

# BCR REPORTS

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## PRIORITIES – INTEGRATING THE STRUGGLES

*This article is a collaboration between Mary Bricker-Jenkins, Ken Grossinger, Fred Newdom, and Jenny Sechler*

Over the years, the focus of much of the work done by BCRS has been to support the struggles of welfare clients to achieve the economic human rights to which they and all of us are entitled. That's a struggle we continue to support simply because it's right to do it and we wouldn't be progressive workers in social welfare if we didn't.

At the last National Steering Committee meeting, we reaffirmed that commitment and joined it to two more initiatives that together give more substance to our economic human rights agenda.

First, we will formally adopt the "Partners in Crime" strategy developed by Mary Bricker-Jenkins in coalition with the Kensington Welfare Rights Union. This project affirms that, as long as this country insists on criminalizing poverty, social welfare workers must create alliances with poor people's groups and work to end poverty. The Project has four components:

1) encouraging all BCRS chapters to establish or strengthen relationships with poor people's groups;

2) participating in the Economic Human Rights Campaign and, specifically, the March of the Americas (see the report on the Poor People's Summit in this issue);

3) producing a resource manual on the kinds of partnerships forming around the country – their activities, structures, struggles, and triumphs;

4) establishing a "Partners in Crime" speakers/consultation bureau

through which schools and agencies interested in developing such partnerships can locate teams who have done so and engage their help.

Recognizing that the attack on welfare clients – and the success it has achieved in the political arena – is only one part of a larger assault on the welfare state, we will be joining efforts to **save Social Security**, the next target of the same forces that ended welfare as we knew it. The attack on Social Security is part and parcel of the ongoing project of privatizing critical functions of the state.

No wonder that Wall Street money managers are aggressively trying to privatize the Social Security system. With baby boomers getting closer to retirement age, capitalists fear a loss of their investment funds when baby boomers trade in their stocks and bonds to retire. For corporate America, the Social Security Trust Fund is a pot of gold. It would provide corporate investors with a mass infusion of funds to offset their revenues from retiring boomers.

In just twelve years, a privatized system of risky individual investment accounts will generate a \$240 billion Wall Street profit. While Wall Street stands to profit, ordinary Americans lose. Social Security provides 30 million elderly persons with retirement security. An additional 13 million Americans receive disability, dependent and spousal survivor benefits. Privatized accounts put these guaranteed benefits at risk.

Moreover, proposals to replace Social Security with individual investment accounts will raise the retirement eligibility age to 70 or more. Some of these proposals also reduce or eliminate COLAs and increase the federal debt. The attack on Social Security is driven largely by a fabricated crisis, whipped up to sustain the Right wing assault on government programs by privatizing them to the advantage of employers.

We're gearing up now. One of our primary activities next year will be to resist this Right wing assault. Through the education of and mobilization of social welfare workers and our allies, we will organize opposition to privatization schemes which are expected to be introduced in Congress in 1999.

The original Social Security Act of 1935 was forged out of the social protest movements of organized labor and the unemployed. We are committed to doing what needs to be done to continue this legacy of protest to ensure that social security is not put at risk.

One common thread between the attack on welfare programs and the impending assault on Social Security is the role the social welfare workers are forced into. As clients of the welfare state become more and more desperate and angry, they are faced by workers in the various systems who are expected to carry out the directives of the state. For that reason, the BCRS also has decided that the third leg of this initiative must be to promote both

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awareness of and opposition to social workers' past and present role in the country's oppressive social welfare practices.

The idea of social work – at its best – has been to work with or on behalf of those whose human dignity and survival are under attack. Yet history has shown that social welfare workers have played a role in organizations that, while they have struggled to serve clients, have been guilty of perpetuating racist, sexist and classist stereotypes and practices. These organizations, including state welfare systems, court systems, and child protective services, continue to target and oppress vulnerable people. For that reason, the BCRS will continue to challenge and support social workers to **resist the role of oppressor** and will encourage workers to stand with clients in their struggles with the system. School based chapters, especially, are encouraged to critically examine school curricula, cultures, and practices and provide a voice for progressive social work on their campuses.

The BCRS must not only be part of campaigns with people at risk of losing the welfare state benefits they have struggled for and grown to rely on. We must also make sure that we are partners with them in the places we come together as we do our work. The tension between our after-work activism and on-the-job conformity with the rules must end. The struggle takes place wherever we are and our activities must reflect that reality. ■

### SAVE THE DATE!

The BCRS annual conference will be held at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts  
June 25-27, 1999.

More information coming up!

## ENDING WELFARE AS WE KNOW IT – A Review

Over the summer, PBS broadcast an excellent look at life under welfare reform in the documentary "Ending Welfare As We Know It." Interspersed with statistics from around the country, the program follows six families over the course of a year in Wisconsin, Florida, and New Jersey. Three of the families are headed by a single mother, one by a married couple, one by long-term heterosexual partners, and one by a teenager who lives with relatives for most of the year. *Ending Welfare* depicts the parents' struggles to find employment, child care, housing, and reliable transportation. The program also conveys the desperation felt by the women as they face time limits and family caps. Over and over again, as parents recount what has happened in the months between visits with the interviewer, they explain that "I'll do whatever it takes" to keep my family together, to keep my children fed, to keep my children safe.

Writer/director Roger Weisberg has created a balanced program that is very sympathetic to the plight of these families but still presents some of the conservative arguments for welfare reform. In fact, he could not have found a better spokesperson for the right than he did in Rebekah, one of the single mothers he tracks over the year. She is an articulate young woman who agrees that too many people were abusing the welfare system before TANF and that nothing beats the feeling of accomplishment that comes from employment. She whole-heartedly supports the reforms, even after she loses her minimum wage job, has all her utilities disconnected, and has to turn to a food pantry for help.

*Ending Welfare* is balanced also in its portrayal of the main characters. Weisberg does not shy away from including some of the recipients' ideas and decisions that are bound to be unpopular with more affluent viewers. For instance, middle-aged Denise is introduced compassionately as suffering from long-term depression, as receiving barely any child support, and as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. The program also includes some unflattering moments where she describes getting fired because of arriving late or calling in sick to a job she did not like. *Ending Welfare* thus raises questions of human agency in the context of larger social, personal, and economic issues.

One way the program provides this context is through interjecting statistics related to the women's lives. When teen parent Elba describes her mother's violent boyfriend, the narrator reminds us that 60% of welfare recipients report being abused. When Andrea's family becomes homeless after being wrongly sanctioned, we are told that 36% of Wisconsin's sanctions for noncompliance were later found to be in error. When Jessica is evicted because of sanctions for noncompliance when she could not find child care, she turns custody of her son over to her mother; we are told that statewide the number of Wisconsin children in out-of-home care tripled after welfare reform was implemented.

*Ending Welfare* is a wonderful tool for showing the human side of welfare reform. Its dispassionate, academic tone when describing legislation, the state of the economy, and welfare statistics is interwoven with terribly moving accounts of parents trying to find ways to support their children. The 90-minute program could be a terrific way to open the eyes of conservative and not-so-conservative viewers alike to the reality of living in and trying to escape poverty. The video is available from Video Finders at 1-800-343-4727.

If you are looking for a deliberately social-justice-oriented video on welfare reform, the Kensington Welfare Rights Union's *Poverty Outlaw* is even better. That program is an inspiring documentary of grassroots activism to change the way Philadelphia deals with homelessness and poverty. Rather than focusing on recipients' barriers to self-sufficiency as in *Ending Welfare*, this video portrays recipients as active citizens working together to solve community problems. *Poverty Outlaw* is available from Skylight Pictures at (212) 947-5333. ■

# CHAPTER UPDATES:

**Houston:** BCRS Houston is just coming up for air after coordinating the 1998 Bertha Capen Reynolds National Conference at the University of Houston Graduate School of Social Work. After throwing a much deserved party in July and taking a little time off from "Daring to Struggle" (the '98 national conference), Houston is gearing up to continue to act on our compelling and energizing talks at the conference.

As a chapter, we are working on ways to further the coalition building that grew out of our conference planning and participation in KWRU's New Freedom Bus Tour. BCRS was recently a part of a local coalition (spearheaded by Houston NOW) of religious and non-religious groups that organized a press conference and rally the weekend the Promise Keepers took over the local sports arena, the Astrodome. Our goal was to challenge the public and media to look beyond the rhetoric of the Promise Keepers by calling attention to their misogynist, homophobic, and anti-family political agenda. BCRS participated in the press conference by reading a list of 7 alternative "promises" that men and others could make to insure a society that is truly supportive of families.

We also organized a letter writing campaign to the Texas Attorney General, urging him to conduct an audit of Houston Renaissance, Inc. (HR), the private non-profit that received large amounts of funding from the City of Houston to build affordable housing in Houston's 4th Ward. (Those of you that came to the conference will remember this neighborhood, also known as "Freedman's Town", where our rally with KWRU was held.) To date, all HR has done is buy up property throughout the neighborhood and forced long-time, mostly indigent and elderly residents from their homes, while private developers continue to build expensive luxury townhomes at a record pace. Our work with local activists in the

4th Ward continues.

