

BCR REPORTS

A Publication of the
Bertha Capen Reynolds Society

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Fall & Winter, 1996-1997

PROFESSIONALISM VS. RADICALISM AND THE FUTURE OF BCRS

by Ann Withorn

At the BCRS Conference, participants began a workshop on "Professionalism and Radicalism" by writing the following comments (among others) on note cards.

What Professionalism Means To Me

- Helps me to focus, gives me an entree to where I want to be
- Clinical, dominating, prestige and status seeking, exclusive, individual
- Being recognized by an "authority" to do some work; it has the implicit meaning of quality
- Upstanding, polished, controlled, mannered way of *trying* to effect something maybe resembling change
- Means that I have followed through on the convictions held for years
- Status Quo supporting, elitist self-serving (for the profession) and an excuse to undermine client rights and autonomy
- Earn your living from some type of activity which involves expertise and intellectual involvement or pride of craft in that activity
- A concept that has encouraged a false dichotomy for the social work field
- Having a code of ethics that one's professional actions can be evaluated against by fellow professionals and consumers
- The biggest barrier to radical practice for social workers
- Turning idealism into reality

What Radicalism Means To Me

- Lets me identify with – celebrate being at odds with the system
- Tell everyone how you feel; shared leadership with "non-professionals"
- To be grassroots, inclusive, involved in critical analysis and structural social change
- Critical, challenging of the status quo – seeks to bring about fundamental change; loud, uncompromising
- To have a political stance rooted in an analysis of the fundamental conflicts in this society particularly that between capital and labor
- Questioning, out of mainstream, critical, standing with the people, inclusive, coalition with working class and oppressed
- Means being willing to join with others, including those who receive services, as comrades in the fight for an inclusive and total meaning of justice: economic, social, gendered, racial, cultural, etc.
- Radical = equality
- Means being open to making real, equal human relationships with everyone, not just "peers"
- Bold shit disturber, takes risks, laughs often, full of joy

Continued on next page

The lively discussion that followed revealed important differences among us. Some folks find harmony between their professionalism and their radicalism – it brings politics to life. Others work in the social welfare arena because it connects them to radical goals, and experience the exclusivity of professionalism as a profound obstacle. Many feel divided, with a foot in both camps – seeing value and pitfalls to a professional identity

Are such divisions among us crucial to the meaning and future direction of the Bertha Reynolds Society? Or do they just reflect inevitable contradictions with which we must keep struggling?

From the beginning, some of us wanted BCRS to be a radical group, part of the small divided but still struggling left *movement* in this country – a group of activists, workers, and intellectuals concerned with the practice and theory of the welfare state and the lack of justice within it, as well as with combating attacks upon it.

Yet, after ten years, professional social workers or students training to be social workers constitute our membership, with few exceptions. For those of us who envisioned a broader group this is a problem because we begin from an elitist base. No “health care for all” group composed only of doctors would be legitimate – it would be a “doctors for accessible health care” group.

But naming the problem does not tell us what to do.

And, many BCRS members may not even see a problem. They struggle with what it means to do progressive practice, or of how to organize and oppose bad social policies. This priority leaves little time for tension around who is or is not in the organization, or to the elitism of professional identity.

The Steering Committee discussed an earlier draft of this document. Building on that conversation, what follows attempts to sort out possible organizational responses to what some people anyway see as a dilemma

One response is to accept what

BCRS is and to respond to the concerns of its base. Given our membership and activities, we must admit that BCRS as a de facto “left caucus” within the social work world only, and expect little direct connection with broader groups of human services workers or non-social work intellectuals. As such, we can sometimes consider the contradictions of professionalism, but our main job would be to keep challenging bad policies and raising the political/intellectual consciousness of social workers. We can encourage mobilization and political activism among social workers, but not try to expand outside our base.

Another response is to accept our base in social work, but then to challenge the profession with a more radical analysis and practice. This was the focus of much of British Radical Social Work activism in the 1970s. We could challenge NASW’s positions, CSWE’s role in defining professional social work education, fight licensing and try to change the inegalitarian practice of professional social workers that discredits the idea of a social state. We could spend some time on policy issues, but operate mainly through broad based progressive coalitions. With this direction BCRS would focus aggressively on reaching students in social work schools.

A third response is to broaden our base to other front line human service workers (day care workers, residence house workers, home care workers, for example). Our goal would be to actively recruit among service work unions and other community based service organizations where providers are struggling with the demands placed on them by welfare reform and immigration law. Given who we are, this will be extremely difficult, and will require inclusion of non-social workers in leadership and a direct challenge to social work as a guild-based elite that consistently mutes the potential for radicalism. Otherwise, many community based service workers simply won’t trust us enough to consider joining.

A fourth option is to rename the organization and move on to being

some other kind of entity. We could focus more on being a source of ideas for progressives in regard to understanding the role and practice of the welfare state. We could spend less energy on conferences and chapter building and more on networking and the developing of ideas.

