of demanding what poor people need and then showing how basic programs for the poor become the core of what everyone needs and should have: a basic income floor, health care, guarantees of decent housing and child care.

So, rather than seeking other arguments for making alliances with labor, social workers and other less immediately vulnerable groups, we urge that the BCRS continue to marshal its limited resources in opposition to welfare reform, which is going to quickly devolve down to a struggle in each state. We can take some leadership by helping to provide recipient speakers and material that will be especially effective in showing non-poor groups how increasing poverty affects them, but the focus will still be welfare reform and poverty. Because poverty is the link to a real alliance – if we can't get labor, leftists, social workers or whoever on board in defending welfare recipients, immigrants and the others who are most vulnerable for now, then other associations don't mean much. BCRS, with its historic connections to labor and mainstream social work, can make a critical contribution to the alliance, but only if we sharpen, not broaden, the focus. ■

## The Silence of the Welfare State

*by Joel Blau*

Once there was an American welfare state. It wasn't much by comparison with most European welfare states: as a percentage of the gross domestic product, the budgets of European welfare states were about fifty to one hundred percent larger.

They had well-funded day care programs for working families. We did not. They provided a regular stipend for every child regardless of family income. We did not. They offered national health care. Despite efforts in the 1940s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1990s, we did not.

Still, in its heyday, the American welfare state made a difference, because its programs benefited certain categories of people. Whether it was students, veterans, women, children, blacks, the poor, or the elderly, the benefits of the welfare state – from college loans to Social Security – gave people access to opportunities and a standard of living superior to that which the market alone could provide.

Then came the backlash. The first really visible sign of a decline in the adequacy of social provision was the appearance of homeless people on the streets of major American cities. But since only 1% of us were likely to be homeless in any given year, most Americans saw little risk to themselves, and said nothing.

Next President Reagan fired the air traffic controllers who had gone out on strike. Air traffic controllers are trade unionists. Most Americans are not

trade unionists, so they said nothing.

The attack intensified. Even though almost half of all Americans get some cash benefits from the national government, conservatives contended that the primary recipients of federal largesse were black or Hispanic. Most Americans are not black or Hispanic, so they said nothing. Welfare – really Aid to Families with Dependent Children – was the most vulnerable program in the American welfare state. Although it only absorbed about 1% of the federal budget, this 1% was said to be a social contagion that destroyed the true grit of poor people and ate away at our economic vitals. Besides, since just 15% of the U.S. population is officially poor, there is an 85% chance that poverty will only strike other people. Because those are such terrific odds, most people said nothing.

In the last couple of years, critics of the welfare state have turned their attention to the benefits that immigrants receive. Even though immigrants perform work that no one else wants, for wages that no one else will accept, many in what used to be described as a "nation of immigrants" have been surprisingly receptive to this critique. Now when they hear of proposals to slash benefits for recent immigrants, they think of themselves as real Americans, and say nothing.

The original purpose of the welfare state was to provide a measure of protection against the worst effects of a market economy. Recently, as that economy has become more global, large segments of the white American middle class have been left behind. An expanded welfare state – one that provided jobs, national health care, day care, college loans, and children's allowances – might have addressed their growing economic insecurity. But now that the economy is affecting them, the welfare state had been so shrunk by silence that they do not see the point of speaking up for themselves, and there is no one else left to speak up for them. ■

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### HOW TO ORGANIZE A BCRS CHAPTER:

"How to Organize a BCRS Chapter" organizing packets are available by contacting Tony at Communication Services at (518) 463-3522, 8 Thurlow Terrace, Albany, NY 12203. The contents of the packets include such things as posters, brochures, book order forms, recent newsletters, copy of by-laws, names of BCRS organizers from the Steering Committee who will help you, and much more! Allow 4 weeks for delivery. ■

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### WELFARE CUTS MONITORED ONLINE

Women Online member Vicky Steinitz (steinitz@umbcc.edu) plans to monitor the impact of the welfare cuts on recipients this year. Her focus will be Massachusetts and her approach will be to treat the cutbacks as equivalent to human rights abuses and to collect documentation of the impact of those abuses in the form of "stories." Please drop her a note if you are doing similar work or are interested in helping her. ■

# SWIMMING AGAINST THE TIDE: REPORT ON THE BCRS NATIONAL CONFERENCE HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK, JUNE 23-24, 1995

**A**s stated in the program, this year's conference goal was: "to examine why and how the U.S. seems to be turning so directly on immigrants, people of color, women on welfare and other low income and working class people who 'break the rules' made by the economic winners. As always, a major purpose is to critique and develop individual and collective strategies for changing things and for keeping ourselves going as progressives in social welfare."

On Friday, participants focused on how, as individuals and together with allies, we could begin to turn back the tide of reaction and retreat from social responsibility that currently engulfs the country. Groups met and discussed the major issues that face us and how to strategize more creative and supportive ways to accomplish change. We considered several key areas: welfare reform; supporting personal radicalism; fighting the religious right; multi-cultural work within organizations; and ways to rebuild popular and political support for social policies. The afternoon also included time for strategy roundtables and field reports in a range of areas. Most respondents were pleased with the day's events. However, evaluations revealed a consistent division between those who wanted "to hear more from people who had thought a lot about the issues" and others who wanted "less talking by planners and more strategizing with everyone in the room."