We've also been focused on the excitement that comes with a new semester at the Graduate School of Social Work and the University of Houston (GSSW-UH). Our student members did a bang up job publicizing BCRS to new social work students and, with community members' help, organizing a terrific party. Also on campus, BCRS Houston will co-sponsor a domestic violence training session with the GSSW and UH's Dept. of Communications.

Finally, we'd like to thank all BCRS members, the Freedom Riders, and others who traveled to join us in Houston for the June conference. Without the spirit and spunk you all brought, it would not have been half as successful. We look forward to seeing everybody again at future conferences!

**Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids, MI:** This chapter began around November, 1997 as an outgrowth of a community organizing class lead by Prof. Jerry Johnson. At the initial organizing meeting, about 19 students and 2 faculty attended.

From there, the group decided to become an official student organization as well as develop plans for community outreach to human service professionals community-wide. As part of that effort, a core group of five MSW students carried the torch by planning a community event called the Gathering where representatives from over 10 community-based, multi-cultural service groups came to present information about their programs and community initiatives with which BCRS might get involved. About 75 persons attended the evening and a mailing list was born and members recruited. One talented student, Adele, designed a logo and brochure for our chapter, which could serve as a model for others, if you are interested.

In addition, BCRS co-sponsored a showing of "Amistad" for students and community members at a local theatre

where tickets were sold at a reduced rate and we filled the theatre for that time-slot (it was open only to us that evening). What a great event as a local historian specializing in African and African-American history led a thoughtful discussion following.

Over the summer, the core five MSW students, graduated but have remained committed. As such, they organized a neighborhood march for peace to correspond with another annual community event commemorating the Hiroshima bombing. While we had only 10 marchers, we got press in the local paper (and we looked larger in number) and we met folks in the community, two of whom joined in. We then listened to some Indian drumming for peace, enjoyed a potluck, and participated in the Circle of Peace activities focusing on the theme of "forgiveness", as assigned.

Lastly, the core group plus several faculty are working on long-term organizing plans for: 1) increasing membership; 2) reaching out to all human service personnel in GR for help and membership; 3) providing some service activities; 4) building alliances to enhance name and purpose recognition; and 5) challenging injustices as we identify or become aware of them in part by developing a chapter infrastructure supporting these activities. A service project we are currently planning in concert with two community groups is a "toiletty/personal item" drive to occur in October and November. We are thinking of working on welfare and/or managed care monitoring.

Finally, another project just beginning is BCRS/SSW building an alliance with the Heartside neighborhood where our SW offices are found. We think we are in an ideal position to do more and are beginning dialogue with members of the community to see how, if at all, we might be useful in their own fight for justice. We are glad to be part of BCRS and look forward to fighting the good fight together.

*Chapter Updates continued on next page* ▶

**Missoula, Montana:** The Missoula chapter of the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society actively entered the community in late 1997. A diverse group of University of Montana faculty and students, human services agency personnel, and progressive social organization members came together to build community coalitions, promote progressive education and issues, and support one another in what is often a difficult and hostile environment of "welfare reform." Broad-based membership and ties to several organizations in Missoula have allowed BCRS to draw various people and resources into community partnerships.

In March 1998, the Missoula BCRS chapter co-sponsored an event entitled "The Workings of Welfare: A Community Conversation" with the Jeannette Rankin Peace Resource Center. The evening began with a community potluck followed by several brief presentations from panel members. Comprised of childcare and housing program directors, welfare advocates and activists, and research and educational representatives, the panel explained Montana's current welfare system and its effects on the program participants and on the public as a whole. A general and very active discussion among the panelists and audience members ensued. The audience consisted of NASW members, first year social work students, community agency directors, welfare participants, university faculty, and concerned citizens. This lively event was well attended and achieved one of the foremost goals of the Missoula BCRS chapter which is to reach those in the community who are not already part of the "the choir." Reaching beyond those in ready agreement gathers a larger, more diverse and powerful group into a strong coalition able to start, support, and sustain progressive movements.

Also in the spring of 1998, a senior undergraduate anthropology student named Beth Collins initiated and completed a wonderfully powerful photography and narrative exhibit in conjunction with the BCRS chapter.

Beth gave disposable cameras to five women in the community who were receiving public assistance through Montana's welfare program, Families Achieving Independence in Montana (FAIM). She asked each woman to take photographs of the significant people, things, places, and events in her life. Beth then interviewed each woman as the woman described the photographs she had taken and the meaning they held in her world. Each participant in the project had the decision making power to determine which photographs and words would be shown and then arranged the materials on a board. The photographs and accompanying narratives were then displayed at the public reception held in May 1998.

As the Missoula BCRS chapter heads into fall, the members have launched a new project again aimed at educating and at promoting progressive issues within the parts of the community that may not know or care about the poverty, homelessness, and hunger that affect Montanans on a daily basis. BCRS members are now acting as brokers to match speakers from a variety of backgrounds and professional experiences with the audiences of service groups, churches, business organizations, and university classes. Speakers include members of the Living Wage Campaign, the Welfare Advocates of Missoula, the Montana Hunger Coalition, the Coping with Block Grants project, and the Futures program for pregnant and parenting teens. A special presentation by two BCRS members will feature a discussion between Jane Adams and Bertha Capen Reynolds herself (costumes necessary, of course!). BCRS will match the speakers with the interests and special projects of the audience members to connect with each group in areas of mutual concern.

Ongoing events include a video and book club, membership and organization development, and increased community recognition of BCRS in Missoula. The video and book club has met twice now, first showing "Entertaining Angels: The

Dorothy Day Story" and then "Ladybird, Ladybird," a film about a woman's struggle with the child protective services system in Great Britain. These events allow members to discuss issues concerning social work while building members' sense of belonging and camaraderie. Membership continues to increase as more individuals and groups are introduced to BCRS. As BCRS plans and conducts more community events, the name recognition is expected to rise, too. For now, the core group of members is committed to education and progress in Missoula.

**Southern California:** The Southern California Chapter of BCR now called SOCIAL WORKERS FOR ACTION AND ADVOCACY has been very active with the California NASW chapter. In April of 1996 the SWAA conducted a workshop at the State Conference of NASW. The workshop consisted of a panel of social workers and people close to social work to talk about the problems and grievances of social workers and their clients especially in the public service arena. The workshop invited attendees at the workshop to voice their concerns about their work and to exchange ideas and information about the challenges and frustrations of their work activities. The workshop had expected an attendance of about 25 and instead had an audience of almost 100. The panelists told of their own frustrations particularly in the department of Children's Services in both Los Angeles and Orange County. Many of the attendees said that they would have liked to participate by telling of their own experiences but worried about the repercussions to their own job security if they talked openly. They hoped that there could be a confidential and safe forum in which they could voice their concerns. As a result of the success of this workshop, the NASW chapter asked BCR to conduct workshops in 1998 at both the Legislative Conference of southern California and also at the state conference to be held in southern California.

At the Legislative Conference on February 28, 1998 the SWWA conducted two workshops called Social Workers Anonymous. One workshop was for students and the other for practitioners. At both sessions confidentiality and anonymity were stressed by the moderators. Both workshops were well attended. Masks of brown paper bags were provided for those who felt they needed to use them. (None did.) The format included a whole group introductory session at which the moderators told of their own experiences. Then the attendees broke up into small groups to discuss and list some of the most common and recurrent problems as well as possible solutions. Each group appointed a spokesperson to report. Then the group as a whole repeated the process and a master list was compiled.

The process was repeated at the state conference held on April 24. The workshops at both venues received a great deal of attention in articles in the chapter newspaper. Many signed up to be put on the BCR mailing list. As of this article, two members of SWAA are using the material for an article to be submitted to the BCR Journal as well as to other journals. The next major project of the SWAA chapter is to have an open meeting at the offices of the Liberty Hill Foundation in November 1998 at which the Executive Director of Liberty Hill will speak. This Foundation awards grants to many projects and agencies in the social service and grass roots organizing fields. Notices of the meeting will be posted in the many schools of social work in southern California and in many of the social service agencies. Members of the grass roots organizing committees and coalitions will be invited guests. The most rewarding item about the activities of the past few years is that the spirit of Bertha Capen Reynolds is being felt throughout the social work community in these troubling times of welfare reform.

*Eleanor Belser*

**New York City:** Pat Brownell, Marilynn Moch, Carol Raphael, and Tim Scoff of the NYC Chapter were

on the Planning Committee, headquartered at the Urban Justice Center, for the New York stop of KWRU's national Economic Human Rights Campaign New Freedom Bus Tour and the July 1 Economic Human Rights Tribunal at the Church Center for the United Nations. As usual for NYC Chapter members, Pat also represented Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service, Marilynn coordinated with a representative from ACORN, and Tim worked with Workfairness. ACORN and Workfairness are organizing workfare participants in NYC.