Some Steering Committee members suggested that we avoid making a choice among these options, but simply proceed with a heightened awareness of our internal tensions. Maybe, but I fear that this path hampers growth. It is unpleasant for people comfortable with being social workers to be around people like me, who take every chance to challenge, and perhaps (I’ll admit it) even ridicule the profession and professionalism. And we will not attract the people who identify principally as organizers, whatever their training or jobs.

So we should, at the least, informally poll ourselves about this question and also take it up again at the next BCRS conference. Others should write for *BCR Reports*, or perhaps we could circulate a set of responses as a kind of dialogue about the Future Directions of BCRS. Maybe we should re-examine our statement of principles too and see if it says enough, and the right things, about what we do.

But let’s do something. It’s been more than ten years and BCRS needs more clarity about who we are and what we want to be. ■

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

Barbara Kasper, Editor
350 New Campus Drive
SU!NY College at Brockport
Brockport, NY 14420-2952
FAX: 716-395-2366

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 **March 15, 1997.**

**Bertha Capen Reynolds Society
National Conference
CALL FOR PROPOSALS
June 13 - 15, 1997
at Saint Louis University, School of Social Service
St. Louis, Missouri**

The theme of the 1997 BCRS Conference will be "Challenging the Contradictions" (a working title). The conference will include examining individual and collective strategies for advancing a progressive social welfare and human rights agenda. One of the most successful elements of our conferences in the past have been creating forums in which we could listen to and learn from each other rather than working from a "teacher/student" approach. 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.

BCRS members or others interested in participating, should submit a one page proposal which outlines the topic area and format you would like to present. Suggested general topic areas include (but are not limited to):

- welfare rights and reform
- the economy
- housing
- international issues
- culture and diversity
- gay, lesbian, bisexual issues
- women/gender issues
- human rights
- health care/disability rights
- affirmative action
- labor issues
- immigration
- affirmative action
- politics
- peace and justice
- criminal justice

Ideas for format could be: 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.

Please also 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) and/or 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 who you think might help).

Please get your proposals and ideas to us as soon as possible but no later than January 20. The Conference Program Committee will review all proposals and notify applicants by February 20 at the latest.

Please mail your proposals to: Maria Bartlett

Saint Louis University
School of Social Service
3550 Lindell Boulevard
St. Louis, MO 63103
or fax them to 314-977-2731
call 314-977-2717 for further information ■

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

For a book entitled *Radicalism and Repression in Social Work History*, we would be interested in hearing from or interviewing social workers and social work educators who have been engaged in radical/progressive activities during their careers or who have espoused radical ideas in their work. If you would be willing to share your reflections or printed materials, please write to either:

Professor Michael Reisch
School of Social Work
University of Pennsylvania
3701 Locust Walk
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6214
215-898-5550
215-573-2099 (FAX)
e-mail: mreisch@ssw.upenn.edu

Professor Janice Andrews
School of Social Work
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2115 Summit Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55105
612-962-5803
612-962-6410 (FAX)
e-mail: jlandrews@stthomas.edu

BCRS Book Fund Submission Policy

1. Author must be an active BCRS member.
2. Author must have presented at a BCRS regional or national conference.
3. Author will negotiate with their publisher for the best discounted purchase price.
4. Books will be sold to active BCRS members at a discount from the list price.
5. Only paperback or "reasonably priced" hardcover books with general distribution potential will be considered.
6. Submissions will be considered yearly by January 31st.

Forward submission requests to:
Michael Cronin
c/o BCRS Book Fund
241 West 100th Street #2R
New York, New York 10025

WELFARE RIGHTS INITIATIVE: MOBILIZING STUDENT WELFARE RECIPIENTS

by Melinda Lackey

In a seventeenth floor New York City conference room of Hunter College West, fifteen determined women gather every Tuesday afternoon for three hours. At first glance there is nothing extraordinary about the group of full-time students, but this seminar in fact represents a ground-breaking educational initiative.

For all of these students are receiving public assistance. They have come to study the history of social welfare policy, share personal experiences with the current system, and ponder welfare reform. Even more remarkably, they have come to hone their skills in public speaking, "active" listening, coalition-building and fundraising. They develop organizational skills by practicing meeting facilitation and learning how to take minutes as a tool of organizing.

Welcome to the Hunter College Welfare Rights Initiative (WRI), which requires its students to become active participants in off-campus venues for pursuing welfare reform that is both sensitive and sensible. A second-semester internship develops their potential as grassroots community organizers and leaders.

WRI was spawned by three troubling aspects of national and local debates over welfare reform: the absent voice of welfare recipients; the tendency of negative stereotypes of welfare recipients to dominate the debates; and the failure to envision reforms that are humane, realistic and constructive. By offering college credit to students who are current or former recipients, and providing critical resources like subway tokens, the WRI Leadership Seminar gives them the chance to shed the shame of being on welfare, add their articulate voices to the debates, and become informed, practiced advocates.