At the plenary, "Talking Back and Fighting Back - Finding the Words, Arguments and Strategies to Turn Back the Tide," a diverse group of activists formed a panel. This was moderated by Ann Withorn and included Mimi Abramovitz, Nina Perales, Diane Dujon, Michelle Tingling-Clemmons, Cheri Honkala, and Fred Newdom. Speakers attempted to listen and discuss how best to reframe the issues and "talk back"

to the Right. Michelle Tingling Clemmons was especially moving in her rousing call that we all "get down to business," make alliances and work for real change - not just to stop the onslaught. A constant theme was the need to take leadership from those most affected and to listen to a variety of voices while not determining prematurely just one strategy for turning the tide.

Respondents at the event were divided about whether the attempt to foster discussion and not suggest more focused directions was effective. Many were pleased by the participation of grassroots speakers and the openness of the discussion. Others, however, felt we were too bogged down in discussions of the opposition successes, and did not push hard enough to suggest specific plans for change.

On Saturday a day's worth of workshops were scheduled to allow for concentrated time to discuss critical issues facing social welfare progressives in many settings. Goals for the workshops were to combine reports on what was being done with comments and collective thinking about what more might be possible. The workshops covered a wide range of topics, from using schools as a base for community building to understanding the attacks on affirmative action. We continued the discussions about welfare reform and unemployment and also found time to discuss how to respond to the increasing "criminalization of diversity." In short, there were topics to touch most of our concerns as progressives and an

attempt to combine the sharing of knowledge about the issues with the development of better tactics for addressing them.

There was no Saturday plenary session, either in the morning or in the evening, and many respondents noted that this caused problems for those people who could only attend on Saturday. One person said she felt like she "walked into the middle of something that seemed quite good, but she couldn't find a way to connect." Next time we definitely need some way to welcome and engage with "Saturday only" participants.

Sunday morning's discussion, "Where Do We Go From Here? Making Alliances in a Context of Reaction," was wide ranging and included many perspectives about how BCRS should proceed. One response to that discussion is printed here in the article by Withorn and Newdom.

In summary, this year's conference was highly successful in terms of the quality of discussion and the importance of the issues raised. The presence of significant numbers of community and labor activities was critical to bringing immediacy and relevance to the discussion. Next year we will want to expand our reach and improve our coordination, so that more people appear and the event continues on its "uncharted journey" away from a standard professional conference format. We need BCRS members or other folks with ideas to participate in creative ways at the 1996 conference in Philadelphia. ■

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## BCRS FACULTY NETWORK

The BCRS Faculty Network is in the process of updating our database. If you are a BCRS faculty member currently on the network, and have changed your address since we first compiled our list, we would like to hear from you. We would also be glad to hear from any folks who are not currently part of the BCRS Faculty Network but would like to join us. Write to: Carol Kaplan, Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service, Lincoln Center, New York, NY, 10023. - Tel. 212-636-6672. ■

# CHAPTER UPDATES:

**HOUSTON:** Core members of BCRS Houston spent a good part of the past summer evaluating the local chapter's mission, activities and structure. We chose to re-structure the group to increase efficiency in decision making and increase group cohesion. We developed leadership roles (like job descriptions) which the group considered pivotal to running the organization effectively by distributing the work that needed to be done.

Once we finished restructuring, we focused on preparing for the arrival of new students at the University of Houston Graduate School of Social Work. Part of our efforts to reach new students included recruiting members at the new student orientation as well as hosting a barbecue at Bob Fisher's house for old and new members. We have approximately 30 local members. We have promoted the organization as "busy person friendly," meaning we encourage membership from people regardless if they can contribute an hour a month or 5 hours a week.

Ideas at our first business meeting ranged from issues of national concern (welfare rights, literacy, voter registration) to local events/issues which members considered pressing (breast cancer research, fund-raiser, Texas Commission of Alcohol and Drug Abuse funding cuts, etc.).

The first action-oriented event of the newly formed group was organizing volunteer participation in the Houston Standown, a 24 hr./day marathon of services provided to Houston's homeless veterans over the September 29th weekend. Spearheaded by the VA Hospital, many different groups across the city helped to organize and provide services over the weekend, in an effort to reach veterans who may have slipped through the cracks and plug them back into services. Food, showers, psychiatric assessments, clothing, employment information, substance abuse counseling, and health assessments were some of the services provided. Homeless veterans and their families could

choose to spend the night or the whole weekend.

Of primary importance to us is to eventually move the chapter's leadership off of the UH campus so that the group has greater appeal to community practitioner's/activists, and not only students. This will probably require more graduating students to remain active in the group, as well as more focused recruitment efforts. We are working on getting the phone tree up and running efficiently so that it can be activated not only by Houston BCRS members, but also BCRS national, in the event a larger action that demands nationwide response is planned. Of course, we'd like to move beyond our formation pains by determining our issues of focus and setting our calendar for the year.

**NEW YORK CITY:** Following up on the Welfare Reform Teach-In in June, 1994, Mimi Abramovitz, Diane Borko and other members have been active in a Welfare Reform Speakers' Bureau organized by the NYC NASW's Executive Director and BCRS member Robert Schachter. Bob and Marilyn Moch also successfully lobbied the New York City Council and the Human Resources Administration to establish community liaison tables in welfare centers throughout the city, staffed by welfare recipients to provide information and help other recipients through the maze of changes.

The Chapter helped coordinate the program for the Philadelphia BCR conference in June, and several members led workshops, including Monnie Callen who not only coordinated two workshops with Hospital Workers Local 1199 but arranged for 10 union-sponsored activists to attend the conference.