Other Chapter members provided support for the Freedom Bus riders, coordinating lunch and staffing water stops on the march, and providing child care, transportation, and help negotiating NYC. Still others came to the pre-Tribunal rally, and to the Tribunal itself. BCR Steering Committee member Mimi Abramovitz joined 8 other noted representatives of organizations fighting for economic justice as a juror for the Tribunal.

After a month traveling around the country – "30 stops in 30 days" (see the Houston BCR Chapter report) – collecting documentation of economic human rights violations and proclaiming freedom from unemployment, hunger, and homelessness, 50 Freedom Bus riders left their bus and marched across the George Washington Bridge on July 1, where they met up with the NYC contingent and together marched through Washington Heights and down the West Side to lunches provided by St. Ann's Church parishioners at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. From there, the marchers moved to Manhattan's East Side, proceeding with chants and banners to the United Nations where the Church Center was given over to the rally and Tribunal in the auditorium, a packed overflow crowd watching the proceedings on simulcast closed-circuit TV on the second floor, and child care upstairs.

The Economic Human Rights Tribunal itself was very powerful, with testifiers from poor peoples organizations in Idaho, California, Wisconsin,

Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, New Jersey, and New York testifying to abuses covering the International Declaration of Human Rights in three categories: Article 23 covering the right to work, a livable wage, and the right to organize; Article 25 covering the right to food, clothing housing, medical care, social services, and income security; and Article 26 covering the right to education. Additional testifiers described violations of the rights of indigenous peoples, immigrants, and environmental justice. The proceedings will be transcribed and presented to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for her review, consideration, and action. In follow-up actions, Temple University School of Social Work sponsored Cheri Honkala of KWRU to the International Federation of Social Work conference in Jerusalem in July, where she held a well attended workshop, and BCR member Mary Bricker-Jenkins, also of Temple, was a core organizer of the Poor People's Summit in October (see article, this Newsletter). The Tribunal proceedings were taped, and we will announce their availability and cost in a future Newsletter.

**BCRS and Eastern Europe:** BCRS member Bill Simpson Whitaker, Dean of Marywood University School of Social Work, has just returned from a two-week Summer School in Yalta, Ukraine. Bill and Cheryl Simpson Whitaker co-taught a course, "Loaded for Bear: Interactive Teaching and Learning for Applied Sociologists, Social Workers, and Change Agents," for 28 junior social science faculty from universities in Ukraine, Belorussia, and Lithuania. Bill and Cheryl are interested in sharing experiences with other BCRS members with connections in the newly emerging states of Eastern Europe. They can be contacted via e-mail <bchome@icontech.com> or by calling 717-342-2679. ■

# “PARTNERS IN CRIME” IN ACTION

The concept of “partners in crime” rests on the notion that social workers must now, more than ever, create new ways of forming working relationships with poor people’s organizations. This article will describe one model of how this concept was operationalized by undergraduate social work students and several poor people’s organizations in Rochester, New York.

In the fall of 1997 the leadership of the Student Social Work Organization at SUNY Brockport approached me (as their advisor) to brainstorm ways they could go beyond the usual charity model of their predecessors – i.e., volunteering for a day at a soup kitchen, the proverbial Christmas “angel tree” for poor kids, and various fund-raisers for local non-profits. I had suggested that they become part of the Economic Human Rights Campaign being spearheaded by the Kensington Welfare Rights Union.

The students seemed intrigued by this idea and decided to invite Mary Bricker-Jenkins and Cheri Honkala to campus in March 1998. This was accomplished by the students writing a successful proposal to the Global Interdependence and Cultural Diversity committee on campus, as well as securing funds from the Dean of the School of Professions and some financial and clerical support from the Social Work Department and the College’s Women’s Center.

The real work, however, involved visiting non-profits who might have a stake in sending workers and clients, mass mailings, and “selling” the idea to Department faculty, so that attendance at workshops on campus and off would be a good mix of students, human service workers, and poor people. A local church donated space and refreshments, and one poor people’s organization did a mailing to their membership and leafleted the local welfare department.

The result of the preliminary groundwork was a well-attended and challenging campus-based morning workshop presented by Bricker-

Jenkins and Honkala which focused on social workers’ role in “partners in crime.” A few students who were in their senior internships brought their clients. Later that same day, a community-based meeting facilitated by Honkala and Bricker-Jenkins took place in the City, with approximately 90 folks attending, about half of them poor. The following morning Willie Baptist from KWRU met with a small group of poor people affiliated with a local welfare rights organization.

KWRU was so impressed with the energy in our community that they decided to make Rochester a stop on their 30-day national Freedom Bus Tour during the month of June. The students – already graduated – continued to work with an African American church group to organize a rally to greet the bus on June 2<sup>nd</sup> and prepared a lasagna dinner to feed the 45 Freedom Riders.

We presented this working model (along with Bricker-Jenkins, Honkala and Baptist) at the BCRS conference in Houston in late June, with the Dean of our School of Professions footing the bill to pay for airfare and registration for four of the student organizers.

But...we were still not “finished!” There was the Poor People’s Summit in October, and there was now a felt commitment to send local poor people. Although the lead student organizers had graduated, the new students sold raffle tickets and raised \$180. We had some seed money from Mary’s honorarium (she had set aside part of it to send some Rochester folks), and I approached the union that represents the workers at DSS, local churches, the College’s Women’s Center, and the Social Work Department to raise additional funds. Our fund-raising netted us \$1,500.

We approached some local poor people who were recently profiled in newspaper articles addressing welfare reform, as well as folks from a local homeless shelter, the House of Mercy. Our final “tally” was that we had a Rochester “delegation” of 11 people.

Six of these were local poor folks, and the Department partially financed travel expenses for two students. In addition, Sister Grace Miller from the House of Mercy shelter participated, along with Delaine Cook-Greene, an organizer for the Baden Street Settlement House.

Involvement in the Summit was a politically and emotionally energizing experience for everyone in our group. The result was that Chris Coleman and Marian Baldwin – two of the homeless people from our group – wanted to go back and plan a “Rochester Poor People’s Summit.” An ever-expanding group of folks have consequently been meeting every Monday evening at the shelter since the Summit, and have just named themselves the “Rochester Poor People’s Campaign.” They came to our campus in November to report on the Summit and tell the new students in our program about what it’s like to be poor and how they have been harmed by the fallout of welfare reform.

One of the six people we sponsored, Sarah, is currently a student at the College. She and I performed a “partners in crime” skit (which premiered at the 1997 St. Louis conference by Mary and Tara Colon from KWRU!). This skit gets across the fact that both social workers and clients are trapped in the system, and it models a different way to work together – towards *mutual empowerment*. Several students who came to that meeting have now volunteered to give transportation to folks from the Poor People’s Campaign and help them as they leaflet at the welfare department. And a few of the student organizers who graduated are now attending the meetings at the House of Mercy, and working together with them to plan their first event – a downtown rally in December.

Due to space, many of the details, obstacles and little successes of our experience have been left out, but we would be happy to share these with any interested parties – just contact me at (716) 395-5509 or [berthabk@aol.com](mailto:berthabk@aol.com). ■

– by Barbara Kasper, SUNY Brockport

# "Gonna Take Back What He Stole From Me. . ." A Report on The Poor People's Summit

**C**lose your eyes and picture 300 poor people and 50 non-poor, mostly social workers, in a dimly lit room. Where are you? Welfare office? Food stamp office? Jail? Bus station, waiting for the bus to visit the prison? Shelter? INS compound? These are the answers we've been getting as we explore the prevailing images of poor people in our communities. Few mention what we actually experienced a few weeks ago. The differences between the media-magnified representations listed above and what we saw are enormous. They both inspire hope and signal a most urgent call to action.

On October 9, 1998 approximately 300 representatives of poor people's groups along with 50 allies convened in Philadelphia to change the terms of the debate about poverty and to build the skills and organizations to end it. Invigorated by the slogan of the convening group "We do not want to manage poverty; we want to end poverty!" – participants came from over 40 states, Puerto Rico, and Canada for a weekend of workshops, plenaries, cultural events, networking, caucuses, and a demonstration.

As representatives from poor people's groups from all over the country shared and compared their political analyses and strategies in workshops and plenaries, a huge graffiti wall was being painted (on canvas) in view of the participants. It depicted graphically the same analysis being explored inside: the relationships among global economic forces, advertising and media, crumbling infrastructures, children in poverty... and the rising tide of resistance and visions of economic justice. Between sessions the Economic Human Rights Choir taught everyone a song they had adapted from one they learned in a small Southern church last summer: "Goin' down to the rich man's house/ Gonna take back what he stole from me/ Gonna take back my dignity/ Take back my humanity!" By the end of the weekend, this sentiment was more than a metaphor for most of the participants; it was a commitment backed by

a plan. Once again the combination of people speaking together in their own voices and the cultural representation of their struggles and dreams created an alchemy that drew out hope from despair, action from lethargy, and disciplined leadership from stereotypes of the nature of poverty and poor people.