WRI was originally conceived by

Janet E. Poppendieck, Director of the Hunter College Center for the Study of Family Policy, Mimi Abramovitz, Professor of Social Policy at the Hunter School of Social Work, and myself.

While working on my Masters in Social Research at Hunter College, I undertook qualitative research for Marilyn Gittell at the Howard Samuels State Management and Policy Center, to study the impact of higher education on college students supported by public assistance and college graduates achieving economic self support. The needs, ideas, experiences and aspirations of women interviewed for that study have inspired all WRI planning and development. A long range goal for WRI is to assist in the development of student-driven welfare reform organizations on each City University of New York (CUNY) campus, and form a union of all of them.

WRI has recently developed an Advocacy Training Mobilization Project in concert with the CUNY Law School at Queens College. This, we hope, will result in an innovative lawyering seminar this coming spring. Some 25 to 30 law students will train for advocacy on behalf of CUNY students who receive public assistance. The Initiative is also working with attorneys from the Legal Aid Society, Legal Services, and the Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law to disseminate information about rights of access to education and training and coordinate a city-wide rapid response advocacy team to oppose unjust or ill-considered reforms.

Already WRI student leaders have been called upon to testify at local, state and national hearings and have been invited to speak at press conferences. And they have been asked to lead presentations and

educational forums at numerous local colleges and civic groups, such as New York University Law School, Citizens Advice Bureau, New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), and the local chapter of NASW. Their reputation has spread out of state as well, as signaled by invitations from the Women's Centers at Yale University and Dartmouth College.

A natural outgrowth of the Initiative has been the development of a strong mutual support system among participants. By sharing information and representing one another at fair hearings and re-certification interviews, student participants have improved their individual and organizational capacities to advocate for themselves, navigate bureaucracies and help others. Our students say that WRI "feels like family."

It is not by accident that WRI was launched at CUNY, where low tuition draws many students from the New York area that could not otherwise afford to attend college, and where more than ten percent of the student body are recipients of Home Relief and AFDC. In the past year and a half, 7,000 CUNY students have been forced to abandon their studies to participate in workfare. The current attack on welfare has opened these students' eyes to the ways in which their lives are linked to public policy, mobilizing them not only to defend their ability to get a college degree but also to promote economic justice for others.

At WRI, we believe people who are poor should have the same opportunity as everyone else to acquire and develop a variety of skills, including literacy, Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, vocational and job-oriented programs, a high school diploma or its GED equivalent, two and four year college degrees. WRI is working to insure that full-time study be recognized as work preparation and work experience. If education, training

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POLITICAL FICTIONS

by Murray Gruber

To progressives, the self-deceptions inherent in conservative and liberal ideology are completely transparent. Take, for example, the apotheosis of the market by conservatives and the liberal celebration of incrementalism. Less obvious to us are the fictions held dear by progressives, a serious deficiency when you consider the need for clear-headed analysis. A case in point is Fred Newdom's, "Progressives and Professional: A Contradiction in Terms?" (*BCR Reports*, Spring 1996).

Social workers, Newdom argues, have struck a bad deal. "Society" he says, "confers privilege for a price and the price is not rocking the boat." The privileges social workers get, says Newdom, are "social status, monopoly over certain functions, the ability to police themselves and have a measure of self-determination over the nature and conditions of their work." In return, "society demands conformity with mainstream ideology".

WELFARE RIGHTS INITIATIVE: MOBILIZING STUDENT WELFARE RECIPIENTS

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and study hours are made to count toward the federally-mandated work participation rate, education can be utilized as a viable route out of poverty.

The welfare system must permit and encourage public assistance recipients to advance. In the absence of real jobs for all, we know of no better way than education to reduce the welfare rolls and reduce poverty at the same time. Utilizing fundamental principles of social work: dignity, democracy and self determination, WRI remains hopeful that its creative approach to grassroots community organizing will make a difference.

Lackey is the Director of the Welfare Rights Initiative, Center for the Study of Family Policy, Hunter College. ■

But instead of social analysis, Newdom offers a secularized parallel to the Old Testament story of the Covenant. In this version, some sort of vaguely cosmic force – "society" – watches over us, judges, and metes out punishment to those who transgress. Regrettably, important questions are closed off by this sort of ideological certainty in which society begins to sound something like an anthropomorphic god. It also calls to mind Marx's criticism of Hegel that Hegel likes to "build castles in the air while I like to observe what's going on in the street and in the shop."

Let's get to some of the questions that need to be discussed. Does "society" really confer privilege on social workers in return for which, *it* "demands that we are in conformity with mainstream ideology"? Is "society" really watching over us? And if so, how is ideological conformity actually enforced? What are the mechanisms by which "society" tells us what to say, what positions to take, and what punishments will be inflicted for deviance?