BCRS members dominate the Planning Committee for the Poverty, Violence and Development Project, part of a NASW sponsored nationwide curriculum development initiative to better acquaint social workers with the relationship between develop-

ment and violence in the areas of poverty, ethnicity, family structure, trauma, and substance abuse. Coordinators for three of these areas presented a well-attended Field Report at the June conference: BCRS members Arlene Prigoff of San Francisco on trauma, Marilyn Moch of New York on poverty, and Pat Leahan of Minneapolis on family structure. BCRS member Dorothy Van Soest is writing the curriculum. Publicity for the curriculum will be kicked off by a nationwide teleconference and teach-in the week of February 6, 1996. Interested members may contact BCRS member and the Director of the NASW Office of Peace and International Affairs, Eileen Kelly at the national office of NASW.

The New York City Chapter of BCRS will be having an open steering committee meeting in January, 1995. Any member interested in coordinating an area of activity for the coming year, please let us know by writing to P.O. Box 20563, New York, NY 10023 or contact Miriam Thompson at 718-997-3060.

**ST. LOUIS:** BCRS has applied for Student Government Association status within St. Louis University. Our meetings continue to draw students from SLU and the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University. On September 27th, BCRS participated in a rally co-sponsored by Reform Organization of Welfare (ROWEL) to inform people of changes in entitlement and anti-poverty programs. As a St. Louis University BCRS practicum experience, Diana Oleskevich, an MSW/MPH student, is designing a model to implement a Voter Registration campaign in health clinics in the St. Louis area. This Voter Registration Initiative is also a recommendation for local grassroots organizing which came from the Fourth U.N. Conference on Women in Beijing in August. ■

## INTERNET RESOURCES

### HEALTHLINK USA WEEKLY:

Highlights from HandsNet's Health Issues Forum. An excellent source for information on Medicare, Medicaid, and other health policy issues. E-mail Patrice Franklin at Families USA Foundation, HNO156@handsnet.org.

### JEFFERSON REPORT:

If Rush Limbaugh and G. Gordon Liddy make you ill, take the anti-dittohead medicine recommended by doctors – The Jefferson Report. The Jefferson Report is a syndicated political radio commentary that is a sure fire cure for the right wing rhetoric on the airwaves. And now this 90-second daily commentary is available in e-mail form for the Internet crowd. Best of all, The Jefferson Report will be delivered to your computer free every weekday. Hear it or read it – just don't miss it. Order The Jefferson Report by sending your request to JeffReport@aol.com.

**TRUE WITNESS:** A pilot project of The Chautauqua Society, this 'zine reports on public pronouncements of the right wing. It is compiled by a citizen network of watchers to monitor public pronouncements of the far right in media. TW strives for gentle humor and minimal editorial comment. Coverage includes shortwave radio and the 700 Club. To subscribe, e-mail Chautwa2@aol.com.

**WHAM! ALERT:** (Women's Health Action & Mobilization) WHAM! is a direct action group committed to demanding, securing and demanding absolute reproductive freedom and quality health care for ALL women. This mailing is made up of compiled information and suggestions for actions YOU can take. WHAM! ALERT is distributed free via the Internet. To subscribe, send e-mail to listproc@listproc.net with "SUBSCRIBE WHAM yourfullname" (without the quote marks, and using your real name, not e-mail address) in the BODY of the message (NOT the subject). Also see their Web Page: <http://www.echonyc.com/~wham/> ■

# THE CASE OF MUMIA ABU JAMAL

*(A video and discussion of the case of Mumia Abu Jamal was held at the June BCRS Conference in Philadelphia, and the BCRS Steering Committee voted support for Mumia at its October 7 meeting, including urging members to write in support of Mumia.)*

As Mark Furman once again turned the attention of the country to racism and corruption in the Los Angeles police department and rampant police thuggery was exposed in New Orleans, a long-brewing scandal of police corruption erupted in Philadelphia. Six police officers pled guilty to lying in order to obtain search warrants, framing defendants, stealing money, assault and perjury in court, among other rights violations, and accusations quickly spread beyond those six. Speaking for many Philadelphians, the late State Representative David Richardson said, "If anybody believes that there is not a conspiracy within the police department, they're crazy. This happens every single day."

Within this context, Mumia Abu Jamal was sentenced to death in 1982 for killing a police officer, despite evidence which points to his innocence. Mumia, a Black Panther when he was 16, a supporter of MOVE, and the President of the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists, had long since gained the enmity of the Philadelphia police department, although he had not once been accused of a violent act. When arriving police found Mumia, a policeman's bullet in his stomach, lying near the dead policeman, he was accused of the murder.

Of the two witnesses who identified Mumia as the gunman, one was a prostitute with several charges pending against her (which subsequently were not prosecuted), and the other was a cab driver on probation for a felony conviction. Others in the area insisted the prostitute arrived well after the shooting, and the cab driver gave a deposition the night of the shooting stating that the gunman, a bigger man than Mumia, had fled the scene. Several additional witnesses testifying to Mumia's innocence were threatened or coerced into silence, including a gas

station owner whose statements describing a gunman other than Mumia were repeatedly torn up by the police and who fled Philadelphia in fear of his life, not to return until he felt safe when international attention focused the media on the case.

Incredible additional prosecution and trial abuses in the case are voluminous and can be obtained from Equal Justice USA, but thousands more have been falsely imprisoned, many on death row, in cities like Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and New Orleans where police officers and police departments have decided they know who the bad guys are, and they are going to put them away. Perjury, bribery, intimidation, and coercion are fair tools in their private wars. It must stop!