The Poor People's Summit was sponsored by the North-South Dialog (N/SD), a network of poor people's groups, allies, and advocates that came together at the Highlander Center for Research and Education in October, 1997. Participants from the sixteen groups that established the N/SD envisioned the Summit as a means of advancing what was clearly an emerging movement to end poverty. Speaking from the crucible of their own experiences with poverty, sometimes being taken seriously in a public forum for the first time, participants in the Highlander gathering began to challenge the assumptions underpinning current public policy and to insist upon new analyses and actions based on their truths. They wanted this kind of experience with and for others and established a steering committee that began organizing for the Poor People's Summit shortly after the Highlander gathering. Signaling their commitment to the work of ending poverty, they chose the theme, "First Things First: Let's Get Organized!"

Two organizational members of the N/SD joined in a unique partnership to co-host the event. The Kensington Welfare Rights Union (KWRU) and the Temple University School of Social Administration (SSA) extended the collaborative work they began in 1995. At that time Temple students and faculty established a "depot" of The Underground Railroad to support KWRU's activities; in turn, KWRU members became frequent speakers in Temple classes on poverty, welfare, and community organization practice. Members of other university departments joined SSA students, faculty and staff to address many of the administrative tasks of the Summit – child

care, proposal writing, publicity, space and equipment arrangements, and the like – so that KWRU could use its limited resources to do what it does best: mobilize poor people and allies. In turn, they urged other social work programs and poor people's groups to form similar partnerships to get representatives to the summit. About 10 schools, several organized by Bertha Capen Reynolds Society members, did so.

Much of the grass roots organizing work for the Summit was done in June 1998 when KWRU traveled to some 30 cities and towns across the country in "The New Freedom Bus." At each stop along the route local groups – again, many assisted by BCRS members – had organized rallies, demonstrations, speak-outs and teach-ins, most of them focusing on the ways in which welfare reform policies violate the Economic Human Rights provisions of the 50 year old United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The bus tour culminated on July 1 with a march across the George Washington Bridge to the United Nations and a tribunal at which representatives of America's poor people presented their case. Many of the participants in the bus tour rallies and the UN march reconvened at the Poor People's Summit.

Lessons and follow-ups to the Summit are numerous and evolving all over the country as people return to their communities with a renewed sense of hope – and a renewed sense of urgency. We will mention only a few here.

First, as the evaluations reveal, people were most moved by the experience of their own unity and the growing hope that economic justice is imaginable even through the challenges of their poverty. As one participant said, "There are others like myself. We can unite." Another said, "I now know where I need to go – my direction." Another named the necessary direction: "I think we can change the world."

Second, it is clear to all that poor people can – and must – organize, analyze, and lead this movement to end poverty. As the history of liberation movements reveals, the struggles

*Continued on next page* ▶

must be led by those directly affected by the oppression being challenged and changed. While everything in the popular media, and much in the professional literature, obscures and distorts poor people's capacity for leadership, the Summit gives lie to those images.

Third, there is a role in the movement for social workers and other allies: People who have access to resources and skills can lend them to the cause. This participation must not be based on sentimentality or false notions of serving "those" people, but on a "felt analysis" of the ways in which we are locked together in our vulnerabilities to poverty. As hundreds of social workers are "downsized," "bumped," and "reclassified" every week, the need to make common cause to end poverty is ever more apparent. For many of us, however, effective participation in the movement to end poverty requires unlearning certain elitist attitudes and behaviors engendered by our professional training and, some would say, supported by the NASW Code of Ethics. [The BCRS "Partners in Crime" Project described elsewhere in this newsletter is designed to help create and strengthen alliances between social workers and poor people's groups.]

Fourth, we need every living person with consciousness and commitment to economic justice involved in this struggle. In March of 1999 - in some places even earlier - the huge wave of cuts and sanctions will slam into poor people all over this country. One participant said that the Summit gave her hope because "Maybe people will wake up before their Loved One dies." Many of us have "zombied" through this post-"reform" period out of despair and hopelessness. The Poor People's Summit awakened participants to hope and confidence that it is possible to transform this assault into fuel for the movement to end poverty.

Finally, while we are working in alliance in our local communities to protect individuals and families from the assaults, we must continue taking the initiative on another front. Announced in the Economic Human Rights caucus and carried to the floor at the closing session of the Summit was the March of the Americas. This

## *Highlights of The Poor People's Summit October 9-11, 1998 Philadelphia, PA*

- Theme:** "First things first: Let's get organized!"
- Sponsor:** The North/South Dialog - a network of poor people's groups and allies
- Hosts:** Kensington Welfare Rights Organization and Temple University School of Social Administration
- Participants:** 300 members of 60 poor people's organizations; 50 allies
- Geography:** 40 states represented, Puerto Rico, and Canada
- Languages:** ASL, English, French, Mayan, and Spanish
- Events:** Plenaries, workshops, caucuses & networks, child care, a mini March of the Americas/demonstration, human rights documentation, graffiti wall (on canvas), banquet & cultural event, sunrise worship, and much singing throughout.
- Workshops:** Workfare; Environmental Justice; Linking Up Organized Labor and the Unemployed; Homelessness; Demolition of Public Housing; Using the Internet to Fight Poverty; Economic Human Rights Monitoring; Organizing Rural Poverty; Media; Youth; The Power of Faith; Time Limits = Time to Get Organized; Right to Recovery. Two workshops for allies: Partners in Crime - Poverty Outlaws and Social Workers Make Common Cause, and Knowing When to Stand Up, Sit Down, Speak Up, Shut Up.
- Premier:** Clip from "Outriders," documentary on the New Freedom Bus tour, available January 1999 from Skylight Pictures (of "Takeover" and "Poverty Outlaw" fame).
- Evaluations:** Slightly higher from poor people (4.25 on a 1-5 scale) than from allies (4.14). Most mentioned pluses: experience of so many people from so many places coming together in common cause; unity & hope engendered by the demonstration; belief in one's power to make a difference when working in solidarity with others. Perceived need: analysis of ways to build unity of poor and homeless people where race, gender, sexual orientation, and similar factors are used to divide us.
- Next Steps:** Organizing back at home, documenting economic human rights abuses, and mobilizing for the **March of the Americas, Washington, DC to the United Nations, NYC, October, 1999**. Poor people and their allies will walk, tracing the line of the global economy from Washington to the UN, and there meet others from Central and South America, Canada, and the Caribbean.

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march, scheduled for October 1999, will begin in Washington, DC and end at the United Nations. Once again, another tribunal will be held at which poor people will testify on the violations of economic human rights they have experienced. This time, however, there will be representatives from poor people's groups from many countries in North, South, and Central America. We hope that social workers along the route will begin organizing now to provide support: tent sites, meals, medical care, mini-rallies, media coverage, and, of course, marchers.

This report is best closed with words from several of the participants about the hope they felt as they left, words that might give hope and a call to action to those who could not attend: "As long as people are willing to take a stand for change I know there is a chance" . . . "I believe now more than ever" . . . "The Summit gave me hope that movement building is not hopeless" . . . "I know now I can do my best!" ■

- by Mary Bricker-Jenkins,  
Temple University, and Willie Baptist,  
Kensington Welfare Rights Union



# BERTHA REACHES THE SUMMIT

— Fred Newdom

A “summit conference” of the social work profession was convened by NASW in early October to try to find common ground in the profession among the many constituencies and interests found in social work. Among the 40 or so organizations was the Bertha Reynolds Society which was represented by National Steering Committee members Jerry Sachs and Fred Newdom.

The range of organizations was dramatic — academia was represented by CSWE and the organizations representing doctoral programs, masters programs and baccalaureate education as well as the research wing of social work; multiple groups representing aspects of the health care field from public health to pediatric oncology social workers; organizations representing Latino and Native American social workers; representatives from practice specialties from the Clinical Federation and Psychoanalytic social workers to group workers and ACOSA, the Association for Community Organization and Social Administration; Christian social workers, uniformed services folks and, of course, our friends at the Association for Women in Social Work. All in all, a pretty diverse and eclectic group.

With that wide a variety of participants, it wasn't clear that we'd be able to agree on anything beyond the fact that the sun rises in the east and, perhaps, that it sets in the west. Surprisingly, there was a more substantial agreement on issues of real importance. With a number of progressive allies, we were able to create support for a consensus principle in favor of economic justice and in opposition to the abuses in managed care. What these principles will lead to, in terms of action, is unclear and it's likely that people are more comfortable with economic justice in the abstract than in concrete terms.

Given the wide range of organizational interests and the preponderance of groups with a

seemingly conservative or narrowly professional focus, the fact that the only consensus was on a progressive position was a pleasant surprise, to say the least. Part of the credit does have to go to NASW which set the tone for the gathering by having, as the two speakers, Mary Ann Mahaffey and Richard Cloward, two BCRS members and spokespeople for a progressive position within social work.