We could do with fewer political mantras disconnected from the concrete world, taken as revealed truth, requiring no facts, then disseminated among the faithful, and eventually institutionalized and re-circulated. The progressive cause would be better advanced with good, concrete social observation. For example, are NASW policy positions really in conformity with mainstream ideology? You don't have to be in thrall to NASW to see that in reality, many policy positions on health reform, children's issues, violence, racism, and more, are reasonably progressive. Criticize NASW if you will, but it's a stretch to portray it as a conservative monolith.

Instead of blaming NASW and CSWE for inducing conformity with mainstream ideology, it might be more accurate to say that social workers themselves, as a consequence of their own political socialization, are probably clustered around the center-

liberal side of the spectrum. That being the case, we don't need "thought police." We have our own well-internalized systems of political values, thank you. Indeed, it might be worth considering that while NASW is a reasonably good mirror of its membership, on many policy positions, it may stretch the political parameters leftward.

In the old-fashioned who-dunnit, we discover that it was the butler (naturally) who did it. Here, of course, it's capitalism, Newdom's ultimate villain which explains "the very nature of professions." If it's capitalism, then we may as well indict each and every profession in each and every capitalist western democracy, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden included. Where does one go from there?

The point is that for many analytic purposes, capitalism as a catch-all category is not terribly useful. It doesn't go very far in explaining some rather key differences between the health care systems say, of England, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Canada and the U.S., nor will it give you a clue as to the totally different circumstances of labor unions in the U.S. compared to other capitalist nations in the West, or why German workers have a shorter work week and better benefits than their American counterparts. In addition to capitalism, what's important is political structure and culture, social values, and social solidarity.

The progressive journey is a long one. Ideological clichés are the easy road, but they go nowhere. The harder travel is tough-minded, critical analysis. Keep in mind, ideology by its very definition, contains falsifications. We need to recognize our own – especially the one that pits progressivism against professionalism. ■

CHAPTER UPDATES:

The Penn School of Social Work Chapter of the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society: At present we have approximately thirty members, including first and second year MSW and PhD students, as well as a few folks who have graduated and continue to be involved. We have held two general meetings since the beginning of the semester. Topics on our agendas have included: reporting on the BCR Conference held here at Penn in June 1996, Transit Voter Campaign, the Open Door Coalition, AIDS Walk, how to follow up on the discussion generated at the National BCR Steering Committee meeting, membership recruitment, working in conjunction with the Student Council and planning future events.

BCRS, as a member of the Transit Voter Campaign, held a voter registration drive in October which successfully registered 30 voters and assisted 50 additional voters in obtaining information on the election (absentee ballots, giving out forms, providing education, etc.) The BCRS also participated as a team in Philadelphia's AIDS Walk on October 20, 1996. The total raised has not been determined yet.

Taking up the discussion initiated at the national conference, two BCRS members, Michael Reisch and Fiona Patterson, were invited to address BCRS, the School of Social Work, and the larger social welfare community on November 19th on the topic of: "Professionalism, Radicalism and the Future of Social Services."

Our next general meeting will focus on membership recruitment, joining in action with student groups and the Kensington Welfare Rights Union, and planning the fourth annual Lecture on Social Justice, which will be held in April.

Smith College BCRS Chapter

Report: This summer, activities of the Smith College School for Social Work Chapter of the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society (or the

SCSSWBCRS, for short) included a film and discussion series; letter-writing campaigns; welfare reform protests, and passing along the White House e-mail address and tips for advocating via the internet.

The Chapter, working with other campus groups, sponsored letter writing campaigns to advocate for government investigation into the burning of the Black churches across the nation, and to urge members of Congress and President Clinton to oppose the Defense of Marriage Act. An estimated 200 letters were drafted and sent (plus numerous e-mails to President@Whitehouse.gov). The (free) weekly film and discussion series, which screened films including "Black Is, Black Ain't" and "Roger and Me," was a popular Saturday night event.

Towards the end of the summer, Smith BCRS co-organized a march and rally protesting the draconian welfare bill with ARISE, a local welfare rights group, and the American Friends Service Committee. The event was well covered in the local press.

Finally, several members made it down to Philadelphia for the national conference in July.

Houston: The month of October marked the height of the "Six-Fifty for the City" Living Wage Campaign in Houston, Texas, and is the primary focus of our current efforts. Spear-headed by the SEIU, ACORN and workers, the campaign seeks to raise the minimum wage in the city to \$6.50 an hour. From October 8th to November 8th, 22,000 signatures of registered voters (a City requirement) needed to be gathered to put the wage increase to a vote on the January 1997 ballot.

Specifically, the Houston Chapter endorsed the Living Wage Campaign and professed our support at the October 1st press conference in front of a local K-Mart – banner in tow. Members also committed several days

to collect signatures and organized canvassing of the University of Houston campus and – with permission from the local Housing Authority – all public housing complexes in the city. Finally, to support the Living Wage PAC, we organized a huge garage sale in late October to raise money (\$850) and, of course, to collect more signatures. The obstacles placed in the campaign's path were enormous, including the one-month time limit to collect the signatures and a demand that all names had to include the person's voter registration number. The necessary signatures were gathered, and we are awaiting official word from the city regarding the special election ballot.

