

# BCR REPORTS

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## WELFARE REFORM – BCRS STEPS FORWARD

**H**ow do you build an alliance with the welfare rights movement to combat the rush to punitive welfare reform? The answer, especially in the Nike age, is to “do it.” That’s exactly what the Bertha Reynolds Society has done. Challenged at the 1994 annual conference in Seattle to take a stronger role on this issue, the BCRS has mounted a campaign to: provide resources to welfare activists among our membership and in the broader human services field, and, to attempt to link social service workers with welfare rights groups.

Our campaign, which will be described elsewhere in this issue of *BCR Reports* is based on an analysis of what needs to be done and what we are capable of doing. It is clear that welfare rights organizations such as the National Welfare Rights Union have developed a sound critique of current welfare practices and pending proposals. Activists in the human service field tend to be in general agreement with those positions. We, on the other hand, have an extensive network and access to institutions such

as schools of social work and public employee unions which can be mobilized to influence the local debates on welfare which will help shape public policy. Bringing together the analysis and the organizing base is a contribution we can make.

In part, our desire to take on this campaign, and to support it financially, grows out of a reading of the political terrain. Frustrated at the decline in the American standard of living in an era when we are the lone military “superpower”, the electorate is seeking out scapegoats. Welfare clients, along with immigrants, gay and lesbian people, and urban youth among other groups, are being targeted in our policies and at the polls. The political isolation of these marginalized populations contributes to the possibility that they will be subject to harsher and harsher treatment as people experience the contradiction of growing employment and an economic “recovery,” accompanied by poverty and declining real income. The desire to blame and to punish is strong, especially in times like these.

Working on welfare, standing

beside clients, is one way we can work to counter the dangerous ugliness which is coming to dominate American public life. We are, after all, workers and students in the

human services. We have historic ties to the welfare system. It is there, we felt, that we must make our stand. We know something about the reality of the lives that poor people lead; we have studied and attempted to influence the policies which govern the welfare system. It is the place we ought to “just say no” to the politics of blame and resentment.

We have much work to do if we are to have any chance of heading off truly horrendous welfare “reform.” The political climate, currently inhospitable to decent welfare reform, has become even more antagonistic to clients as a result of the ascendance of Newt Gingrich and his Contract on America. With a more conservative Congress in place, our task is to influence – in as many places as possible – the public dialogue on welfare so that the Right will fail at using this issue to advance its agenda. Defeating them on welfare can provide a great boost to activists working on other issues – Bertha Reynolds Society members among them – as they seek to find ways to combat the headlong run to the Right.

The BCRS has committed itself to this campaign. We invite you to join with us. The only way to have an impact is to get involved. As Frederick Douglass pointed out: “If there is no struggle, there is no progress... Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did, and it never will. People may not get all they pay for in this world, but they must pay for all that they get.” In that spirit, I call on you to join the struggle. ■

Fred Newdom

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 September 15, 1995.

# VOICES OF OPPOSITION

**A** message for Congress: there is a loud, large and organized voice that is opposing regressive welfare reforms. In a tough year – characterized by welfare bashing, work-fare, child exclusion and budget cuts – social activists are tightening their organizations to deal with the challenge of the conservative backlash. Strategies on the national level are targeted to stop the Republican “Personal Responsibility Act”; challenge the Republican Governors’ block grant proposal to eliminate entitlement programs; and hold President Clinton to his State of the Union promises to raise the minimum wage and not punish the poor. At the state level, welfare rights groups are responding to new state welfare reform plans and are pushing for adequate benefit levels, basic services and better treatment.

To better coordinate our grass-roots efforts, this article highlights the work of organizations conducting innovative work on welfare reform issues. With welfare proposals on the federal, state and local level, this is the time to GET BUSY. Call the leaders of these groups, add them to your mailing list, invite them to your event, send them your fact sheets, network and organize for this difficult struggle.

## **Our Children’s Hearts are in Your Hands: A National Day of Action**

Public outrage at proposals in Congress to dismantle the social-safety net was the theme of the February 14th National Day of Action, co-sponsored by BCRS with the Salt Lake City group, JEDI Women. Hundreds of local events illustrated that the grassroots opposition to regressive welfare reforms must not be ignored. The majority of Americans stand against homelessness, poverty and hunger and threats to the AFDC program will increase the emergency situation for the most vulnerable people in our society. Over 64 cities and 34 states participated in the Day of Action and held banners reading: “Protest Against the War on the Poor: Our Children’s Hearts are in Your Hands;” “No Orphanages;” and “Jobs for Those Who Can Work, Humane Benefits for Those Who Can’t.” Valentine’s Day postcards with children’s handprints, names and ages were sent to Members of Congress and other elected officials.

## **Up and Out of Poverty NOW !**

A large national effort is the Up and Out of Poverty NOW Campaign to redefine welfare reform. Working at the grassroots level the group is conducting public education and is supporting community-level welfare rights organizers. Members include: The National Welfare Rights Union, The National Anti-Hunger Coalition, The National Union of the Homeless, National Empty the Shelters, National Farm-workers and the National Organization for Women. The main goal is to ensure that welfare recipients, homeless persons, immigrant groups and other indigent groups receive full representation in the House and Senate struggle for welfare reform. In conjunction with this campaign, the National Organization for Women passed a resolution that states: “Candidates seeking NOW’s endorsement will be

those who oppose punitive welfare provisions which seek to reduce or withhold welfare benefits from any individual based on number of children, marital status, sexual orientation, age, or ability to work outside the home.” For more information on Up and Out of Poverty NOW! contact: National Welfare Rights Union, Detroit, Michigan, c/o Marian Kramer, 13220 Woodward Avenue., Highland Park, MI 48203, Phone: (313) 831-1040.