In the closing session, BCRS representative Jerry Sachs summed up both of our experiences of the summit by saying “this was not as good as my best fantasy of what would happen but better than my worst fantasy.”

For BCRS, this was an opportunity to identify possible allies in social work and to test the receptivity of a broad social work audience to a clearly progressive message. It could have been a whole lot worse. ■

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## BERTHA AND REACHING OUT

— Fred Newdom

Over the years there has been a spirited and agonizing debate over the impact on coalition building and public recognition of being named after a person few people outside of social work have heard of. Bertha Capen Reynolds is an inspiring figure to those of us on the social work left who found few figures in our history who could claim a real politics and commitment to progressive values and action. For a younger generation of social workers, Bertha Reynolds became a figure the “elders” could talk about as a means of connecting them up with the best of the social work tradition — radical politics, excellence in scholarship, commitment to practice, staying the course and paying the price. Bertha Reynolds was the ideal person for whom an organization on the social work left could be named.

And yet, even at the founding meetings of the BCRS, there were

those who knew Bertha who said that she would have been uncomfortable having an organization named after her. And she certainly, we were told, would not want her name to make it harder to make the organization more of a presence on the American left.

In our efforts to become an organization whose political reach goes beyond social work, we have found it difficult to develop coalition partnerships with community groups, left organizations, and groups of people of color who wonder who this Bertha Reynolds is and what does a “society” have to offer them. While it is enjoyable and even helpful to explain who Bertha was and why we identify with her legacy, there are conversations that don't take place because people don't look past the name. Clearly, we could take the “what's in a name?” position and say that's who we are and we'll work with it. And we have worked with it for more than ten years.

But, as we choose issues whose boundaries are beyond social work — such as the Social Security issue — we find that we have to build partnerships with people who would love to know who and what we are by our name. When we look at left organizations in the professions, for example, we think of the National Lawyers Guild, Physicians for Social Responsibility and the Union of Radical Political Economists as typical and descriptive names.

At its September meeting, the National Steering Committee agreed to change the name of the organization but didn't come up with a new name to embrace. We are clear that it should be descriptive. We would love to keep Bertha Reynolds' name somehow in the organization's full name (our current full name has “a national organization of progressive workers in social welfare” as part of our name). We are asking you — our membership — to help us in our search for a name that embraces our past, describes who we are, and allows us to build the bridges we'll have to travel over in the important political work ahead of us. Please let us hear from you so that we can find a name we can all feel proud to rally behind and reach out with. ■

# FIGHTING BACK IN KENTUCKY

**O**n April 24, 1998, the Sociology Department and the Appalachian Research Center, University of Kentucky at Lexington, sponsored a forum called "Assessing Welfare Reform." At this forum, Barbara LeMaster spoke as part of a panel entitled, "Welfare Reform in Kentucky." LeMaster is a member of Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, a member-run, grassroots organization. KFTC deals with a variety of issues as diverse as: sidewalks on the poor side of town; hog farms in Western Kentucky; Mining in Eastern Kentucky; and welfare reform throughout the state and the nation.

KFTC joined with the Kentucky Welfare Reform Coalition, Kentucky Youth Advocates and other organizations to make welfare reform a more realistic solution to some of the problems of poverty in that state. The result of this statewide effort was HB 434 which:

- Requires caseworkers to fully inform recipients about educational options and support services available to them
- Requires quarterly and annual reports about the number of low-income parents in various levels of education and training programs
- Establishes an advisory board to examine the barriers to education faced by low-income Kentuckians and make policy recommendations

In addition, the Cabinet for Families and Children committed to make significant improvements, which didn't require legislative action. This included childcare assistance being made available to low-income parents who are in school, eligible for KTAP assistance and choose not to receive KTAP. Additionally, strong efforts are to be made to inform recipients, caseworkers and educational institutions about ways to help students meet the 20-hour work requirement contained in the federal welfare law.

At this panel, Barbara LeMaster told her story:

"I am the divorced mother of four. I didn't plan on raising my four children alone, but you can only take so much mental and physical abuse from an alcoholic husband.

Due to my lack of education, job skills, child care and transportation, I was unable to go to work to support my family. I had no choice but welfare.

I received my GED when I was 34-years-old. No one bothered to tell me that I could have received help in furthering my education at that time.

When I was 39, we moved into a housing project in Prestonberg. One of my neighbors was a night manager at a local restaurant and helped me get a part-time job as a cook. I rode back and forth to work with her; at times, I would have to wait around for hours before it was time for me to start.

The older children took care of the younger ones, with neighbors keeping a watchful eye out for any problems. I only worked part-time because if I had gone to work full-time I would have lost all medical assistance, and with four children I couldn't afford that. Full-time work in a restaurant does not afford you the luxury of health insurance.

As it was, my rent would increase and my money assistance and food stamp allotment would drop with every cent I earned. I was getting nowhere. I was trapped in the welfare circle. Finally, through neighbors, I learned that I could get help to go to college. It had always been a lifelong dream of mine to get a college education. At the age of 43, I enrolled in Prestonberg Community College.

Due to various problems such as poor health and the personal problems of the children, it took me four years to earn my degree. But in those four years, I served on college-wide committees. I was a member and even President of Phi Theta Kappa, an International Honors Society of the two-year college. I represented PTK at their international convention in Washington, DC and at their National

Honors Institute in Rhode Island.

On a warm night in May, 1997, I received my Associates in Arts Degree. I graduated with High Distinction and received a scholarship to Morehead State University. That was one of the proudest moments of my life.

I looked forward to attaining a Bachelor's Degree in medical lab technology at Morehead. I knew it would be hard, especially with the new welfare reform laws going into effect, but I had to try.

My first semester at Morehead was extremely difficult. I had to drive three hours a day back and forth to school, spend eight hours in class, come home and take care of my son (only one at home), my home, and myself, and try to fit in some study time. Even though I had worked part-time most of the way through Prestonberg CC, I had stopped to turn my attention to the more difficult classes that I would be taking at Morehead.

But I knew in January that I would have to go back to work. That thought never left my mind. In fact, between that hanging over my head and the stress of classes, I ended up hospitalized over Thanksgiving (I'm still waiting for some pumpkin pie).

In December, my former employer called and asked me to come back to work for them in their new restaurant. Knowing I would have to find work or do "volunteer" work, I took the offer. College started back in January and it became apparent very quickly that I could not maintain home, job and school. I had to quit college.

When I took that drop slip in to be signed, I wanted to cry. I wasn't just dropping out of college, I was closing the door on my dreams. I was saying goodbye to the chance of getting my degree and a good paying job, a job that I would have allowed me to support my family and maybe even send my youngest son to college.

And now, I'm back where I started. The same low-wage, no-benefit job I had before I started college. But the worst of it is, is that I was once able to reach for a dream, and now it's no longer there. ■

# SOCIAL SECURITY

## Myths and Realities

**MYTH:** Social Security won't be there for me when I retire.

**REALITY:** Social Security has provided a lifeline to millions of Americans with millions of checks, and in more than 60 years has never missed a payment – and this track record can continue. Social Security is basically a sound system that can meet 100 percent of its obligations for the next 33 years, and with responsible changes it can continue to do so indefinitely. Social Security will be there for young workers – if we insist that it will be there. There are plenty of things we can do to make the necessary repairs to Social Security, and we've got time to do them. If we choose to make these adjustments, Social Security will be around for generations to come.

**MYTH:** The Social Security trust funds will run out of money in 2032.

**REALITY:** The Social Security trustees project that the Social Security trust funds, now growing by \$90 billion a year, will be drawn down to zero in 2032 if no changes are made. But after 2032, Social Security will not be broke. As it does today, Social Security will continue to collect payroll taxes from workers and employers. In fact, Social Security payroll taxes will be sufficient to finance about 70 percent of the payments that will be owed to the program's beneficiaries. With responsible modifications to the program, Social Security will be able to continue meeting 100 percent of its payment obligations to retirees, disabled workers and survivors.

**MYTH:** Social Security won't be able to pay for all the Baby Boomers when they retire.

**REALITY:** When the Boomers were babies, their parents and the government found ways to provide for them, to build new schools and later to finance expensive college education for many of them. And ever since the Baby Boomers were born, we have known that they would begin retiring by 2010. So the Social Security tax has been set higher than necessary deliberately to help defray the costs of the Baby Boomers' retirement. This money has been saved in the Social Security trust funds. At present the trust funds are running an annual surplus of \$90 billion; by the end of 1997, more than \$655 billion had been saved in the trust funds for the retirement of the Baby Boom generation. Finally, we should not look only at the number of retirees per worker, but also at the number of dependents (retirees and children) per worker. It is projected that in 2030, there will be about 79 dependents per 100 workers – well below the ratio in 1965 of 95 dependents to 100 workers.

