

BCR REPORTS

A Publication of the
Social Welfare Action Alliance

Volume XVII, Number 1

November, 2005

Right Wing Group Attacks Social Work Education

As part of a continuing assault on public education and social work by this country's well-founded conservative movement, the National Association of Scholars (NAS) called on the US Department of Education to investigate the fitness of the CSWE and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) as the accrediting bodies for professional education in the two fields.

In a press release announcing the letter, NAS President Stephen Balch stated "Anyone not immediately familiar with these organizations' accreditation standards will likely be very surprised and troubled by the unabashed political tests they mandate for accredited institutions... In both instances, students can be required to embrace a particular view of 'progressive social change,' and even to become political activists in the pursuit of it. Of course, this is where many students will balk, if they happen to have a different view of what 'social change' ought to be." He goes on to allege incidents in which students in education and social work have been penalized by their schools for not acting in accordance with the schools' standards and missions, reflecting the accreditation standards of CSWE and NCATE.

In response to the letter, CSWE's attorney wrote to the US Department of Education essentially to argue that NAS wrote to the wrong office. There was absolutely no assertion by CSWE that social work's value base is worth defending and that schools have an obligation to prepare students for practice in a profession based on progressive social values. The unwillingness of CSWE to make a case for its values is both appalling and unsurprising. This is, after all, the same CSWE that didn't defend its right to require accredited schools to not discriminate based on sexual orientation.

By contrast, NCATE's President wrote in defense of the right of education programs to set "conceptual frameworks" in which social justice plays a major role. The response of

NASW's Executive Director, Betsy Clark, also offered a clear statement of social work's values and of the right of a profession to educate for practice in line with those values.

It's critical that we view this latest incident as part of a larger political campaign to undermine sources of progressive thought and the institutions that offer an alternative to the dominant conservative project. Social work, while often politically compromised by its reliance on government funding and managed care strictures, still is rightly seen as an institution that represents a rejection of the Social Darwinian strains of our current political climate. And, social workers often identify with progressive views of social justice and seek to enact them within the settings in which they work. So, it's no surprise that the forces that would dismantle the welfare state would also seek to compromise the ability of schools to educate for a progressive values-based practice.

For those of us who would wish to see CSWE respond forcefully to this political assault on its role and on the values of the profession, it might be useful to write to:

Julia Watkins, Ph.D., Executive Director
Council on Social Work Education
1725 Duke Street – Suite 500
Alexandria, VA 22314

Perhaps a response from CSWE's grass roots can remind them of why we are engaged in social work education.

Fred Newdom

INSIDE:

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The Journal of Progressive Human Services (JPHS) is available to members of SWAA at a substantial discount. It can be ordered through SWAA using the application in this issue of the *BCR Reports*. Neither the JPHS collective nor SWAA are involved in subscription fulfillment; that is the responsibility of our publisher, Haworth Press. If you are a subscriber and have not received an issue, contact Kathy Rutz at 1-800-HAWORTH. To submit an article to JPHS, send four copies of your manuscript, including a short abstract to: Marcia Cohen, JPHS Collective, University of New England, School of Social Work, 716 Stevens Avenue, Portland, ME 04103. It is important that your name and any other identifying information not appear on three of these four copies. We also encourage submissions of poetry and short (500-1000 word) opinion pieces for our Soapbox column and letters to the editors.

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*For the JPHS Collective,
Marcia Cohen*

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CHAPTER REPORTS

Portland, Oregon: The SWAA Chapter at Portland State University Graduate School of Social Work (GSSW) has been meeting regularly this Fall as we develop some focus around our enthusiasm. After being a presence at the new student orientation, SWAA organized a tour of Dignity Village, the city's officially recognized tent city. Villagers shared their views of the 'helping' profession and what they thought new social workers will need to know to do their jobs well. This relationship continued into the semester when a representative from the Village came to speak at the GSSW. Other SWAA activists have been involved with campus efforts to address anti-Semitic commentary in the campus newspaper, and recruiting people to support the Radical Women's clinic defense efforts at the Lovejoy Center. Also, recent efforts to promote anti-military recruiting generated substantial dialogue about the impact of protests on service men and women. Future efforts include bringing a speaker to campus, and utilizing the efforts of an upcoming community organizing class to assist in the development of a larger project, yet to be determined. For more information about the Portland chapter, contact Bill Boyd at swaapdx@hotmail.com.

Rochester, New York: This fall, the Rochester chapter worked with the local NASW chapter as well as the Federation of Social Workers (the union that represents county workers in the Department of Human Services) to distribute our 2005 voter education/registration brochures. Every member of our county legislature (because of new term limits) was up for re-election. Member Susan Ruhlin was particularly active in voter registration work.

In October we ran another Reality Tour. We had a full bus; many of the 40 passengers came from suburban church groups. This time we tried to include a few more "consumers" of social services, and added a speaker on Medicaid and lead paint poisoning. This Tour was co-sponsored by the local NASW chapter. In fact, a week before the Tour we had an op-ed article published in the Rochester newspaper that was also endorsed by the Federation of Social Workers as

well as the NASW chapter — no small feat! This article focused on challenging our County Executive's recent assertions that the reason the County budget is running such a deficit was due to social services.