Seattle: The Seattle BCRS Chapter has been meeting almost monthly over the past year to discuss current topics of interest to progressives in our area. We have had guest speakers come to our meetings and share their knowledge about issues such as anti-affirmative action initiatives, immigration "reform," tax resistance, and voter registration in human service agencies. We also, in the tradition of several other BCRS chapters, had our first "movie night." We viewed an episode of the PBS series on the War on Poverty that related the rise of the National Welfare Rights Union and the campaign for a guaranteed family income. For many of us who were too young to remember those times, it was particularly powerful to hear about that movement from its participants and compare that to what is happening today as the welfare system is destroyed. It reinforced our support of the national BCRS commitment to standing behind welfare as a priority issue. Several of our members are currently exploring how our chapter can do more local solidarity work with groups such as the Welfare Rights Organizing Coalition and Fair Budget Action Campaign.

Our second "movie night" was held

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CHAPTER UPDATES

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during our annual summer barbeque. One of our members had participated in the production of the video we watched, entitled "Raise the Roof! Partners in Housing for Washington." The video is a community education tool being used by low-income housing advocates to dispel stereotypes about low-income housing and tenants and to mitigate the effect of NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) attitudes on low-income housing funding and construction. It was clear in the discussion that followed that, especially in Seattle, one of the nation's top "mean streets" for the homeless, there is much work to be done around housing and homelessness. We are lucky to have several activist groups comprised of homeless and formerly homeless individuals to lead the way. Our next activity will be supporting and organizing volunteers for the second annual "Homeless Women's Forum" sponsored by the Women's Housing, Equality and Enhancement League (WHEEL). This forum is an opportunity for homeless and formerly homeless women to publicly give voice to the issues they face, in a setting they control. The audience will be service providers, elected officials, and other community leaders.

While we are excited about our potential for activism and solidarity work with welfare rights and homeless advocacy groups, we realize we need to encourage the growth of our chapter and give better visibility to BCRS locally. We recently held a roundtable discussion at the UW School of Social Work on the history of radical social work and the BCRS in order to recruit new members. We are hopeful that we can keep our chapter strong in order to move ahead on the types of activities our members are enthusiastic about. If anyone has any great ideas on outreach and recruitment of BCRS members outside of a school of social work, please let us know. Thanks. ■

WELFARE REFORM WHAT ARE THE FACTS? WHAT WILL ITS IMPACT BE?

The Women's Committee of 100 has just compiled its updated
WELFARE REFORM TEACH-IN PACKET

prepared by:

Ruth Brandwein, SUNY Stony Brook School of Social Welfare

Kim Christiansen, SUNY Purchase, Department of Economics

Eva Kittay, SUNY Stony Brook Department of Philosophy

This important and up-to-date 200 page manual gives welfare myths and facts and provides a summary and brief analyses of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. It also compiles brief articles by welfare mothers and has a section analyzing welfare related issues including an historical perspective, racism, economic issues, education, teen pregnancy, family violence and immigration. The last section, "Where Do We Go From Here" provides a number of thoughtful approaches by several organizations including NASW and the National Jobs for All Coalition. This interdisciplinary compilation includes material by social workers and the NASW's Office of Government Relations, as well as sociologists, economists, lawyers and key policy think tanks and advocacy groups.

The packet contains brief articles and fact sheets that can be reproduced as handouts for classes and public presentations. The packet is loose-leaf ready on three hole paper to facilitate copying and inserting additional material.

The packet can be purchased for \$15 (includes shipping).

Checks should be made out to SWNR & E Fund/WC100 and sent to:

Dr. Ruth Brandwein
SUNY Stony Brook
School of Social Welfare
Health Sciences Center L2-090
Stony Brook, New York, 11794

For information call: 516-444-3176

fax: 516-444-7565

e-mail: rbrandwein@ssw.hsc.sunysb.edu

SURVIVAL NEWS

Survival News is published by Survivors, Inc., a group of low/no income people and their allies who are working together for change in the social welfare system. Our purpose is to provide information about benefits and rights, to provide a forum for the voices of low/no income people and their allies to be heard, and to educate the people and develop theory about social welfare issues. We are helping to build a national network of people who work for change in the social welfare system.

Survival News received the Eugene Debs award from the Massachusetts chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America for an outstanding grassroots community group. Katha Pollitt, writer for the Nation and The New Yorker, says, "I love the paper."

We are eager to receive writing and art work, and pay \$25 to low-income people for each article, poem, or graphic that we use.