## **Creative Organizing at the Grassroots Level**

The National Black Women’s Health Project is organizing their 42 self-help member groups across the country to address welfare reform issues. A series of discussions with welfare clients on their experience with the system are being held and work to update their members on legislative developments in Congress is underway. For more information contact: Tammy Jo Walker, Public Education and Organizer, National Black Women’s Health Project, (202) 835-0117.

The US Student Association, whose members include colleges and universities across the country, has included welfare reform as a priority agenda item. A National Student Lobby Day occurred on March 17th and members spoke against two-year time limits, the linking of welfare to student financial aid and maintaining the college-option in welfare reform. For more information contact: Stephanie Arello or Meryl Webster, USSA, (202) 347-8772.

## **Young Parents on AFDC**

Teen parents are targeted for special consideration in many welfare reform proposals. One group that has worked on welfare reform and teen parents is the National Women’s Law Center, which met with the Clinton Administration to question the design of the live at home requirements for AFDC teen parents. Another group, the National Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Parenting and Prevention (NOAPPP), is promoting a platform of comprehensive strategies to empower pregnant and parenting adolescents and their families. For a copy of their welfare reform position paper contact: NOAPPP, 4421-A East West Highway, Bethesda, MD 20814. (310) 913-0378.

## **Grassroots Opposition to Regressive Welfare Reform**

“Walk a Mile in Your Sister’s Shoes”, a project sponsored by the Welfare Rights Organizing Coalition in Olympia, Washington, matched AFDC mothers with their local legislator or policy maker for a month. During this time, the policy maker lived on a food stamp budget, went to the welfare office or food bank with the parent and attempted to share in her life. In exchange, the welfare recipients went with the policy maker to their activities to see how government worked. For more information contact WROC, 2212 S. Jackson, Seattle, WA 98144.

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Coalition-building in Boston was a tool for empowering many to protest Governor Weld's state welfare reform legislation. The client-led National Welfare Rights Union joined with service professionals and advocates in the Coalition for Real Welfare Reform and The Coalition for Basic Human Needs along with feminist group Boston NOW, Boston Child Care Coalition and MASS Choice to lobby against the welfare reform bill. The coalition broadened their support when the Cardinal of Boston spoke against the family cap at a conference for Catholic churches and at another event the Vice President of the AFL-CIO spoke in opposition to punitive welfare reform. In protest of the Governor's reforms, one group circulated a postcard from a fictional mother on welfare that pointed out some of the problems welfare mothers face. Another group dramatized the "human toll of punitive welfare reform" in a theater-protest held at the Massachusetts House of Representatives. The skit was performed by welfare mothers and advocates and included a 'child' in a body bag to symbolize the impact of the legislation.

### **A Sit-In for Child Care**

In Salt Lake City, Justice Economic Dignity and Independence for Women (JEDI Women) led a campaign to secure adequate funding for child care services that enabled single mothers to go to work. The first step was to design and distribute a survey to the public to assess if they had support on the issue. They then shared the results with public officials. When, however, they were unable to meet with the Governor, the JEDI women went to his office with their children to request a meeting. When the Governor ignored their request, the JEDI women decided to wait until he would be available. The wait lasted all night and the story of the JEDI Women's Governor Mansion sit-in – with their children, sleeping bags, toys and a vacuum cleaner (so not to ruin the fancy rugs) – was the top news story for two days. JEDI Women may be contacted at 347 South 4th East, Salt Lake City, Utah 84111, (801) 364-7765.

### **Consciousness-Raising**

The University of Washington School of Social Work held a poverty awareness event that included a panel discussion on "Envisioning a City Without Poverty." It began with the Mayor of Seattle speaking on a new vision for the city and was followed with a panel discussing what a poverty-free city would mean. Another noteworthy event was a "poverty quiz" that was on display in the foyer of the school. Myths and facts about welfare were printed on large signs and accompanied with fact-sheets, action suggestions and a request for financial donations.

### **Tools for Public Education**

In St. Louis, many have participated in a "Welfare Simulation" (copyright) educational program created by the Reform Organization of Welfare (ROWEL). This event is an "experiential learning" activity in which participants are sensitized to the realities of life in poverty. Thirty to seventy people can participate in a guided role-play of the lives of Missourians with low-income from various kinds of families. Some are newly unemployed, some are recently

deserted by the "bread winner," and others are recipients of AFDC, either with or without additional earned income. ROWEL will also provide information on how to conduct a state-wide campaign on welfare reform issues, based on their recent lobbying efforts. For more information contact: ROWEL, 5300 Delmar, St. Louis, MO 63112.

### **Policy Analysis for the People**

To prepare for meetings with Congressional Representatives the Welfare Reform Network of New York City held a training session this summer on "How to Lobby for your Welfare Rights." Included was information on the status of proposed bills in Congress, the policies supported by Representatives and what happens during a lobby meeting. It was stressed that examples of personal experience and client observations on what may be the possible impact of new reforms is valuable information to members of Congress. The training also included a role-playing exercise where teams of clients practiced presenting their concerns and fielding questions in a staged lobby visit with Congressional members of differing political perspectives.