This is the warped face of American "justice" in 1995 – twisted, biased, one-sided, and glorying in its bent!

This is the face we must fight, and over which we must prevail.

To you, the many, who have joined me in this fight, know that I warmly applaud and thank you – you are the Soldiers of Life!

This battle, for Life and Liberty, is never over. It renews itself with each breath. And it is every growing, spreading, life to life, mind to mind, spirit to spirit!  
As we grow, we win!

*Mumia Abu Jamal*

For more information on Mumia's case and to learn what you can do, contact the Equal Justice USA hotline: 301/699-5007 and write to District Attorney Lynne Abraham, 1421 Arch Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102 for full disclosure of police misconduct, a moratorium on death penalty prosecutions, and release and compensation for the victims. ■



# LABOR'S STAKE IN WELFARE REFORM

by Ellen Bravo and Ken Grossinger

After the GOP's sweep in the November elections, the National Restaurant Association vowed that it would press for welfare reform in the 104th Congress. It may seem odd that the association would care about welfare reform. But America's restaurants, which are always seeking a steady supply of cheap labor, understand something that the U.S. labor movement needs to grasp: The welfare reform legislation now before Congress, though clearly aimed at the non-working poor, would also have an enormous impact on working families.

Republican-backed bills in both the House and the Senate would drive down the wages of the lowest-paid workers, displace current workers with welfare recipients, and make it even more difficult for unions to negotiate decent contracts. The Republican reforms would do this by forcing welfare recipients off public aid and into the nation's labor market – creating a huge pool of low-wage workers. In addition, the reforms – by creating “workfare” programs that allow employees to fill regular jobs with welfare recipients – would convert permanent jobs into workfare slots. Unless hundreds of thousands of new jobs are created, the market will be flooded with workers seeking jobs that don't exist.

Right now businesses in many cities face market pressure to increase the minimum wage. The combination of low pay and no benefits makes it difficult for many adult workers to support a family on \$4.25 an hour. At a time when the administration is calling for a modest hike in the minimum wage, the GOP's welfare reform offers a more appealing solution to the business community. Rather than worry about lifting the lowest wage rates, employers can rely on the welfare reform to keep pay down all along the scale. Any measure that lowers the wage floor makes it more difficult for organized labor to negotiate pay increases. It also allows non-union employers to offer jobs at even lower rates. While driving down the wages of those on the bottom, welfare reform would lower the living standard of middle-income workers as well.

GOP sponsors of the Personal Responsibility Act (PRA) – a key component of the Contract with America that passed the House on March 24 – estimate that 1.5 million welfare recipients would enter the job market in the first two years after their bill became law. And, according to sketchy details released by Republicans, the PRA's workfare programs would allow employers to hire welfare recipients whose wages would be paid by the government – effectively giving companies access to a free labor market.

And we don't have to wait for the PRA to become law to know what effect GOP-style “reform” would have on organized labor. For years, public employee unions have seen formerly unionized positions filled by workfare participants – many of whom work off their welfare benefits

at sub-minimum wage rates. In San Francisco, for instance, Service Employees International (SEIU) Local 790 learned during contract negotiations that a worker in the Department of Public Works who had lost his job as a result of city budget cuts was placed into his old position through the city's workfare program – and was earning significantly less. At San Francisco General Hospital, Local 790 found that vacant laundry positions – which had been unionized – were being filled with workfare participants. The union eventually negotiated new contract language to prevent further erosion of its bargaining unit, but public employees in other cities still face the same threat. Even more jobs are at stake in the private, low-wage service sector.

With Republicans and some conservative Democrats launching their assault on public assistance, it is time for unions to step up their defense of health and welfare programs. Today's unemployment benefits and social programs although meager, don't just help the non-working poor; they also give workers a chance to stand up to employers. When workers know they qualify for public relief, they cannot be as easily coerced into minimum-wage jobs with no benefits. Unions can bargain stronger wage and benefit packages when their members know they have a safety net of health and welfare protections to fall back on during an organizing drive, negotiation or strike.

The current welfare system guarantees a modicum of economic support for poor families with children, but both the PRA and a similar measure approved by the Senate Finance Committee in late May would eliminate that guarantee. Currently, when the number of poor people rises, as in a recession, the federal government must increase welfare funding to cover everyone who is entitled to assistance. But the PRA would replace today's entitlement programs with federal block grants, lump sums of money that states could spend with little federal oversight. Some 300 welfare programs would be affected, including school lunch programs, disability relief and the nation's main welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Under the GOP's block-grant proposal, the federal government would provide states with fixed funding for public assistance – and even if the number of poor increased, federal spending would not.

By turning entitlement programs such as AFDC into block grants, the PRA would cut nearly \$70 billion in social welfare spending over the next five years. Recent studies by SEIU and the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities demonstrate how this “block and cut” strategy would result in a massive loss of federal funding to the states. This loss would likely lead to reduced services, slashed benefits and increased unemployment. To offset this revenue reduction, states intent on maintaining services would be forced to raise taxes.