Subscriptions are \$10 for individuals; \$25 for organizations; free to low-income people. Write to: *Survival News*, 102 Anawan Avenue, W. Roxbury, MA 02132. Telephone and fax: (617)327-4219, E-mail: bmandell@bridew.edu ■

OUR COLLEAGUES NEED YOUR HELP

Update on Mumia Abu-Jamal:

On July 7, HBO premiered *Mumia Abu-Jamal: A Case For Reasonable Doubt?*, a documentary produced by Ottmoor Productions in association with Channel 4 in Britain. The Fraternal Order of Police is pushing a boycott against HBO in retaliation. You recall that National Public Radio (but NOT WBAI) cancelled a Mumia series under pressure from the FOP, so taking a moment to congratulate HBO would be helpful. Under the heading of good news, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ordered Judge Sabo to hear the recant of her original testimony by Veronica Jones who claims the police threatened to take her kids if she failed to testify against Mumia. But the bad news is still very serious. Judge Sabo is still on the case and the new "Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act" radically limits the rights of all prisoners to appeal their convictions and sentences in federal courts.

The BCRS Book Fund has copies available of the anthology edited by Sam Anderson and Tony Medina, *In Defense of Mumia*, with all royalties going to the Mumia Abu-Jamal Legal Defense Fund. This is an incredible collector's item in itself. Send \$17 (\$14 for the book, plus postage), and we will include the latest information on Mumia's case.

Olga Gonzalez:

Olga Gonzalez, secretary to David Dinkins when he was the Mayor of New York and now an administrative assistant with the Children's Defense Fund of New York, was arrested in June as she returned to New York after burying her mother in her native Columbia. The INS held Ms. Gonzalez for over two months, intending to deport her, using their expanded authority under the new immigration legislation for a drug conviction many years ago. Character letters from Mr. Dinkins and the executive director of the CDF, along with some technicalities led to her

Obituary

Eileen McGowan Kelly died on October 31, 1996 of a brain tumor. We knew she was dying, but until shortly before her death, Eileen continued to lead, guide, plan and train all of us who worked with her to carry on.

Eileen enriched many lives, deeply, and in many ways. As professional colleagues, we express profound grief at her death. Our sadness and a sense of personal loss, which might be expressed in different words, we know to be true for so many others.

Eileen was the Director of national NASW's Office of Peace and International Affairs. With only two or sometimes three staff members, all of which – including herself – had to be paid with grant money she raised, she created an international network among social workers and greatly enhanced the networking capability of the existing peace network.

With the call on local NASW chapters in 1989 to form International Committees as part of the Family and Child Well-being Development Project, she provided a forum that brought together many of us struggling to articulate concepts, ideas, worries and concerns in a global context. Her available ear and responsive and helpful suggestions got us established – gave us a toe-hold – and over the years, it worked. Her sense of humor, progressive perspective, and steady public support got us through discouraging times, opposition and the inevitable mistakes. She traveled to Russia and to Romania, helping social service workers in these countries organize associations and programs, and encouraged U.S. International Committees to twin with other, especially developing countries, so we could learn from and help each other.

She took many risks to keep the Office of Peace and International Affairs alive within NASW. Through her many struggles to maintain a progressive international focus, she was our role model.

Could anyone but Eileen have pulled off the concept of the violence and Development Project – coordinating NASW and CSWE, a nationwide teleconference hosted by Charles Kuralt, six Centers for Violence and Development, five of which were led by BCRS activists, and all funded by the Agency for International Development? She overcame the obvious mistrust and suspicion, gaining respect within NASW for internationalism and activism, contributing to what *The Amicus Journal* refers to as "the substantial metamorphosis of AID," and pulling quite a number of progressive social workers into a mainstream project. No mean feat.

Eileen McGowan Kelly was a progressive social worker of whom we can be proud, for whom we give our respect, and to whom we give our thanks. Less than a month before she died, as she was about to enter a hospice, Eileen, a member of BCRS since 1989, renewed her membership.

Submitted by: Chauncey Alexander, Pat Leahan, Marilyn Moch, Arlene Prigoff, and Dorothy VasSoest.

release, but the U.S. Government is appealing. The National Committee Against Repressive Legislation (NCARL), founded in 1960 as the National Committee to Abolish HUAC is fighting both this and the death penalty legislation making Mumia Abu-Jamal's defense more

difficult, but in the meantime Ms. Gonzalez and others like her need help. Contributions can be sent c/o Ruth Wilson, Coordinator, Committee for International Human Rights Inquiry, 415 Grand St., Apt E 1905, New York, NY 10002. NYC BCRS is a sponsor of CIHRI. ■

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WORTH READING

Social Work and Community in a Private World: Getting Out in Public, by Robert Fisher and Howard Karger (Longman, 1997). "This book offers an analysis of contemporary life, a model for contextualizing social work practice, and an argument for how the new context relates to social work theory, practice, policy, and research. Fisher and Karger propose that the concept of "getting out in public" expands the trajectory of social change beyond individual and direct service practice and beyond the community (whether physical or cultural) in ways more congruent with the challenges of contemporary life in the twenty-first century" (from the preface).