**MYTH:** Ending all the bureaucratic waste would solve Social Security's projected shortfall.

**REALITY:** Administrative costs for Social Security is less than 1 cent per dollar paid out in benefits. This is much lower than the average administrative costs of 12 to 14 percent for private insurers. In Chile, which instituted a system of mandatory private savings accounts in the early 1980s, administrative costs exceed 20 percent.

**MYTH:** We can't afford Social Security anymore.

**REALITY:** The Social Security system was put in place during the Depression. If we could afford it then, we can afford Social Security today when the country is four times richer. The United States is the richest country in the world, and we can provide for our elderly – as do nations not nearly as rich as we are.

**MYTH:** I would have a lot more to retire on if I put my money in the stock market rather than paying into Social Security.

**REALITY:** Individual stock market accounts would cost a bundle. We'd have to pay for two Social Security systems at the same time: today's program for current beneficiaries and the privatized system. To cover the price tag, we would have to raise the retirement age, cut Social Security benefits, hike taxes, cut or eliminate cost-of-living adjustments – or some mix of these bad choices. Privatization would be good for Wall Street, banks and insurance companies – just the folks who are supporting the idea. But it would be bad for working families. Social Security benefits are guaranteed, lifelong and protect whole families. The security of these benefits – which provide the foundation of retirement, disability and survivor protections for working families – should not depend on how well individual workers can play the market or whether a worker retires shortly after the stock market has plunged.

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– *The AFL-CIO has undertaken a large-scale campaign to educate and mobilize working families to strengthen the Social Security system. For more information, speakers or materials feel free to contact Ken Grossinger at 202-637-5393 or E-mail him at [Kgrossin@aflcio.org](mailto:Kgrossin@aflcio.org)*

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<p><b>Social Work &amp; Social Living</b> The practice and philosophy of social work are critically examined. Reynolds argues, based upon her experiences with labor unions that the orientation of social agencies toward psychological dynamics makes it difficult for clients to seek help. Softbound</p>		List Price \$8.95 Member Price \$8.00	
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<p><b>Uncharted Journey</b> Reynolds' inspirational autobiography dedicated "young social workers who are facing realities and shaping our profession with courage and creativity." Covers the development of her practice philosophy and the course of her career from 1914-1964. Softbound</p>		List Price \$21.95 Member Price \$20.00	
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## My Time is Up

By Barbara LeMaster

Is it reform, elimination, or enslavement? Just what is welfare reform? Let's take a look into the future.

**1998:** Isn't this great? So many welfare recipients are earning their keep! On the job training, but for employers that will never hire them. Why should they? They have an inexhaustible supply of free workers. Workers that they can even get a tax break to hire (at one time forced labor was called slavery). When they train one for six months they can just let him go and turn around and get another welfare recipient for nothing. Who cares about the one that ran out of time?

*My time is up. Where do we go from here? My ex-husband won't help support the children, and I can't afford a lawyer. The government just issues empty threats (at him). I went to work, just like I was told to do, they even helped to find me a job. I didn't get minimum wage, just welfare. I worked real hard they past six months, everyone said I was going real good. But they say they can't actually put me on their payroll, they don't have a real job for me! How will I pay my rent? How will I take care of my children. I looked and looked for a real job, but any job I could work is already taken by other welfare recipients! We just do what they tell us, so tell us, what do we do now? My time is up.*

**1999:** The job market is flooded with uneducated, and poorly trained workers. My teenager can't even get a job flipping burgers because of those people! Have you seen the crime rate lately? It has climbed sky high in the last few months. Do they plan on putting people to work building prisons and staffing them? I guess we'll have to build orphanages for all those kids, too. I thought welfare reform was supposed to save taxpayers money, who's saving any money?

*My time is up. We live on the streets now. Or at least until the law or*

*social services catch up to us. You see, the only way we can stay together, my children and I, is to steal food and clothing. We hide at night wherever we can. My oldest child is old enough work but there are no jobs. I tried to teach them right from wrong, but how can I tell them it's wrong to steal when it's the only way they can eat? What did I do wrong? I've tried my best. I did what I was told? Please help us, my time is up.*

**2000:** Take a look out your door and what do you see? The homeless have increased astronomically. The crime rate keeps climbing, prisons can't be built fast enough. The orphanages are overrun. So many teens have dropped out of school to try and help support their families that the level of illiteracy has never been so high! Have you noticed that most of the small businesses have had to close? They can't afford to compete with Corporate America, they can't get the free labor, they can't make the huge profits they can't get the big tax breaks, they can't compete they can't remain open!! The corporations are swallowing them whole, only to grow larger and more powerful. We have eliminated welfare but at what cost? Has this country eliminated compassion also? My God, there are riots in the streets, what's next, civil war?

*My time is up. They finally caught up with us. First the law, I was shoplifting some bread for my*

*children. Next the social services, they took my kids. I don't even know where. Maybe it's for the best, maybe they'll take care of them, I can't do it anymore, but I tried. Who will hug them when they re hurt? Who will play with them and help them with their homework? Who will hold them after a bad dream? Who will read their favorite stories to them? Who will love them like I do? They say I'm going to jail. They whisper that I might not ever see my kids again, that they will probably be split up if they can find anyone to adopt them (which is very doubtful)). They've taken everything from me, my home, my children, what little self respect I had, what do I have left? They've taken my life.*

**God forgive me, my time is up.**

## BERTHA LIST UNDER CONSTRUCTION

The BCRS steering committee agreed to the need for a listserv which Michel Coconis agreed to organize and moderate, should that be the structure we want. The list name will be BERTHA-L. If you are interested in participating in other lists from a progressive perspective, you can find lists at <http://www.liszt.org> and when asked to search type either "social work" or "progressive" for a nice listing of listservs to which you might subscribe. More info: Michel Coconis at 616.771.6550 or [coconism@gvsu.edu](mailto:coconism@gvsu.edu).

Please forward 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 **March 1, 1999**.

# GLOBALIZATION & COLD WAR: WHY NO PEACE DIVIDEND?

— By Michael A. Dover

“It will be a great day when our schools get all the money they need and the air force has to hold a bake sale to buy a bomber.”

This bumper sticker slogan expresses our hopes for the future but also contains an explanation of the past: namely, that military expenditures were primarily to blame for our relatively undeveloped U.S. welfare state.

As the Cold War drew to a close at the turn of the last decade, the possibility of a peace dividend captured the public imagination. But that dividend has not materialized. There have been two main explanations for this. First, we point to the continued high levels of military expenditures. Second, we blame the globalization process. Both are good partial explanations. But there is a third factor. The end of the Cold War resulted in an accelerated reduction in the already declining level of elite consents to welfare state expenditures.

For instance, Malcolm S. Forbes Sr. said in 1993: “The Cold War is over...What was tolerable in war is no longer in peacetime...The costs of the welfare state are becoming unsustainable — politically and economically.”

As Michael Reisch has pointed out, there is substantial concern about how social work and social welfare will evolve in a world without socialism. The opening of one-third of the world to capitalism has been a key element of the debate on globalization. But before we can understand the future of globalization, we need to understand what it was about a world with socialism which influenced postwar social welfare development. Did the existence of Communist-governed forms of state socialism provide a rationale for increased Western military spending, which in turn stunted the welfare state? Or did Western elites consent to demands for

social welfare partially because they saw the value of a guns and butter defense against communism? If both effects can be discerned, which was predominant, and what does this tell us about the conditions for achieving a post-Cold War peace dividend?

Most theories of social welfare development make one of three assumptions about the role of elites. Theories of elite defeat have stressed the role of working class mobilization, civil disorder, and social democratic electoral victories. Theories of elite compromise stress pluralism or Theda Skocpol’s polity-oriented processes. Theories of elite control saw social welfare as social control and as fully subordinate to the rule of capital. Other theories saw social welfare as a built-in feature of industrialization.

The above theories all tend to view the nation-state in isolation from the international environment. As a result, they neglect a key structural factor influencing social welfare development.

The neglected structural factor was the bi-polar U.S.-Soviet contention. During the Cold War, U.S. military outlays to N.A.T.O. subsidized the Western European welfare state. Postwar U.S. foreign policy favored the use of a therapeutic dose of welfare state socialism in fighting more virulent strands of communism. In the U.S. in the early 1950s, massive cuts in U.S. social expenditures proposed by N.S.C. Advocates of a guns and butter strategy nixed memorandum #68. This strategy became quite blatant during the Vietnam War.

Also common to the existing theories has been a stress on the active agency of historical actors, rather than on harder to observe, more passive roles such as consent. Arguably, a more nuanced continuum of theories of elite agency in relationship to social

welfare would run from elite defeat to elite enforced consent to elite compromise to elite strategic consent to elite control.