In the month of November, Rochester SWAA sponsored two screenings of the documentary, "Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price," both on the SUNY Brockport campus and the downtown SUNY Metro Center. For more information about the Rochester chapter, contact Melissa Sydor at melmas1@yahoo.com.

Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts: The Bertha Reynolds Chapter of SWAA, housed at Smith College School for Social Work, continued its role of collaborating with campus based social justice groups to support a range of activities. Working with the Disability Awareness Group, SWAA co-sponsored Mad in America II, an exploration of alternatives to traditional approaches to working with people with mental illness. Speakers included Robert Whitaker, author of *Mad In America* and Will Hall and Cheryl Alexander of the Freedom Center, a consumer-run advocacy and service organization for people who have been diagnosed with mental illness. Jointly, with the Jewish Students Group, SWAA supported a fund-raising effort for a local community center aimed at providing school supplies to low-income children. In the area of poverty, SWAA co-sponsored, with the School and the Jewish Students Group, a panel discussion on the role of social workers in working with the movement to end poverty as led by poor people. Panelists included Willie Baptist and Liz Theoharis of the KWRU University of the Poor and Holly Richardson of the Springfield, MA based Arise for Social Justice. Finally, SWAA and the Class Issues Alliance sponsored a Poverty Simulation — a version of the Reality Bus Tours popularized by KWRU and the Rochester NY SWAA chapter. The simulation was developed by the St. Louis MO welfare rights group RAWEL. For more information about the Smith College chapter, contact Fred Newdom at fnewdom@nycap.rr.com.

HOW TO ORGANIZE A SWAA CHAPTER:

Any group of 10 current SWAA members can create a Chapter. "How to Organize a SWAA Chapter" organizing packets are available from the SWAA website at www.socialwelfareactionalliance.org or by contacting Melissa Sydor at melmas1@yahoo.com or 585-262-4366. The contents of the packets include such things as posters, brochures, book order forms, recent newsletters, copy of by-laws, names of SWAA organizers from the Steering Committee who will help you, and much more! Please allow four weeks for delivery.

POOR PEOPLE'S ECONOMIC HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN

www.economichumanrights.org

SWAA has been named to the Coordinating Council of the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC). The PPEHRC brings together over 100 organizations working to end poverty. It was initiated by the Kensington Welfare Rights Union, and KWRU cofounder Cheri Honkala is now the national coordinator of PPEHRC. Most of the PPEHRC member organizations are of, by, and for people living in poverty; all of the organizations pledge to support the program of the poor as articulated in the PPEHRC mission statement (see www.economichumanrights.org). SWAA joined the campaign several years ago, and is the only organization in PPEHRC whose membership is not predominately from the ranks of people living in poverty. SWAA founding member Mary Bricker-Jenkins will serve as the liaison between SWAA and the PPEHRC, and will represent SWAA on the Coordinating Council.

Poor
People's
Economic
Human
Rights
Campaign

Cleveland, Ohio
June 2006
USA
National
Truth
Commission

A Truth Commission is a place where we can tell the truth about what's happening in our country. It is a place where we will shine a light on the economic human rights violations that we're forced to struggle through each day. A Truth Commission is also a place where we will identify the human rights violators-- those who keep us without food, clothing, housing, healthcare, education, communication, and living wage jobs, here in the richest country in the world.

National Truth Commission
www.economichumanrights.org

SWAA Membership Report

Members from all over Canada and the United States form the backbone of the Social Welfare Action Alliance. Recently, the Membership Committee has made some changes that will make things easier for members to join and stay connected with fellow SWAA members.

Membership will be on a calendar year. Members and past members should see letters in their mailboxes in December 2005. Please take this opportunity to renew your membership and to reaffirm your work and beliefs in social and economic justice.

Annual membership rates are as follows: Regular, \$35; Student and low-income, \$10; Sustaining, \$100. Lifetime members may join or renew for \$250.

The Membership Committee is also looking for volunteers interested in outreach and chapter-building. Please contact Jennifer Filipovich at jmfilipovich@hotmail.com.

Mike Dover and Jennifer Filipovich, Membership Committee Co-chairs

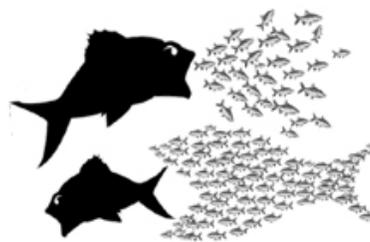
Recent Actions

1. Provided financial support for the People's Institute for Shelter and Beyond for their post-Katrina recovery efforts (www.pisab.org)
2. Endorsed the Coalition for Human Needs' opposition to congress' proposed cuts to vital services (www.chn.org)
3. Opposed the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA)

"The real choice before us as social workers is whether we are to be passive or active... We must first of all know that we have allies.... In using the organizations we have we shall find others in the community also fighting in organized ways for the same issues in human welfare."