To illustrate how federal policy may place new burdens on state and local government, members of the New York City Welfare Reform Network gathered data to evaluate the prospective impact that the Clinton Administration's welfare reform proposals may have on New York City in human and economic costs. Issues addressed include: local poverty rates, caseload data, educational requirements for available jobs, sanction rates, complexity of administering a new program and new costs on state and local governments. The impact statement was circulated to Representatives in Congress. For more information contact: Guida West, Welfare Reform Network, c/o The Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, 281 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10010. (212) 777-4800.

### **Clients Draft Workfare Bill of Rights**

Participants in New York City's Workfare program have drafted a "Bill of Rights" that outlines in clear language their rights under the law and lists proposed rules that the New York City Welfare Reform Network believes must be codified. It will be used to educate other recipients about their rights and will assist case-workers, (who may not have up-to-date information,) determine how to best serve their client. For more information contact: Liz Krueger, Community Food Resources, 90 Washington Street, 27th Floor, New York City, 10006 (212) 344-1422.

### **National Organizations Assist Grassroots Development**

"America's War on Poverty" produced by Blackside Production's series aired on public television, and a diversity of programs were arranged to coincide with the broadcast. The documentary provides a context for considering what role citizens, government, and communities should play in combating poverty today. For copies of the video, call PBS Video 800-424-7963.

Last summer, in the days of a Democratic Congress, welfare rights organization and clients met with Members to

*Continued on page 4*



question the logic of time-limits, workfare, child exclusion policies and to emphasize the need for adequate benefits, child care, education and training programs. The lobby day followed a two-day conference on "Talking Welfare Reform" sponsored by the Center for Social Welfare Policy and Law and others, which drew over 300 participants. Participants agreed to meet regularly with their Congressional Representatives in the local district offices, to invite members to attend "town meetings" on welfare reform and meet with groups of clients. Now we face a new Congress and a tougher battle.

In the next few months, watch for several new campaigns. The Center for Constitutional Rights in New York City launched a "Break the Contract ON America: Stand Up for Your Rights" to galvanize a serious and sustained challenge to Newt Gingrich and the religious rights. *Networks*, an information hotline and legal resources are available, in addition to support for direct action to promote an "affirmative culture of rights." For more information contact: The Center for Constitutional Rights, 666 Broadway, New York, NY 10012, (212) 614-6422.

## RESOURCES FOR ACTIVISTS

### Required Reading:

*Welfare Reform (?) News*. The monthly newsletter published by the Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law monitors welfare reform in Congress. To order the newsletter or any of the Center's publications, send a request to the New York Office: 275 Seventh Ave., 6th Floor, New York, NY 10001-6708.

### Join the Information Highway

- Join *HandsNet*: an electronic bulletin board for social activists. For more information call (408) 257-4500
- Contact the White House and Congress by E-Mail and obtain press releases and other federal government updates. To obtain "Welcome to the White House: An Interactive Citizens Handbook" on the World Wide Web which provides a way to communicate with the White House and access to over 3,000 public documents call 1-800-347-1997. Daniel P. Moynihan, NY, Ranking Minority Member

### Where to get information on Welfare Reform Bills in Congress:

To order copies of bills:

House of Representatives Document Room  
Ford House Office Building  
Second and D Streets, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20515-6622  
(202) 225-3456

Senate Document Room  
SH-BO4 Hart Senate Office Building  
Second Street and Constitution Ave., N.E.  
Washington, DC 20510-7106  
(202) 224-7860

## Get on the Mailing List for Upcoming Congressional Hearings and Arrange Lobby Meetings with Committee Members and Staff Contact:

House Committee on Ways and Means  
Subcommittee on Human Resources  
1102 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-6348  
(202) 225-3625

Bill Archer, TX, Chairman

Senate Finance Committee  
205 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
(202) 224-4515

Bob Packwood, OR, Chairman

## How to Challenge your State's Application for a Federal Waiver

The Federal Register publishes information on state application for federal waivers to conduct welfare reform demonstration programs. There is a 30 day period for interested parties to comment to the Administration before a decision on the request is made. For more information on issues of concern regarding Federal Waivers contact the Center for Law and Social Welfare Policy at (212) 633-6967, 275 Seventh Avenue, 6th Floor, NYC 10001-6708.

## What to do After Your State Passes a New State Welfare Reform Law

- Monitor the implementation of new welfare reform programs.
- Design an independent evaluation of the new program "for the people."
- Design and promote a proposal for a client-established demonstration project and seek government and foundation support for it.
- Determine if your local area is using all available federal funds?
- Conduct an extensive voter registration campaign to change the political climate.

## Working with the Media:

- Watch how the media covers welfare reform. Organize a "rapid response team" who will immediately write responses to inaccurate and stereotypical reporting. Tell your local media that articles about welfare should include quotes from people on welfare and that your group has several people willing to speak to reporters.
- Develop a media kit on welfare reform to distribute to the press. Include a list of stories that you would like to see written. Include a page of quotes on experiences that people have had with the welfare system. Share information on "good" articles with other BCRS members so they can use the published article to pitch a similar story idea to a reporter. Circulate a list of people who are willing to speak about the welfare system. Write articles on welfare reform for local, free newspapers that are eager for free material.