For Crying Out Loud: Women's Poverty in the United States, edited by Diane Dujon and Ann Withorn (South End Press, 1996). "A powerful challenge to attacks on the welfare state, *For Crying Out Loud* makes the connections, and shows the links between women on welfare and all women, between families seeking assistance and all families, between mothers who work at home and all workers. Dujon and Withorn bring together academics and activists to combine powerful personal accounts with systemic analysis and strategic thinking on a wide range of issues including: homelessness, battering, immigration, welfare activism, and coalition building." (from the promotional flyer). ■

HOW TO ORGANIZE A BCRS CHAPTER:

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

**A Review of *Under Attack, Fighting Back: Women and Welfare in the United States*
(by Mimi Abramovitz, Monthly Review Press, 1996)
reviewed by Hester Eisentstein**

On August 22, 1996, President Bill Clinton signed into law a bill that, in the words of the *New York Times*, "ended six decades of guaranteed help to the nation's poorest children..." eliminating "a pillar of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal social welfare program." (Friday, August 23, 1996, 1). The details of this new legislation, with its draconian requirements – a five-year lifetime limit on benefits for the so-called "chronic" welfare family; a requirement for mothers of children over 5 to participate in "workfare" if they receive benefits; the denial of food stamps and Supplementary Security Income to needy, blind or disabled legal immigrants unless they have lived here for 10 years – are beginning to sink in. It is estimated that the new law, which replaces a federal entitlement to welfare with funding at the whim of individual states, will push an estimated 2.6 million people, including 1.1 million children, into poverty. (*National NOW Times*, October 1996, 3).

Some may find it bewildering that the President and the Congress should agree to legislation that embodies such a cruel and heartless set of measures. What explains this venomous approach toward the poorest and most helpless groups in our society? In her new book, Mimi Abramovitz, Professor at the Hunter College School of Social Work and author of the pioneering history *Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present* (1988; new edition 1996, South End Press), provides an answer. She has written a lucid, compact, and impassioned account of "welfare" (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) that places the current welfare repeal into a broad historical, political and ideological context.

The book has four chapters. The first locates welfare, in the narrow sense, among the many other entitlements – "veterans' benefits, farm price supports, the Earned Income Tax Credit, federal civilian and military pensions, and the interest paid on the federal debt, as well as Food Stamps, Medicaid, and Medicare" (18) – that make up the full range of U.S. welfare programs. She traces the history of the AFDC program as part of the original measures that established the U.S. welfare state in the 1930s. Abramovitz details the attacks on the welfare state that commenced in the 1970s as the profitability of U.S. corporations began to shrink, after the "long boom" since World War II, in the face of international competition and the resumption of stagnation. Abramovitz evokes the ideological themes that have become familiar to the public from the debates stimulated by President Clinton's promise in 1992 "to honor and reward people who work hard and play by the rules. That means ending welfare as we know it." (cited in Abramovitz, 13)

Chapter 2 gives us a concise history of relief to the poor, from colonial times and the Industrial Revolution and the post-Civil War period through to the Progressive Era, when Mothers' Pensions were first introduced under pressure by well-meaning middle class women reformers, the Social

Security Act of 1935 and the expansion of the welfare state in the 1960s. For each period, Abramovitz shows a correlation between changes in the composition and the structure of the labor force and a consistent pattern of attempts to control both the labor market and the behavior of women.

Chapter 3 deftly recounts recent debates over the character of the welfare state, and summarizes the feminist critiques of previous accounts which focused on class conflict to the exclusion of race and gender. "Resisted by male-dominated academia, feminist scholars, like the welfare mothers, had to fight back." (89) The chapter provides useful and clear discussions of some fundamental concepts such as patriarchy, racism, and social reproduction.

Chapter 4 records the history of women's resistance, chronicling the activism of women uncovered by the work of feminist scholars over the past three decades, from the evangelical reformers of the 1830s to the Black and white women's club movements of the Progressive Era, and the activism of housewives during the Great Depression. Abramovitz records the history of the welfare rights movement of the 1960s and the 1970s, and brings the story up to the present with an account of the attempts by women academics and professionals in 1994 and 1995 to stop the welfare "reform" bill from being turned into legislation.

Overall, Abramovitz makes it clear that the assault on welfare mothers is part of a broader ideological strategy by legislators, policy makers and corporate leaders. They seek to delegitimize the welfare state by associating it with high taxes and big government, and by demonizing women, the poor and people of color. Beneath the rhetoric is a clear and rational purpose. As Abramovitz writes,

Calls for welfare reform crop up at times when women are using the welfare system as an alternative to dirty, dangerous and low-paying jobs. Thus it is at those moments when wages fall below the welfare grant or when employers want to increase the supply of low-paid workers that policymakers try to reform welfare to make sure that only the most desperate choose it over employment. (29)

The book ends with a discussion of various recent proposals by Heidi Hartmann and Barbara Bergmann, Nancy Fraser, Martha Fineman and Ann Orloff to imagine social programs that go beyond welfare, and by the National Welfare Rights Union to create a guaranteed annual income.