The 104th Congress' efforts to undermine both social programs and labor standards are unprecedented in recent history. Like most organizations, unions are still developing a national response to the current crisis. How can labor reframe the debate over welfare? For starters, organized labor should take a clear stand on the issues and undertake

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<b>Social Work &amp; Social Living</b> The practice and philosophy of social work are critically examined. Reynolds argues,, based upon her experiences with labor unions that the orientation of social agencies toward psychological dynamics makes it difficult for clients to seek help. Softbound		List Price \$8.95 Member Price \$8.00	
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<b>Uncharted Journey</b> Reynolds' inspirational autobiography dedicated "young social workers who are facing realities and shaping our profession with courage and creativity." Covers the development of her practice philosophy and the course of her career from 1914-1964. Softbound		List Price \$21.95 Member Price \$20.00	
<b>The Years Have Spoken</b> A collection of annual greetings sent by Reynolds to her friends from 1935-1973. The collection includes her annual original verse and narrative describing the condition of the world that year and how she had been affected by these events. Makes an excellent holiday or graduation gift. Softbound		List Price \$12.95 Member Price \$10.00	
<b>Regulating the Lives of Women, Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present, Mimi Abramovitz</b> This dynamic history demonstrates that the "feminization of poverty" and the welfare state's current assault on women are not recent developments but have long been a defining feature of women's conditions. Softbound.		List Price \$17.95 Member Price \$16.00	
<b>The Visible Poor, Homelessness in the United States, Joel Blau</b> A comprehensive look at the political and economic causes of homelessness including an analysis of the nature of the government policies and some proposals for a more effective response. Softbound.		List Price \$10.95 Member Price \$10.00	
<b>The Quest for a Radical Profession, Social Service Careers and Political Ideology, David Wagner</b> A fascinating account of the surge and decline of radical thought and activities by social workers since the 1960's. A highly readable well-researched analysis of personal and political development among activists. Softbound.		List Price \$21.00 Member Price \$19.00	
<b>Serving the People, Social Services and Social Change, Ann Withorn</b> While social service work and political activism have often been viewed as separate and opposing forces this book argues persuasively that the two endeavors can and should be combined for the benefit of both. Hard cover		List Price \$39.95 Member Price \$15.00	
<b>Social Welfare and the Feminization of Poverty, Shirley Lord</b> This historical analysis addresses sexism within the American capitalist patriarchal system and the repercussion on women within the household in the labor market and the social welfare system. A progressive feminist social welfare agenda is proposed that produces long term systems change. Hardcover.		List Price \$36.00 Member Price \$33.00	
<b>Checkerboard Square, Culture and Resistance in a Homeless Community, David Wagner</b> An ethnographic portrait of the poor that reveals their struggles not only to survive but also to create communities on the streets and to develop social movements on their own behalf. "A must read for organizers and advocates everywhere." Softbound.		List Price \$16.00 Member Price \$14.00	

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broad education among its ranks. Union members need to understand the impact that the PRA could have on their lives.

Organized labor must press President Clinton to veto any bill that would replace workers with welfare recipients. As recently retired AFL-CIO Legislative Director Robert McGlotten noted in a letter to Congress: "Real and gainful employment must be the goal of welfare reform. If we take the existing jobs of one set of workers and turn them into subsidized, temporary work assignments for those receiving welfare benefits, we will simply be creating another large group of potential welfare recipients. That is a self-defeating formula." Unions should fight to include provisions in any welfare reform bill – and in their contracts with employers – that prohibit companies from displacing current workers, or from filling vacant positions, with workfare participants.

Labor also needs to expose the big lie of welfare recipients as lazy women unwilling to get jobs. In fact, 70 percent of AFDC recipients either hold jobs or are looking for them. Many are pushed out of the workforce by low pay, lack of flexibility and unaffordable health or child care. Surveys suggest that the public has been influenced by negative stereo types about welfare, yet most Americans still support expanding assistance to the poor. When a recent *New York Times/CBS News Poll* asked people whether the nation spends enough on "welfare," only 23 percent said that we spend too little. However, when the question was rephrased – with "welfare" replaced by the term "assistance to the poor" – 64 percent responded that we spend too little.

Unions should expose politicians who hand out subsidies to big business while punishing the poor. This year, AFDC will cost the federal government \$17 billion – little more than 1 percent of the total federal budget. By comparison, Ralph Nader's Essential Information project found at least \$167 billion in corporate welfare in the 1995 federal budget.

By fighting corporate welfare, holding the line on the social and health programs we value, and pushing for expansion of family-supporting jobs and benefits, labor can safeguard employed and unemployed workers alike. Ultimately, welfare recipients want what we all want: a way to support themselves and their families with dignity. ■

*Reprinted from the July 24, 1995 issue of In These Times magazine. Ellen Bravo is executive director of 9to5, National Association of Working Women. Ken Grossinger is legislative field coordinator of the Service Employees International Union.*

Please mail all contributions for the next *BCR Reports* to:

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Letters to the editor, essays, news items, BCRS Chapter activities, cartoons, etc., are all welcome!

*Please note:* The deadline for materials submitted for inclusion in the next *BCR Reports* is **January 15, 1996.**

## REPORT ON THE NATIONAL WELFARE RIGHTS UNION CONVENTION

by Barbara Kasper

**T**he National Welfare Rights Union held its second annual convention in Houston, Texas from August 18th-20th, 1995. The theme was "The Right to Thrive and Not Barely Survive." Approximately 125-150 participants from New York to Seattle were involved in the convention, most of them recipients and/or activists. Strong representation was evident from the National Union of the Homeless and the National Anti-Hunger Coalition. The National Organization for Women was represented in a spirited speech from Patricia Ireland at the awards dinner. The Executive Director of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, Barbara Arnwine, was another challenging keynote speaker. Workshops ran all day Saturday, with the topics ranging from "building coalitions," "legal representation of the poor," to "fundraising" and "nutrition programs/fighting hunger."