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## Working with Government:

- Write model testimony. NOW Legal Defense and Education fund has "Model Testimony on Child Exclusion Proposals and talking points on child exclusion and tips on working with the media as well as other resources on welfare reform. Write NOW LDEF, 99 Hudson Street, 12th Floor, New York, New York 10010. (212) 925-6635.
- Write your own welfare reform bill for your city, state or federal representative. Follow the format of similar bills already proposed or the existing law and design your own legislation. Give the proposal a catchy name. Meet with legislators to ask if they will introduce your bill. (You may want to leave some room for political compromise and negotiation and think about a broad political strategy.)
- Request that your local government hold a hearing on welfare reform and related issues. Contact your Representative and suggest that they sponsor a hearing. Alternatively, organize a town meeting and invite Representatives to attend.
- Determine the real standard of need for your area and compare it to the welfare grant. Inform the department of social services.
- Speak to the Legislative Assistant in the Washington D.C. office of your Congressional Representative. Provide them with information on welfare reform issues, research and issues faced by their constituents. Arrange meetings in the local district office with the member of Congress. Make sure that clients have the leadership role in meetings.

## Public Education Through the Arts

### Films About Poverty:

*Women to Women on Welfare Reform.* Videotape. An unique forum bringing together fifteen women to discuss current ideas about welfare reform. Featured are: five participants in the welfare system, four college students who receive AFDC and the following academics: Mimi Abramovitz, Professor, Hunter School of Social Work; Marilyn Gittell, Professor, Political Science, CUNY Graduate Center; Barbara Omoldae, Research Center for Workers Education, City College; Francis Fox Piven, Political Science, CUNY Grad Center; and Dorris Corea Capplo, Lehman College / CUNY SEEK. To order contact: CUNY TV, City University Graduate Center, 33 West 42nd Street, New York, New York 10036 (212) 719-9128.

*Women: The New Poor.* A videotape by Bea Milwe, 1990. 28 minutes, color, video. Detailing effects of job discrimination and personal misfortune this informative documentary focuses on four women. The tape illustrates commonalities among poor women of different backgrounds and their attempts to defy the statistics of poverty. Order from: Women Make Movies. 462 Broadway, Suite 500, New York, NY 10013. (212) 925-0606.

*No Time to Stop: Women Immigrants.* A film by Helene Klodowsky. 1993. Color 16mm/video. Three women who have different stories and different aspirations but share a

common bond: they are immigrants to Canada, women of color, struggling to make a dignified life for themselves, despite the odds against them. The obstacles they face include racial and sexual discrimination lack of recognition for their skills and qualifications and inadequate access to social services. Order from: Women Make Movies, NYC.

*Metropolitan Avenue.* Community women organizing for change on their urban block. Producer Christine Noschese. To order contact: New Day Films (201-633-0212).

*Take Over.* Produced by Peter Kinoy. Homeless women in New York City take over vacant houses. Sky Light Pictures (212) 947-5333. ■

## THE PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF AMERICAN POLITICS

**W**hy has politics in the United States taken such a mean turn? The poor have never been well-treated in the U.S., but the usual list of suspects – individualism, the ideology of the market, and the structure of American government – no longer suffice to explain the recent explosion of nastiness. What exactly is going on?

Perhaps the quickest route to understanding what is going on emerges out of the *Worker Representation and Participation Survey* just completed by Richard Freeman and Joel Rogers. Although Freeman and Rogers' research about the attitudes of 2408 workers provides much valuable information, by far the most remarkable response came when workers were asked to choose between two hypothetical employee organizations, one that management talked to about issues, but had no power to make decisions, and the other which had more power but was opposed by management. By a 63% to 21% margin, workers chose the weaker organization.

The psychological implications of this choice go a long way toward explaining the new harshness towards the poor. Amid the increasing globalization of capital, a majority of American workers have compared their power to the power wielded by business and made an intuitive judgment that at this point at least, they cannot win. At the same time, however, they are totally dependent on the firms that employ them for their economic well-being. Since American workers do not really believe that business has their best interests at heart, the psychological price of this judgment is enormous. Dependent upon people who would dispose of them in an instant for a cheaper worker or a faster machine, they seek to guarantee their safety by allying themselves ever more closely with people whom they do not fundamentally trust. The self-contempt that arises out of this alliance of necessity finds its most conspicuous expression in increasingly sadistic behavior toward the poor. Such behavior not only displaces their own feelings, but also proves they are trustworthy to the people on whom their lives depend.

Although we probably cannot do much about this psychological dynamic in the short term, we would do well to bring an awareness of it into both our analysis and our organizing. ■

Joel Blau

# WELFARE REFORM IS A WOMEN'S ISSUE

Mimi Abramovitz

**W**elfare reform is a women's issue because the majority of poor persons, single parents and welfare recipients are women. Officially known as Aid To Families With Dependent Children (AFDC), welfare was included in the 1935 Social Security Act to enable poor single parents to stay home with their children. Today's drive to "end welfare as we know it" targets the five million women and ten million children on AFDC. Instead of addressing the poverty that brings poor families to welfare, the mean spirited welfare reforms use government dollars to control the work and family behavior of poor women. Drawing on stereotypes of women on welfare as culturally adrift welfare queens who prefer welfare to work, live high on the hog, cheat the government, and have kids for money, the welfare reformers claim they are trying to restore the basic values of work, family and responsibility. Critics say they're trying to uphold traditional but increasingly outdated work and family norms by disciplining those viewed as not "playing by the rules." But ALL women must ask: Who made the rules? Who benefits from the rules? and Can single mothers play by a set of rules which define their family structure as out of bounds?