Taking into account this structural factor and the related process of elite consent, we need to re-analyze policy determination within each major policy domain as well as the overall postwar relationship between social security and national security. If the Cold War and the Western welfare state, when viewed over the entire course of the Cold War, had more of a symbiotic than a zero-sum relationship, then it is no wonder we have not achieved a peace dividend. The post-Cold War interests of the military industrial complex continues to drive military spending. Piven and Cloward point out that benefit systems produce constituencies whose influence mitigates against cuts. But absent international and domestic social movements strong enough to stimulate renewed elite consent or to impose elite defeat, the withdrawal of Cold War-motivated elite consent makes a stronger welfare state unlikely and severe cuts quite possible.

An opposing argument might contend that the welfare state was formed well before the Cold War. But this confounds welfare state origins with subsequent development. The welfare state never really “took off” in most major nations until after W.W. II ended. Also, exogenous factors such as colonialism and war influenced social welfare prior to the Cold War as well.

Richard Titmuss found that during the early 20th century, states were first concerned about the quantity and then about the quality of potential military recruits, leading to some early health and welfare measures. Later in the century, states reacted to a concern about the welfare of the entire population and finally, during the Cold War, to a concern for civilian morale. But he argued that the nature of defense needs influenced the character of social services all along, the reason

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being that states were constrained to prove they had something better to offer than their enemies.

Max Weber was a leading proponent of linking domestic and foreign policy. According to Karl Marx, Bismarck adopted an essentially international policy, one designed to use reforms to contain class struggles within nation-states. In the United States, both Michael Sherry and Lloyd Gardner demonstrated elite awareness of the relationship of foreign policy and militarization to the New Deal.

Early 20th Century elite consent to social welfare was motivated by a juxtaposition of international strategic concerns and domestic demands from British Fabian socialists, German social democrats and U.S. depression-era social movements. This brief account validates the role of exogenous structural effects on national social welfare. The advent of the Cold War strengthened these effects.

After mounting strong postwar social movements to strengthen social protections, it was natural for labor and left activists to take credit for social welfare achievements, and assume they were imposed on elites. The passive role of the consent of key corporate liberal elites was obscured by the active opposition of other elites. As a result, some of those gains represented Pyrrhic victories. First, they were accompanied by deplorable levels of military expenditures. Second, there may have been an hidden sunset provision, ready to be invoked when elite consent was significantly reduced at three key historical points: (1) during the early 1970's economic and welfare crisis, when reduced expenditures became essential for global competitiveness, (2) when the Cold War began to wind down, and a linked guns and butter strategy became a less essential aspect of national security, and (3) when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, accentuating the earlier effects of both globalization and altered national security requirements.

Gosta Esping-Anderson has pointed out that the causal influence of wars for the welfare state remains a neglected issue in the large literature of welfare state origins. The same logic applies to the role of Cold War. But that logic may have been obscured by the inimical relationship of social welfare and bloated levels of military spending. It would have been counterintuitive to conclude that the Cold War indirectly stimulated the growth of the welfare state. After all, at any one time, advocates for military and social expenditures competed with each other for their share of national budgets. These peace and social welfare struggles shaped our historical perceptions. They made it harder to recognize that over the course of the Cold War these two budget items were both rising rather steadily as part of an effort to build strong capitalist democracies capable of fending off state socialist advances. An untold story of the Cold War may be how national security elites relied upon weapons of mass destruction but also recognized that social welfare policies helped put a human face on capitalism.

Was the welfare state as we have known it an historical anomaly? Was it a structural artifact of the Cold War? Paradoxically, was the consent of U.S. national security elites key? Did we really have a warfare-welfare state as O'Connor and Lasswell argued?

Counterfactually, what if a strong Soviet Union had not survived W.W. II? What if there was no Cold War? Would the postwar welfare state have grown as it did?

If neo-liberal elites continue to withdraw their consent, how can we build an anti-racist, pro-human need and anti-nuclear weapon majority that can impose a defeat on elite opponents of social welfare?

If we can begin to answer such questions, we will be better equipped to wage a struggle to link peace and social welfare once and for all. ■

## BCRS Members in Action

The Human Service Workers' Rights Initiative is celebrating the presentation of the *Human Disservice Award* to acting Massachusetts Governor Cellucci. 15 Human service activists presented the award on Friday, October 9th at the Swissotel in Boston, as other HS workers protested outside. The presentation was made at a packed Chamber of Commerce candidate forum. Activists unfurled a banner and read the following proclamation:

"Ladies and Gentlemen ....  
Hear Ye, Hear Ye, Hear Ye.

We present this Human Disservice Award to acting Governor A. Paul Cellucci for vetoing \$ 6.5 million in pay raises for human service workers. How can you say you care about working families when during your watch human services pay has shrunk 22%? Paul Cellucci, you truly deserve this award."

Demonstrators were then escorted from the Hotel. Media coverage of this event was awesome. The presentation was carried by channels 5 and 56, WBUR radio, the Boston Globe and possibly others. The plight of human service workers is starting to be seen by the public. Now is the time to keep the pressure on!

The Human Service Workers' Rights Initiative is an organization of human service workers dedicated to improving working conditions, wages, and quality of care standards. The Initiative's goal over the next year will be to continue to push for a living wage for human service workers. The first step will be to introduce legislation to raise human services wages by 22% so they are comparable with 1989 levels.

The plight of human service workers is starting to be seen by the public. Now is the time to keep the pressure on! contact Rick Colbath-Hess (617) 354-6471, E-mail: RCCOLHESS @ aol.com

# REFLECTIONS ON A VISIT TO SOUTH AFRICA

— by David G. Gil, Co-Chair, Socialist Party USA

Visiting post-apartheid South Africa excites and humbles anyone committed to human liberation and social equality, because in this society a social movement has achieved through praxis over many decades what others merely dream and philosophize about. Yet visiting South Africa causes also serious concerns, because of continuous widespread poverty and persistent social and economic inequalities, results of past colonialism and racial apartheid, and contemporary exploitative domestic and globalized capitalism.

I visited South Africa during October 1998 at the invitation of the Ministry of Welfare and Population Development to present a keynote address at a conference of Southern African countries on Developmental Social Welfare. My message to the conference was that developmental social welfare ought to aim to overcome the institutional causes of poverty, rather than merely to treat its symptoms as conventional social services do. Furthermore, I suggested that social service workers ought to define their practice as a political process aimed at building social movements to pursue comprehensive transformations of consciousness, values, and exploitative social and economic institutions. Such ideas tend to be labeled in the United States as naive, utopian, and subversive when voiced at conferences. In South Africa, my message was received enthusiastically and was endorsed at the conference by the Minister for Welfare and Population Development, Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, a leading member of the South African Communist Party which she represents in the Government of National Unity.

South Africa has a genuinely democratic Constitution that guarantees not only civil and political rights, but also comprehensive social and economic rights. Moreover, critical political discourse is carried on freely

and widely. However, social and economic deprivation are widespread among large segments of the population. About half the people suffer extreme poverty; unemployment is officially about 30% (50% for black women); discrimination against women is still widespread; violence and crime are spreading and intensifying; begging in public spaces by black and white, poor, unemployed people is widespread; and many white people opt to emigrate. While apartheid by race has been overcome, South Africa is now experiencing de-facto social and economic apartheid. Affluent people, including a growing black middle class, many of whom have returned from exile and are occupying high positions in government, tend to live in walled-in, often electronically protected, homes, while many millions live in black townships in severely sub-standard conditions, often lacking clean water and sanitation. The central dilemma confronting the new democratic South Africa is whether the revolution which overcame racial apartheid will continue and overcome social and economic apartheid.

South Africa is a very wealthy country when wealth is measured as the aggregate of realizable human capacities and natural resources, rather than as capital concentrated in the hands of economic elites. At present, most of South Africa's real wealth is wasted or controlled and exploited by domestic and foreign corporations. The government (i.e., the alliance of the African National Congress — ANC, the South African Communist Party — SACP, and the Congress of South African Trade Unions — COSATU) acknowledges the destructive realities of the society, searches for solutions, and pursues policies and programs designed to ease these realities. Thabo Mbeki, an ANC leader in exile for many decades and

currently the Deputy President of the country, developed the concept of an "African Renaissance" as a frame of reference for policy formulation. His partner, Zanele Mbeki, is a feminist activist who imagined and created a Women's Development Bank She studied with me many years ago and taught me much about critical theory and praxis. During my visit, I had opportunities to talk with her and to attend an ANC celebration of Albertina Sisulu's 80th birthday. Based on my conversations with Zanele Mbeki, I am convinced that she, her husband, and many movement activists are committed to continue the process toward comprehensive human liberation, but that they encounter serious domestic and foreign obstacles in their efforts.

Major domestic obstacles are the capitalist organization and ideology of the economy and society. Furthermore, most productive resources of the country continue to be owned and controlled by affluent members of the white minority and foreign corporations. Enterprises tend to produce for export to global markets, rather than for meeting the real needs of the people of South Africa. To succeed in the competition for market shares, they aim to lower the prices of their products by holding down the wages of workers and lowering their standard of living. Another serious domestic obstacle to the transformation and liberation process is the seductiveness of affluent life styles to which large numbers of the black middle class, including many government officials, are attracted, instead of advocating and practicing a simple life style.