I attended a workshop on "Breaking the Media Black-out" led by Njere Alghanee from Atlanta. This workshop was well attended, and participants shared events in their region which have received little if any media attention. This included such acts as the massive displacement of the poor in Atlanta to make room for the 1996 Olympic facilities as well as welfare rights activists being victims of police brutality during demonstrations in cities such as Boston and Birmingham. We shared strategies that have worked for us in terms of getting the issues made public through our local media. One activist from Alabama volunteered to work on constructing a WEB page on the internet for the NWRU. Everyone in the workshop left with a copy of the *BCR Reports*, and they were encouraged to contact BCRS Steering Committee members in their area for assistance in organizing and publicity.

I also attended "Welfare Rights Advocacy/Benefits Organizing" facilitated by Maureen Taylor from Detroit. After a presentation of the impact of the welfare cutbacks, state block grants, the decimation of affirmative action, legal services to the poor, etc., Taylor used the arguments espoused by conservatives to get the participants to learn and practice persuasive, fact-based counter-arguments. The concept of a Guaranteed Annual Adequate Income was also explained as part of the "Up and Out of Poverty Now" organizing campaign.

Better networking, more broad-base coalition building, voter registration drives, and electing to office the victims of poverty themselves (Vice President Dottie Stevens discussed how she ran for Governor of Massachusetts) were among the overall strategies discussed. ■



## Bertha Capen Reynolds Society

### National Conference CALL TO PARTICIPATE

June 28-30, 1996

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

### at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work

The theme of the 1996 BCRS Conference will be "Voices of Protest, Towards a Human Rights Agenda." We will be focusing on the assault on the entire idea of entitlement as if people having claims on their government and each other is responsible for the decline of the U.S.'s dominance in the world economy. In addition to providing a forum within which rights will be reasserted, we will also be looking at ways in which we can raise our voices to press the demands of marginalized and oppressed people. This will include examining individual and collective strategies for advancing a progressive social welfare and human rights agenda.

One of the most successful elements of the 1995 Conference was creating forums in which we could listen to and learn from each other rather than working from a "teacher/student" approach. For that reason, we're continuing last year's initiative of issuing a Call to Participate. We are using a number of vehicles for asking people to participate in the June meeting by proposing to do one or more of the following (this list is intended to provide possibilities not to limit them, so propose your own structure):

- offer to tell us about your work your ideas or things you have learned about some topic of interest;
- organize a panel which will present current thinking and strategies for activism in a particular area;
- lead a discussion on a topic of relevance, where questions are proposed but no formal presentations are given;
- organize a more "hands on" training session that will help folks develop skills, strategies and tactics;
- hold a gripe and support session to keep folks going;
- organize a song fest, or a hike, or a walking tour or a volleyball game;
- provide names (preferably with addresses and phone numbers) of other people you would like to hear and talk with (it would help if they were reasonably accessible and do not expect honoraria);
- suggest topics you would like to discuss without proposing to lead the discussion (though, here too, it would help if you could give us an idea of someone(s) who you think might help);
- offer to be involved in whatever ways make sense to you.

BCRS members or others interested in participating should submit a written "Proposal to Participate," including a specific proposal to do what you would like to do and a brief summary of your relationship to this topic. Please get this to us as soon as possible but **no later than January 10**. The Conference Program Committee will review all proposals and either accept your idea, suggest an alternative format, or explain why it won't work by Feb. 15 at the latest.

Please mail your proposals to:

Bertha Capen Reynolds Conference Program Committee  
Columbus Circle Station  
P.O. Box 20563, New York, NY 10023  
or fax them to Ann Withorn, 617-738-9629

## ORGANIZING IN CYBERSPACE

INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN'S POLICY RESEARCH SEEKS PARTNERS TO EVALUATE IMPACT OF WELFARE CUTS. If AFDC is block-granted to the states, as currently proposed in both the House and the Senate, it will be essential to monitor and evaluate the impact of this major policy change on the well-being of poor women and their children, along with other groups in the population. Because of funding cuts and the know-nothing political climate, we think that thoughtful research, especially research from a womanist perspective, is unlikely to be conducted without a concerted effort by coalitions of researchers and advocates at the state and national level. IWPR is interested in forming such partnerships with academics, researchers, advocacy groups, and others to develop research projects to track, monitor, analyze, and evaluate programs and their effects. If you have ideas for such a partnership, please fax (202/833-4362) or e-mail Bobbie Spalter-Roth and Jill Braunstein at JILLBRAUN@aol.com.

**TAX THE RICH:** This grassroots campaign aims to mobilize public opinion to make the TAX THE RICH concept a major force in the 1996 elections. The center-piece of the campaign is a day of "Nationwide Saturation Postering." On the night of February 18-19, 1996 (a day before the season's first primary in New Hampshire), TAX THE RICH members across the nation will soak their neighborhoods with millions of TAX THE RICH posters. For more information visit <http://www.webcom.com/~ttr> or e-mail [jela@MAIL.WESLEYAN.EDU](mailto:jela@MAIL.WESLEYAN.EDU) ■

### THE INTERNET: WHAT IT CAN AND CAN'T DO FOR ACTIVISTS

This is a 12-page booklet by organizers with on-line experience providing perspectives beyond the hype. Cost is \$4.50 from Social Justice Connections, Dept. 7, P.O. Box 4090, Arlington VA 22204. Please mention Bertha Capen Reynolds Society when ordering. ■

# DUES INCREASE TO GO INTO EFFECT JANUARY 1

The BCRS has not raised its dues since its founding in 1985 because of our commitment to making the organization as accessible to as many people as possible. We have come to the point where we had to find another way of meeting that commitment while playing the kind of roll our members expect of us in these frightening times.