The first target of welfare reform is women's work behavior. The welfare reformers presume that women on welfare do not want to work despite data showing that most women stay on welfare for a short time, have a work history, and would readily leave and stay off the rolls if jobs with decent wages, health benefits and affordable child care existed. Ignoring the research, today's time-limited benefits and mandatory work programs force women into jobs paying below poverty wages. With higher paying manufacturing jobs giving way to low paying part-time

service jobs lacking benefits and union protection, the promise to make work pay for those who try hard and play by the rules rings hollow for welfare mothers.

The second target of welfare reform is the children who are put in harm's way by work mandates that force their mothers to leave the home for low paid jobs flipping burgers and mopping floors. This both devalues women's work at home and leaves children unsupervised in neighborhoods plagued by poor schools, lack of health care and also drugs, crime, and violence. The research shows that the deprivations of poverty not the receipt of a welfare check impairs children's development on all fronts. Although the combined value of AFDC and Food Stamps falls below the poverty line in all 50 states, welfare reformers are silent on raising and ending poverty "as we know it."

The third target of welfare reform is women's childbearing behavior. The child exclusion (or family cap) promises to end "welfare as we know it" by denying aid to children born on AFDC. Instead of providing sex education, family planning, abortion services, and addressing the complexities of teenage pregnancy, the plan tries to limit reproduction by the poor. Some states have considered making Norplant, the long-lasting contraceptive implant a condition of aid. The male-dominated "family values" camp furthers this Social Darwinism by reviving the once discredited term "illegitimacy" and defining it as the nation's number one problem. They say, mother only families – encouraged by welfare – produce drug dealers, drive by shooters and violent criminals. Their solution: end "illegitimacy" by eliminating all welfare, food stamps and subsidized housing. If the pregnancies persist, they advise mothers to turn to relatives, apply for charity, or give-up their children to adoptive

homes, foster care, or orphanages. Can forced sterilization be far behind?

The fourth target of welfare reform is the parenting behavior of poor women and men. In the name of increasing parental responsibility welfare reform actually undercuts good parenting. As noted above, the work programs force women to leave their children to walk home from school alone in dangerous neighborhoods. "Learnfare" and "healthfare" which exist in many states, dock the welfare check of children who are too truant or do not get their immunization shots on time rather than fixing overcrowded schools or increasing health services in poor neighborhoods. Stricter child support enforcement clamps down on so-called "dead-beat dads." But it ignores that most welfare fathers are poor and unemployed, that some are already involved with their children or that an aggressive pursuit of child support could subject women to male violence.

Finally, turning AFDC into a work program is another government effort that pushes the costs of care giving back into the home. Just when rising rates of female employment, single parenthood, and a falling standard of living have intensified parenting burdens in all families, the government is cutting, privatizing, and otherwise eroding critical family supports. From 1945-1975, the federal government promoted economic recovery by investing, however meagerly, in people and programs. Since then, the nation's leaders have been solving their economic crisis by disinvesting and imposing austerity on everyone else.

Welfare reform fails to address the real needs of poor women or to reduce poverty which is the real problem. Instead it serves political ends by blaming the victim instead of the economy and by fueling the unseemly politics of race. Although 40 percent

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## WELFARE REFORM IS A WOMEN'S ISSUE

all AFDC recipients nationwide are white, since Nixon's southern strategy politicians have wooed voters by pandering to racial fears. Reagan had his welfare queen, Bush used Willie Horton, and today's politicians have welfare reform. Unable to see past the next election, they willingly ignite racial tensions and unleash the intolerance that is destroying the social fabric and paving the way for a more authoritarian state. But poor women are not taking the blame, the punishment or the coercion lying down. Instead welfare rights groups are rising up angry across the country. These actions are critical. The historical record shows that the powers-that be rarely act and social change rarely occurs for the better unless pressured from below.

*This article first appeared in Resource, the Newsletter of the Women's Resource Center of New York, Inc., January 1995. ■*

## BCRS Members in Action

Although there is no BCRS chapter in Rochester, New York, there was a very successful press conference as part of the National Day of Action on February 14th. A few BCRS members in the area helped get their clients out to participate in a press conference held at the Genesee Settlement House. The event was coordinated by undergraduate social work students from SUNY Brockport. Speakers included representatives from the Children's Collaborative, Monroe County Legal Services, Wilson Commencement Park and EMPOWER, the local welfare rights organization. A safety net was constructed which was then cut little by little after each speaker presented, finally "breaking," with hundreds of postcards addressed to politicians falling through it. The backdrop for the press conference was a huge cloth banner with hundreds of children's hand prints, collected from several local day care centers. An open mike "speak out" followed, with several more recipients and activists speaking. ■

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## HOW TO ORGANIZE A BCRS CHAPTER:

"How to Organize a BCRS Chapter" organizing packets are available by contacting David 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. ■

# Testimony of Marian Kramer, President National Welfare Rights Union before the Subcommittee on Human Resources Government Operations Committee Rayburn HB B372 Thursday, March 10, 1994

Greetings Chairman Towns, committee members, friends, fellow panelists, staff and partners in the struggle for economic justice. I am Marian Kramer, President of the National Welfare Rights Union, a national membership organization of survivors of the present welfare system (AFDC) and other public assistance programs and their supporters. I am honored to bring their collective voices to you today and I am pleased that for a change, our presence has been encouraged and an opportunity provided for us to be heard – for we are the true welfare experts.