To overcome the internal obstacles and to transcend social and economic class apartheid, South Africa would have to reorient its economy toward production geared to meet the real needs of its population. It would also have to involve unemployed workers in democratically, self-managed enterprises similar to the "Modragon" cooperatives in Spain. Such worker

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cooperatives could produce quality homes, necessary infrastructure, community facilities, schools and cultural facilities, medical facilities, and essential consumer goods and services. They would require skills training, equipment and materials, to be provided from public resources.

South Africa has not yet been able to reorient its economy along the common-sense lines sketched here, because of foreign obstacles, i.e., the dynamics of globalized capitalist markets which serve the profit interests of dominant classes of the United States and other "developed countries." These dynamics underlie the structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, into which South Africa is presently trapped along with other developing countries in Africa and elsewhere. The United States pressures South Africa to conform to these dynamics, as is illustrated by the following headline of a story in the *BUSINESS DAY* (Johannesburg, October 21, 1998): "U.S. official urges swift action to curb labor's power in SA."

For South Africa to extricate itself from the dynamics and institutions of globalized capitalism, it would have to develop economic and political cooperation and trade with similarly dominated and exploited developing countries in Africa and elsewhere. To achieve such transformations of its domestic and foreign policies, South Africa needs a social movement committed to continue the revolutionary process initiated by the ANC and other anti-apartheid forces. The socialist movement and other progressive forces in the United States and elsewhere ought to be partners of such a liberation movement. We, in this country, ought to work toward transforming US policies and practices toward liberating our own people and toward facilitating the liberation struggles of societies in developing countries. ■

## Globalization II: Why Confusion Reigns on the Left

*"Tis all in peeces, all cohaerence gone."*

John Donne (1611)

Joel Blau's Spring 1998 *BCR Report* essay on "globalization of the economy" reminds us of this theme's growing importance. The same message is conveyed when Pat Buchanan and Edward Herman, the oddest of political bedfellows, agree that global developments threaten America's future.

Yet, as Blau notes, some Leftists still question whether globalization's core components – unregulated relocation of production facilities and acceleration of world capital flows – really are of strategic magnitude. Others fail to see the connection between global change and salient domestic issues.

My purpose here is to explain why globalization's transformative impact has so often been denied, misperceived, or understated. The basic problem appears to be that the velocity of change, coupled with its regressive political consequences, have profoundly muddled progressive expectations about the prospects for social betterment.

Assumptions about unending social progress were of course inherent in the Enlightenment, but received their most plausible political expression in the early post-World War II period, when labor and its allies seemed to have developed unstoppable momentum. This same conclusion also (mis)informed the work of so-called "power resource" theorists, whose optimistic conclusions (based largely on postwar Swedish experience) also buoyed progressive morale. In short, for a long time it appeared that liberal reformism had been vindicated and that the counterclaims of both extreme Right and Left had been definitively refuted.

More recent developments have demonstrated otherwise. While communism has indeed been consigned to history's dustbin, the Right has made a comeback inconceivable in the halcyon days of the Keynesian welfare state. Particularly alarming has been the emergence of transnational corporations (TNCs) and internationalized finance, which have ferociously challenged social democratic assumptions. Indeed, the new capitalism seems intent, not merely on "hollowing out" the welfare state, but on fashioning an entirely "new world order" based on regional trading blocs and international free trade agreements. The definitive dimensions of this transformation can still only be glimpsed.

Nevertheless, it seems cogent to emphasize the need for political flexibility. While Blau may well be correct in asserting that regaining the political initiative will take a generation, modern history, as summarized here, demonstrates the sudden reversibility of structural trends once confidently deemed irreversible. The stunning Asian debacle suggests that globalization itself may be vulnerable to this pattern. Girding for the long haul, progressives will thus also need to remain alert to developments at least as unanticipated as those alluded to in these comments.

– David H. Katz, Michigan State University

# BERTHA REYNOLDS SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE ANNOUNCES NEW MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR

Earlier this year, the BCRS Membership Committee put out a request for volunteers to help establish a better e-mail distribution list and to help further develop the membership database. We are happy to report that Carrie Combs Dalrymple of the Boston area has agreed to serve as the new membership coordinator. More about Carrie and her plans for improving our Society's membership work below. But for now, welcome aboard Carrie!

For the last few years, the membership database was painstakingly updated on a monthly basis by Sharren Wells of Edmonds, Washington. Sharren received her MSW from California State University, Long Beach, where she first learned about Bertha and the Society. There she met one of the Society's founding members, Chauncey A. Alexander. Her activism has been in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual issues, AIDS, and Interpersonal violence.

Having thus moved the Society's membership process in a new and significant direction, Sharren let everyone know earlier this year that she wanted this to be the last year that she was responsible for the database. She has said that after a fall sabbatical she wants to continue to be active in the Membership Committee in one capacity or another starting in January. That's great Sharren, and thanks so much for your patient and loyal service to the members over the last few years!

If you still haven't sent in your estimated pro-rated dues to bring your membership up through May Day 1999, take a look at the expiration date on the label of this newsletter and send in your pro-rated dues today.

The membership may not know how much work goes into this, and we wanted to take the chance to let other members know what we do. In addition to maintaining this database, Marilyn Moch in New York City visits the mailbox at least once a month and opens all the mail personally. She sends the dues checks to the treasurer and the membership forms to the membership coordinator. She also responds to requests for organizing

packets, brochures, requests for information, and makes sure that "welcome new member" letters are sent out. Marilyn has been doing this along with her other BCRS, NASW and Committee on Human Rights Inquiry activism. That's on top of her job for many years with the New York City public welfare system! Thanks Marilyn! Marilyn is moving to Seattle this fall, but has found a volunteer to open the Post Office box in New York City and send her the mail. She will now be sending the checks to our new Treasurer, Susan Collins of the Houston chapter and the membership forms to Carrie! There are a lot of people working behind the scenes to keep the Society's membership work on track.

When the membership form gets to the membership coordinator, the database is updated. The new database is being done by Carrie in Filemaker Pro Version 4.0 on an Apple computer. A back up is kept in Filemaker Pro 4.0 for Windows by Mike Dover in Ann Arbor, who downloads the information when preparing the Membership Directory. Mike was the membership coordinator from 1985-1991 and remains active in the committee. But he too is seeking a volunteer to take over preparing the Membership Directory, with the hopes that this can be done yearly instead of every other year. Any volunteers? See below how to offer to help!

Fritz Naylor of Kalamazoo has also been active as the chairperson of the membership committee and has attended several steering committee meetings as well as bringing the perspective of his experience with one of the Society's most active chapters. By the way, volunteers donate their own computer hardware, but are reimbursed for periodic upgrades of the database software, for supplies

such as labels, for postage and shipping when mailing materials, and for phone expenses when reaching other members to confirm addresses, update information, etc. So if you become a membership committee volunteer, you'll be busy but you won't go broke doing it!

Carrie plans improvements to the database, which should soon enable better e-mail lists. To have your e-mail address added to the database or to update your U.S. Mail address, please e-mail Carrie at the following email address: [ccd@wn.net](mailto:ccd@wn.net). She'll copy and paste your address to the database! Carrie is interested in how technology can be used in social work and nonprofit organizations to further the work of community organizing and base building for organizations. Carrie invites everyone to please feel free to contact her via e-mail with ideas and suggestions ([ccd@wn.net](mailto:ccd@wn.net)) or call (617) 629-0113.

One of the most satisfying things about being on the membership committee of the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society is having the privilege of reading the comments made by members when they join and renew their memberships. These comments are periodically forwarded to the Steering Committee. Although they contain a range of praise and suggestions and criticism, it's quite apparent that Society membership is something which is very important to many of us. If you would like to become active on the membership committee, and help us find ways to build a more diverse and effective membership organization, please let one of us know! E-mail Carrie at the above address or e-mail Mike at [m Dover@umich.edu](mailto:m Dover@umich.edu) or call Mike at (734) 663-6972. We'd love to hear from you or work with you! ■

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## News from BCRS Authors

David Gil has published a new book, *Confronting Injustice and Oppression: Concepts and Strategies for Social Workers*. (Columbia University Press, 1998).

David Wagner has won the Northeast Popular Culture Association's 1998 book award for his book, *The New Temperance: The American Obsession with Sin and Vice* (Westview, 1997).

## 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

## 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. ■

## CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT

The fifth annual Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed conference will be held from June 3-5 at CUNY in New York City. E-mail: [coconism@gvsu.edu](mailto:coconism@gvsu.edu) or [tcluset@pop3.utoledo.edu](mailto:tcluset@pop3.utoledo.edu) for more information. Or check out the URL about the conference: <http://www.unomaha.edu/~pto/ptoonference.htm>

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*\*Chapter Contact Person*

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

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