At the most recent meeting of the National Steering Committee, we agreed to raise our dues for low-income members from \$10 to \$15 and our full dues from \$25 to \$35. As part of that decision, we agreed that **no member will be denied continued active membership status due to an inability to pay the dues.** Members are – as they always have been – free to self-determine whether they consider themselves low-income and whether they wish to pay the “low income” dues rate. Additionally, members who wish to do so may pay at whatever level they choose in submitting their annual dues payment. In essence, we want your active participation in the Society more than money which may be a hardship for you to pay.

The rationale for the dues increase will be familiar to any of you who receive donation appeals or belong to other groups. The cost of literally everything we do and buy has increased – from postage to paper to travel. Efforts to control spending have led to a variety of economies in the organization – the National Steering Committee has eliminated one meeting each year (we now meet twice on a face to face basis and have a third meeting by conference call), we publish expanded issues of our newsletter (savings costs by printing more copy but less often), and we have many of our most basic administrative functions performed by volunteers (we have no paid staff).

At the same time, this political climate demands more of us and you rightfully expect the BCRS to play an important and active roll in fighting

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back against the attacks on the welfare state. We are doing that. This and recent issues of the *BCR Reports* offer much evidence of that. The rest is up to you. We need your support – and that means continued membership – as we carry on the fight you expect of us

and provide you with information you can use in your own activism. Please continue your support of our efforts so that we can provide the needed progressive voice in the human service field. ■

Fred Newdom, Chairperson  
National Steering Committee

# Towards a Strategy for Real Welfare Reform

by Don Cooney

As the National Steering Committee met in New York on the weekend of October 7-8 the Republican dominated Congress was working towards passage of legislation which would reverse 60 years of U.S. Social Policy. The proposed legislation would absolve the Federal Government of responsibility for poor children, wipe out the notion that in the U.S. community membership gives entitlement to some economic protection, and betrays the promise of a Social Contract.

BCRS has been intensely involved in the struggle especially through solidarity work with the National Welfare Rights Union and cooperative efforts with other advocacy organizations. At this stage of the struggle we need a long and short term strategy. In the immediate future we must stand up strongly against the Bills as unworthy of the support of any of our elected officials. We should at the same time, try to soften the weak aspects of the Bills especially by urging our Representatives to:

- Retain entitlements for Child Welfare (especially with regard to foster care, adoption, and assistance for abused and neglected children);
- Support maintenance of effort provisions which require states to continue to spend their own money for assistance;
- Oppose Family Cap provisions such as ending assistance to teen mothers and children born to mothers on AFDC;
- Support the strongest child care provisions possible;
- Retain entitlements for legal aliens.

We must coordinate our efforts with other groups fighting the Bills such as NWRU, JEDI Women, NASW, Children's Defense Fund, Center for Law and Social Policy, etc.

The long term strategy will be more complex. We need not only to organize **against** these punitive Bills; we need to present an alternative just and humane real Welfare Reform

proposal that we can stand for.

The details of such a proposal need to be worked out but some principles are clear. People cannot be expected to take responsibilities for a Society which does not assure them access to what they need to lead a human life.

- People deserve some kind of economic floor, an economic Bill of Rights which would certainly include the right to employment, a living wage, reward for caregiving, National Health Care, and access to education appropriate for participation in today's society;
- There must be National Standards, some kind of Federalism, which guarantees rights across the Nation;
- These guaranteed rights must be universal, assured to all by reason of membership in the Community.

In this enormously wealthy nation resources are certainly available to guarantee everyone a decent standard of living. As first steps towards financing a Human Rights agenda the Nation should:

- Dramatically cut the Military Budget, at least to the level recommended by the Center for Defense Information;
- Require the Right to pay their fair share of taxes;
- End corporate welfare;
- End wasteful bureaucracy and assist people through local, community-based organizations.

The Steering Committee recommends the following steps:

- The National Conference will take place again in Philadelphia in June of 1996. This Conference will be co-sponsored by NWRU and Union Groups. The topic will be "Voices of Protest - Towards a Human Rights Agenda."

In preparation for the Conference local chapters of BCRS should put together community forums with labor, welfare rights groups and human service people. They should address the question of what real welfare reform with a human rights agenda

would look like and how we get there.

- The conclusions of these forums should be sent to Fred Newdom, our National Coordinator, to be organized into working principles for discussion at the National Conference. The hope is that the Conference will be a working session and lead to a consensus positive statement on the shape of real welfare reform and a strategy to organize towards its realization.

BCRS has a great opportunity to serve as catalyst to bring progressive forces together in this election year in a united effort for social justice. ■

## REPORT FROM THE COMMITTEE FOR INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INQUIRY

As an essential part of the peace process, we strongly urge the Israel government to free all 5,000 remaining political prisoners, starting with the women, the sick and the elderly. As 1,000 prisoners may be freed sometime soon, these special categories should come first, including Rula Abu Duhou. Abu Duhou was a student of social work at Bethlehem University. She was active in campus affairs when she was arrested in 1988 and sentenced to 25 years imprisonment after a year of interrogation. Accused of being an accessory to murder, she has maintained her innocence. Without making a judgment on her innocence, on the basis of numerous publications by human rights groups about torture of Palestinians in interrogation, we question the treatment accorded this woman. She made a sworn statement of abuse and sexual harassment published by Amnesty International in March, 1991. Rula is a spokeswoman for the women's group in Hasharon prison, where she is being held, putting the group's problems before her own. The prisoners have suffered years of problematic prison conditions, which led to a hunger strike in all prisons at one point and to another in the summer of 1995, when prisoners sought freedom for all through the peace negotiations.