On June 30, 1987, on the 21st birthday of the Welfare Rights movement, the National Welfare Rights Union (NWRU) was formed. We came from across the nation – from Michigan to Texas, from New York to California – to rededicate ourselves to the pursuit of social justice for ALL the members of our society, particularly those who have contributed to the building of this nation yet, been excluded from the benefits of this nation. According to one of our members “the current welfare system destroys families by keeping the husband and father out of the household, penalizes the parents [who are] trying to work themselves out of welfare and punishes people – ESPECIALLY THE CHILDREN – for being poor.” In effect, current welfare policies punish all kinds of families by denying the kind of monetary support they need to feed and clothe their children, particularly families headed by women.

All people should have adequate

income, whether from benefits or from jobs that pay enough to live on, a guaranteed annual income so that no one in this nation need live in poverty. All people should be able to live a life of dignity with full freedom and respect for human rights. All low-income people and public assistance recipients – victims of poverty – should enjoy a fair and open system which guarantees the full protection of the U.S. Constitution. All victims of poverty must participate directly in the formation of decisions affecting our lives. All women who want to work outside the home should have the opportunity to earn a wage that will allow them to meet all the needs of their families. We also respect the right of all women who choose to stay in the home and nurture their children. They should be fully supported in their task for the important contribution they are making to society. If we value and compensate women for caring for other families’ children, the same value should be placed on them caring for their own.

Yet, we as recipients of welfare are vilified, blamed for expressing our need and asking for help for our children, looked down on by case-workers and their supervisors who have jobs because of our poverty – and offered limited benefits in a brutal system that sends our jobs across the borders and overseas, rips our families apart, then punishes us for not having “intact” families. Poverty is America on American crime. Our members say, “Let us do the crime before we do the time.” Surely, as Martin Luther King said, “Poverty is the greatest violence.”

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, about 300,000 more children fell into poverty between 1991 and 1992 – yet it is “not a significant increase” at least not statistically. Imagine your feelings if it were the pain and suffering of your children that was so easily dismissed! If it is ever mentioned in these ivory towers, it is usually framed as a result of the immorality of certain people (read women of color) – despite the fact that most of the people in the U.S. who are poor are white, and that according to an analysis by the Children’s Defense Fund, the poverty increase was in two-parent and single parent male-headed households.

There are 5.5 billion people on this earth and 3.9 billion of us unemployed – we all work every day if we are alive. There are over 34 to 38 million people who are unemployed in the United States. U.S. business slashes 2,000 more jobs each day, 30% higher than the pace set in September 1992. To quote *USA Today* (10/1/93), “Two-thirds of the 55 economists surveyed by *USA Today*/CNBC this week predicted large companies will continue to eliminate jobs through 1994.” President Clinton himself stated in the same article “Jobs will be lost. We all will profit in the long run by getting rid of them. But the next two or three years will be extremely difficult.” We have family members in all occupations – auto workers, steel workers, teachers, others – who have not yet recovered from the massive layoff of the 1980s. The President’s two or three years have already been our decade and the inhumane proposals coming from all corners of Capitol Hill, demanding “two years and off” for welfare recipients is clearly not a solution – but a death sentence for thousands of your constituents.

A recent survey released by the Second Harvest Food Bank Network reported that their member agencies and their members served about four

Continued ▶



million unduplicated homeless persons in the past year. While so-called "Experts" argue about the accuracy of the number, the fact is that there have been no significant programs to product quality, affordable housing – certainly none from the federal level – and the President's budget even proposes to move a portion of the HUD budget to space exploration. We who work directly with people living in the streets, doubled up, in shelters and fight to keep more people from the streets, firmly believe that these numbers are too low. We do know for certain that the numbers are too many to waste so much of our nation's resources arguing over the count rather than providing services, support, compassion, and housing. Now that the cold war is over, our defense budget has increased. On the other hand, the level of poverty has risen, yet social and human service programs to protect its victims have decreased.

True welfare reform requires universal health care. We are told that health care reform is a priority in this nation. A December study by the Congressional Budget office found that a single payer health system such as that proposed in HR 1200, the McDermott-Conyers-Wellstone bill, would save \$114 to \$175 billion annually while immediately extending coverage to every American. The CBO said savings are expected to increase over time by \$4-5 billion a year. Administrative savings alone under HR1200 are expected to be between \$50 and \$100 billion. HR 1200 savings are greater than those generated by any other health care plan evaluated by CBO. (excerpt by Rep. Jim McDermott, D, WA, as reported in *American Health Security News*, 202-226-2621). Yet Congress is debating plans that not only don't offer universal coverage but continue to secure profits to the insurance companies

We are living in a society where increasing numbers of people will

never work because of the technological advances that serve to replace workers. The thrust is not for labor-saving but of labor-replacing devices. Major corporations talk about improving their profitability and show significant growth while announcing massive layoffs of thousands of loyal hard-working employees. This is progress? There are automobiles being produced without human hands or humans being in any way involved in the final product. We know that homes can be produced on the assembly line in matters of minutes – although it does take Habitat for Humanity three days – yet homelessness continues to increase. We have the ability in just one state alone – California – to produce enough food for the entire world. Still millions of kids are hungry in America according to the Food Research and Action Center's study on childhood hunger.