This book is essential reading for activists, scholars and students, and in fact would make a perfect textbook for Women's Studies courses, courses in public policy, history and political science. It is written in an accessible style, with clear definitions of terms, while at the same time presenting a sophisticated analysis. In her text Abramovitz summons feminist scholars to join with the activists who have been

Continued on next page ♦

trying to stem the tide of right-wing reaction in the United States since the Reagan years. She calls on women to overcome the historic divisions of race and class that have made an effective coalition impossible in the past. Now more than ever this is an urgent and essential task. Abramovitz is to be congratulated for her work in assembling the necessary information in such a readable format. The rest is up to her readers.

Eisenstein is Director of the Women's Studies Program and Professor of Sociology, Queens College and the CUNY Graduate Center. This review is excerpted from a longer version in *A Report on the activities of The Center for the Study of Women and Society* (of the Graduate Center, City University of New York) Vol. 15, No. 3, Fall 1966.

RAISING VOICES, DEMANDING RIGHTS: THE BCRS NATIONAL CONFERENCE 1996

This year's conference, held at the University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work on June 28-30th, posed the challenge of developing a human rights agenda reflecting the multiple injustices that flow from the intersections of racism, sexism, classism and homophobia, both in this country and abroad. This effort, particularly relevant in this election year, was highlighted against a backdrop of global politics which clearly demonstrates a calculated disregard of the social and economic devastation wrought by these forms of oppression.

Friday's program brought people together in day-long institutes, each of which addressed a distinct dimension of how social and economic injustice affect those with whom and for whom we work. Topics included developing strategies to preserve access to public health care; gaining an understanding of economic restructuring and the effects that changes in capital's global and domestic behavior have upon local social and economic development; and integrating progressive politics and clinical social work practice.

The evening plenary program explored "The Economics of Human Rights: How Economic Issues and Assumptions Shape and Constrain the Potential for Human Rights." Ann Withorn assisted in moderating a round-table presentation that traced connections between political and economic interests and what recent shifts in these fairly long-standing patterns of relationship have meant for the working class, the working poor, and the impoverished. Panelists included Marion Kramer, Dennis Brunn (City Councilwoman Fernandez's Office), Mimi Abramovitz, Joel Blau, Cheri Honkala (of Philadelphia's Kensington Welfare Rights Union). All were invited to join in discussion afterwards, and many of us offered suggestions concerning how to go about building alliances in order to effect changes of our own, primarily at the local and state levels.

Two sets of workshops on Saturday morning allowed us to concentrate more specifically on many of the issues raised in Friday's discussions. These smaller meetings increased opportunities for sharing experiences about how we're

challenged, what we're doing to protect human rights, and for generating ideas about what more is possible. Workshops on voter registration, law office social work, the significance of culture, on family and social policy, and welfare rights and reform reflect the breadth of our concern and involvement. A workshop probing the impact social work "professionalism" has upon our understanding of ourselves as BCRS members focused on identifying values that define us as "professional" and/or "radical" workers, and sparked a discussion that will continue into next year's conference.

The program planning committee contacted a locally organized group of welfare recipients who had joined us at last year's conference to coordinate an action on Saturday afternoon. A spirited (and loud) contingent of conference participants joined ranks with Philadelphia's Kensington Welfare Rights Union in a protest march in Market Street, the City's main thoroughfare. Carrying signs and chanting, about 150 marchers blocked traffic as we walked thirty city blocks from the Penn School of Social Work, through City Hall Plaza and the Center City shopping district, to the Federal Office Building located in Historic Old City. We were met with honks and cheers of support, as well as by impatient and threatening motorists on car phones.

At the Federal Building, KWRU herded us through an obstacle course mirroring the welfare application process: finger-printing, jumping through hoops, begging a case-worker on bended knee, becoming snarled in red tape, and waiting in limbo still didn't guarantee a benefit! As we waited for the media, local police arrived and re-directed traffic; protesters formed a circle in the street and offered a prayer in Spanish and English. We formed a "line of sanity," standing in solidarity and resistance in the face of then-pending welfare legislation, and were joined by tourists from California as we chanted and sang. After a slight delay, the media arrived; the protest was broadcast on the evening news. While not everyone participated in the action or was supportive of its inclusion in the program, it was experienced as an unqualified success in terms of carrying an important message that was heard, and in reestablishing our solidarity with those in need in Philadelphia. This exhilarating joint event publicized the Kensington Welfare Rights Union and its struggle to obtain housing for homeless families in Philadelphia. It demonstrated that the welfare cuts affect real people and put these people in front of the public. It also provided an opportunity for conference participants to work together across the provider/recipient divide, a divide that BCR members continuously struggle to close.

The Sunday morning plenary consisted of a mixture of discussion and presentation, which had the unfortunate effect of preventing consolidation of the issues raised over the weekend. However, a fruitful discussion helped some to find renewed commitment in our work, and led to planning the next annual conference, which will be held in St. Louis, around a theme that will allow us to continue to address the multiplicity of injustices perpetuated in the name of justice. ■

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