Continued ▶

Please write to: Israeli Prime Minister, 1 Kaplan Street, Bakarya, Jerusalem 91007, Israel, urging the release of all prisoners, with the women, the sick and the elderly being given priority. This should be done regardless of political affiliations or length of sentences, as sought by the Palestinians.

Your help is also needed for Phyllis Coard, a social worker in a Grenada prison. Coard, now age 50, has been kept in isolation for most of ten years, the only woman prisoner in the women's prison in the little Caribbean island of Grenada. Separated from her three children and now suffering from clinical depression and diagnosed by a psychiatrist as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, she has stated that she is unlikely to be cured in her present environment.

Inhumanely treated by the former sadistic prison governor, and still suffering mistreatment and discrimination by the hostile prison staff, Coard suffers from lack of proper medical care, exercise, and letters from her children; she has had only infrequent visits. She and 18 other prisoners were arrested following the U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983. They were accused of the killing of Prime Minister Maurice Bishop, the leader of the New Jewel Movement, which peacefully overthrew the dictatorship of Gairy in 1979. Coard and her husband had worked for much needed economic and social reforms. Lengthy and irregular trials were completely biased and lacking in due process according to Attorney Ramsey Clark and others. No clear evidence was ever produced to show that the defendants were involved in the murder of Bishop and his aides. On humanitarian grounds, because of declining health, and because of the lack of fair trials based on sound evidence, we urge that Coard be freed to leave the island and be reunited with her children. Your letter to Prime Minister Nicholas Brathwaite, St. Georges, Grenada is most important.

For further information on the above cases, contact Ruth H. Wilson, CIHRI Secretary, at 212-674-3762. ■

## BCRS Joins With Human SERVE to Register Clients of the Welfare State

**A**t its October National Steering Committee meeting, BCRS voted to cooperate with the Human SERVE campaign to conduct voter registration of clients of human service agencies.

We see this as part of our overall effort to counter the marginalization of poorer and minority people who will be the first to lose needed services if the policies currently being considered and adopted continue and are further expanded after the next round of elections. BCRS members are asked to initiate or participate in voter registration efforts in your agencies, unions, schools or wherever else you have access to potential registrants or activists.

**Some background:** 65 million Americans, most low income, are not registered to vote. While the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) is registering people at driver's license and public assistance agencies, many low income people are not being reached.

This is why Section 7b of the NVRA encourages "all non-governmental entities" to register their clients. This includes: family planning clinics, day care centers, child welfare agencies, community health centers, etc.

Many will vote. Studies show that 70% of the people who are registered to vote by volunteer canvassers in welfare and food stamps offices actually go to the polls and vote in presidential elections.

**To start registering voters in your agency,** follow these four easy steps:

1. Appoint one permanent staff person to coordinate voter registration activities. This person should oversee amending the agency forms, and ensuring that the agency has an adequate supply of state mail-in voter registration forms at all times. Forms can be obtained from local elections offices.

2. Agency forms and procedures should be amended to include the question, "IF YOU ARE NOT REGISTERED TO VOTE WHERE YOU NOW LIVE, WOULD YOU LIKE TO REGISTER HERE TODAY?" Until it is possible to redesign intake forms, rubber stamps with this question are available for \$5 from Human SERVE, phone (212) 854-4053, FAX (212) 854-8727.
3. Always offer to help the client complete the voter registration form. Check to be sure the application is properly filled out, and offer to mail it to the appropriate elections office. Maintain a record of how many people register to vote through your agency.
4. Obtain answers to commonly asked questions from your local or state elections office. For example: How will I know if I'm registered? Where do I vote? How do I get an absentee ballot? Do I need an I.D. card to vote? Can I register to vote at age 17, if I will be 18 by election day? How do I register if I am homeless? How do I know if I am a U.S. citizen? If I register, am I permanently registered? Do I have to choose a political party when I register? If I vote in a party's primary election, do I have to vote for that party in the general election?

**Questions?** For BCRS members who are interested in getting more information on this effort, we have identified National Steering Committee contact people (addresses and phone numbers are elsewhere in this issue of *BCR Reports*) for different groups: For labor: Ken Grossinger; For Schools of Social Work: Carol Kaplan; For Students: Susan Collins; For Social Agencies: Fred Newdom. For general information or to obtain voter registration kits: Human SERVE, 622 W. 113th Street, Suite 410, New York, NY 10025. Phone numbers for Human SERVE are listed above. ■

# Response to the Call to Join the BERTHA CAPEN REYNOLDS SOCIETY

Please send me more information about the Society.

I would like to join the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society

I would like to renew my membership.

Enclosed is my check:

\$15 Student, unemployed, low-income member

\$35 Member

\$100 Sustaining Member

\$250 Institutional Member

I would also like a subscription to the *Journal of Progressive Human Services*:

Individual Subscription:  
\$18 for BCRS Members

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (please print or type)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Institutional/Organizational Affiliation (Optional)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone

(Home)

(Work)

Please make your check payable to  
The Bertha Capen Reynolds Society  
and return to:

Bertha Capen Reynolds Society  
Columbus Circle Station  
P.O. Box 20563  
New York, NY 10023

Bertha Capen Reynolds Society, Inc.  
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