Yet, we see people at the helm, in Washington DC, who are coming out with antiquated notions and rhetoric that AFDC/welfare participation should be limited to two years; that there should be a cap on family size; that pregnant teenagers should be sent home to poverty or forced into marriage; people should be fingerprinted when they admit their poverty and need for help by applying for public assistance; that bounty hunters should be hired to find the fathers of children to make them pay; that the vast majority of children living in poverty should be put in orphanages because the parents are incapable of raising their children, or according to the Administration's budget goals, irresponsible for even having them. These barely veiled allegations of immorality are coming from the same people who would turn around and reward the S&L bailouts with taxpayers dollars, pay to bail out General Motors and give more tax breaks and loopholes to the rich. Yet they refuse to invest in our future – our children – preferring instead to condemn us to

death for our misfortune. It is said that our children are having too many children but we are still fighting to ensure that they gave information and resources to ensure the true right to choice. We do not want to soften these words for we have seen the result of the early wave of these proposals in waiver states such as Michigan, California and a growing number of states – and their end result is death or a living hell that is even worse than welfare.

True welfare reform means first of all, that everyone must be up and out of poverty now, We stand firm on the fact that the present welfare system cannot be reformed – it needs to be abolished and replaced with a guaranteed annual income with an annual cost of living increase. Couple it with universal health care, administered by the federal government. Add guaranteed housing as a constitutional right and free education, from birth to death. We should be able to thrive and not merely survive.

We are fighting for the future of our children and the elimination of poverty in our nation and this is the first step. Welfare reform is first and foremost a children's issue. We know you have heard much of this before... what is different now is that you have the power and the opportunity to do something about it. We know that "bad luck" creates individual poverty, but public policy sustains it. We urge you to lend your support to efforts to move up and out of poverty how, for it is only in ending poverty – not by hiding or killing off the poor – that we can provide for the common defense and ensure true national security by ending welfare as we know it. ■

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For more information contact:  
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13220 Woodward Avenue  
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Phone (313) 868-3660

**E**fforts are underway to launch a movement for "wealth-fare reform." "Wealth-fare" are the subsidies extracted from government by the rich and powerful interests in this country. Such subsidies should be eliminated in order to reduce the deficit, finance productive investment and reduce excessive inequality by meeting human needs.

Wealth and income in the U.S. are more concentrated in the hands of a few than at any time since 1929. Yet political leaders seem more obsessed with attacking welfare recipients and new immigrants while serving up a new offering of tax cuts designed primarily to benefit the wealthy.

Eliminating "wealth-fare" is a good first step in reducing the excessive inequality of the last 15 years. Wealth-Fare costs over \$150 billion each year almost ten times AFDC) while undermining U.S. productivity and security.

These issues are beginning to tap into the public consciousness. What is missing is an organized effort to advance these policy proposals. Without pressure from below, all this talk about welfare for the rich is political rhetoric. Ultimately, we need to build a movement that will fundamentally address the problem of excessive inequality and its distorting impact on our economy, politics and culture.

A coalition of labor, women's, civil rights, social workers, and antipoverty groups have come together to launch a campaign for wealth-fare reform. They are preparing legislation, tentatively called the "Wealth-Fare Reform Act of 1995," which calls for the elimination of tens of billions of dollars in subsidies which exclusively benefit the wealthiest five percent of the population. The Congressional Progressive Caucus has agreed to sponsor the bill. The proposal includes: cuts in the mansion subsidy, the CEO subsidy, the Big Mac Subsidy and other forms of corporate welfare (send for details).

This legislative initiative will serve as a context for education and organizing about the true problems facing our country. It will also shift the lightning bolt of attacks off low income people so that real welfare reform and immigration policies can be debated in their proper context.

Will you join us? Can you afford not to? Drop a note and we'll send you information on the Wealth-Fare Reform Campaign and a complimentary copy of our quarterly newsletter "Too Much." Contact the "Wealth-Fare Reform Campaign" c/o Share the Wealth, 37 Temple Place, 3rd Floor, Boston, MA. 02111 (617) 423-2148. ■

## *Journal of Poverty: Innovations of Social, Political & Economic Inequalities*

### CALL FOR PAPERS

Founding Editors: Keith M. Kilty, Ph.D.,  
Virginia E. Richardson, Ph.D., and  
Elizabeth A. Segal, Ph.D.

The editorial board, in conjunction with the Columbus Chapter of the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society announces the development of a new journal, the *Journal of Poverty Innovations on Social, Political & Economic Inequalities*, which will be published by The Haworth Press, Inc.

The *Journal of Poverty: Innovations on Social, Political & Economic Inequalities* is a refereed journal designed to provide an outlet for discourse on poverty and inequality. Poverty means more than "the condition or quality of being; poor; need; indigence; lack of means or subsistence." It also refers to "deficiency in necessary properties or desirable qualities, or in a specific quality; inferiority; inadequacy." The editorial board welcomes manuscripts; which sensitize social scientists and practitioners to the varied forms and patterns of inequalities, new developments in cultural diversity, and interventions promoting equality and social justice. Articles guided by conceptual analyses involving quantitative and qualitative methods are encouraged. The intent is to produce and disseminate information on poverty and social, political, and economic inequalities and to offer a means by which nontraditional strategies for change might be considered. The journal is concerned with various levels of intervention ranging from direct practice to community organization to social policy analysis. Manuscripts should increase knowledge of oppressive forces, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia, which contribute to the maintenance of poverty and inequality and suggest methods of change leading towards their eradication.

Submissions should reflect the mission of the Journal. Authors should submit four copies of the manuscript. Manuscripts should be double spaced. Please include an abstract of no more than 100 words. References and format should follow APA style. Manuscripts will be peer reviewed by at least two consulting editors and returned with comments.

Manuscripts should be sent to:

The Editors

*Journal of Poverty: Innovations of Social, Political  
& Economic Inequalities*

P. O. Box 3613, Columbus, OH 43210-3613

Telephone: 614-292-7181

Fax: 614-292-6940

# CHAPTER UPDATES:

**ST. LOUIS:** BCRS St. Louis joined the Reform Organization of Welfare (ROWEL) in the "Have a Heart for Kids Lobby Day" on February 14th, lobbying in Jefferson City against punitive state welfare reform. BCRS also joined South Side Welfare Rights Organization in a St. Louis rally, also on February 14th. A local war tax resister spoke at a BCRS meeting in late February and BCRS joined other groups at a gathering on April 15th to strategize for action against the Contract with America. A Mother's Day Rally was held against the contract in May.

**NEW HAVEN:** Beth Lewis coordinated a successful "Our Children's Hearts are in Your Hands" action on February 14th, part of the national day of action generated by the JEDI Women in Salt Lake City. The event was co-sponsored by many local and state human service groups, including the Connecticut Chapter of NASW and the Coordinating Council for Children in Crisis. Several welfare recipients spoke, along with State Senator Toni Harp and Congressperson Pat Dillan and representatives for Senator Dodd and Congressperson De Lauro.

**SEATTLE:** The Seattle Chapter has returned to its monthly meeting/issues discussion format. The 1994 conference brought in many new members. The BCRS involved students at the University of Washington School of Social Work continue their work on the Street Youth Project. Their organizing efforts last year succeeded in the showers at the school being open one day per week to youths living on the streets in the University District. The shower nights are staffed by students, who collect donations of soap, towels and other hygiene products. About 15 homeless youths use this service each week. To maximize their efforts, the students also developed a training for shelter and teen food volunteers and offer a training bi-monthly for 20-30 volunteers.

The Chapter is also working in coalition with other human service activists and organizations to fight against the "Contract with Washington." BCRS collaborated with Fair Budget Action Campaign on the February 14th National Day of Action held at the Federal Building in downtown Seattle. The Chapter also endorsed and participated in a "Leave No One Behind" human service rally and lobby day in the state capitol, Olympia.

**REBECCA BINKOWSKI CHAPTER - KALAMAZOO:** The Chapter continues to meet weekly with attendance upwards of 20, mostly students.

The Chapter is working with a group called PRIDE, a low income, single-parent group on campus. We brought Marian Kramer from the National Welfare Rights Union to campus in February. We participated in an audio conference sponsored by the Michigan League for Human Services and featuring Mark Greenberg (Center for Law & Social Policy) and Pat Babcock (former Michigan DSS Director), also in February. We sponsored a day long Teach-In forum as well.

We organized a forum with the Kalamazoo Task Force on Youth and Violence called "Angry Kids - Helping Them and Helping Those Around Them," in March. We worked with the Social Work Undergraduate Organization to

organize a "Stay Out" for the homeless. We organized a campaign to stop the campus paper from advertising "strip joints" in the area. Finally, we worked with other campus groups to organize a "Fifty Years is Enough" campaign for reform in the International Economic system and an exhibit of paintings mostly by Leonard Pettier for his Defense Committee.

**PHILADELPHIA:** The BCRS at the Penn School of Social Work has been busy organizing a community response to welfare reform. BCRS has recently sponsored four speakers: Steve Culbertson, Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations spoke about "Grassroots Community Organizing." Jody Levin Epstein, Center for Law and Social Policy spoke on "Welfare and Proposed Federal Reform on AFDC." Dean Ira Schwartz from the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work spoke on "Linking Policy and Practice." Amy Hirsch, Community Legal Services, University of Pennsylvania School of Law talked about "Welfare Reform in Pennsylvania."

The Chapter has coordinated the efforts of various student organizations at the University in activities such as postcard and letter writing, and acts as the liaison between these groups and local activists and advocates in planning a Philadelphia campaign to protest proposed cuts. Upcoming events include postcard and telephone campaigns, rallies and lobbying efforts in Washington, D.C.

BCRS also rallied against HUD's Blueprint for Reinvention along with the Philadelphia Housing Coalition, which is made up of many local housing groups, advocates for the homeless, union members, and Community Legal Services attorneys.

**SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER:** Southern California is very proud to announce the creation of another chapter of the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society. This chapter was organized under the leadership of Mary Brent Wehrli, a faculty member of field placement instructor at the UCLA Department of Social Welfare, and Chauncey Alexander, Professor Emeritus at California State University Long Beach. Our chapter held its first meeting in October 1994, which included approximately 25 individuals. Since our first gathering we have held five monthly meetings.

In addition to ethnic and social work diversity representative of Southern California, there exists an exciting spectrum of age groups ranging from those who personally knew and engaged with Bertha Capen Reynolds over 50 years ago, to those who are just beginning their social work careers.

The desire of the membership is to continue to explore the teachings of Bertha Reynolds while actively applying them to current issues facing our society and its members. Some of the projects that the membership has committed to address include the attacks on children via "Welfare Reform" initiatives and the attack on public broadcasting. We believe these issues, the welfare of children and the dissemination of information to be of crucial importance.

If you are interested in joining, visiting or collaborating with our chapter, please contact Mary Brent Wehrli at (310) 825-1480 or FAX at (310) 206-7564. ■

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

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I would like to join the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society

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<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	
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