*Bertha Capen Reynolds
Social Work and Social Living, p. 175-6*

See www.socialwelfareactionalliance.org for a list of available titles from Bertha Capen Reynolds



S.S.W.A.P.S., Student Social Workers' Alliance for a Progressive Society, is an organization of student social workers committed to reclaiming the social justice tradition through advocacy and activism.

S.S.W.A.P.S. members believe that the challenge for contemporary social workers is to raise the political consciousness of all people with whom we work and to engage in collective social action. As social workers, we are ethically obligated to take action to ensure ample resources and access to services. S.S.W.A.P.S. encourages students from all methods to participate in our educational forums and social actions. These activities include supporting student advocacy efforts, sponsoring teach-ins on social justice issues, mobilizing students for demonstrations, working in coalition on critical issues, and promoting anti-oppressive dialog in a variety of settings.

For upcoming events and information visit: www.sswaps.org

SWAA Faculty Network

The Faculty Network met for a brief yet lively breakfast meeting at the SWAA conference in Toledo during the National Conference. Twelve people were present at the meeting, several were new to the network. They included Jim Williams, Savannah State; Mary Bricker-Jenkins, Temple; Manoj Pardasani, Indiana University; David McKell, Northern Arizona; Daysi Mejia, Florida Gulf Coast University; Elizabeth Traver, Clarke; Lisa Hines, San Francisco State University; Hank Liese, University of Utah; Herman Curiel, Oklahoma University; Katherine Palazzolo-Miller, Ferris State; Mike Dover, Central Michigan; Joan Dworkin (Coordinator of the Faculty Network), California State University, Sacramento.

The group discussed various possible activities of the faculty network and ways of publicizing SWAA and the network. There was a sense at the conference and at the faculty network meeting that publicizing SWAA was a priority. Hank Liese and Lisa Hines volunteered to work together on flyers and publicity pieces that would be user ready for faculty in their schools.

Several program ideas were introduced. There was a discussion about having awards to honor a social work program each year that exemplifies the spirit of Bertha Reynolds/SWAA and or promotes economic and social justice. There could be different types of awards that are given to individuals and programs. This could increase the visibility of SWAA and recognize programs that exemplify the values and goals of SWAA. Members of the faculty network can become consultants to people who are starting SWAA chapters in their area. It was also suggested that faculty network members teaching community practice pool syllabi. The group discussed setting up a speaker's bureau. Katherine Palazzolo-Miller of Ferris State University agreed to collect the names and coordinate requests. Four people at the meeting indicated areas of expertise: Jim Williams-Savannah State-community, labor; Manoj Pardasani- Indiana NW-HIV/AIDS, homelessness, international action; Dave McKell- Northern Arizona U. - liberation theology, peace; Mary Bricker-Jenkins- Temple- economic human rights in social work. Other ideas for expanding SWAA were to encourage each member get a member, issue position statements so people know what SWAA stands for, and possibly have a SWAA legislative day.

An issue that was raised at the general meeting membership meeting had been referred to the faculty network for discussion: are progressive faculty at universities being ostracized at this time because of the national political climate? There was anecdotal conversation about examples of faculty members who had problems getting tenure because of their views. There was general agreement that if there were faculty experiencing such difficulties, faculty network members could provide support and consultation as well as assistance with getting published.

There will be a meeting of the faculty network in Chicago during the weekend of February 16-19 when the Annual Program Meeting of CSWE is scheduled. Joan Dworkin and Mike Dover will look into arranging space.

Joan Dworkin, Coordinator

WE WANT YOU TO SUBMIT...

... articles for the next BCR Reports!!

Please forward all contributions for the next to:

Bill Boyd, Editor
4047 NE 13th Avenue
Portland, OR 97212

E-mail: bikerbillboyd@hotmail.com
(E-mail submissions are preferable)
Phone: 503-280-1251

FAX: 503-232-4640

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

Please note: The deadline for materials submitted for inclusion in the next *BCR Reports* is **February 15, 2006.**



Social Welfare Action Alliance

SWAA Book Fund Submission Policy

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

Forward submission requests to:

Laura Walther
c/o SWAA Book Fund
Columbus Circle Station
P.O. Box 20563
New York, New York 10023

National Conference 2005: Toledo, Ohio

Social Darwinism as a Force in Social Welfare

Among the many wonderful presentations at the recent SWAA conference hosted by the University of Toledo was a workshop titled the “Reemergence of Social Darwinism as a Force in Social Welfare.” The intent of the workshop was to create a context where a once predominant value could be discussed in its current form. A small but enthusiastic group of attendees offered their views of this topic.

The presenters, Drs. Luther Brown and David A. Ellenbrook, set the tone for the workshop by highlighting their emerging views of the topic. Social Darwinism as a guiding principle for policy decisions will never be overtly stated in today’s political culture for fear of backlash. However, astute observers can detect its influence. Much of what happens to the poor is attributed to a lack of political power, but our interpretation of the dynamics is that the least fit amongst us are being exploited because of prevailing views of who they are and their inherent worth. They further noted that self-reliance is a desirable value that is firmly embedded in the collective psyche of the United States. This value is conveniently espoused when needed to promote the interest of the business sector of our society. For example, when businesses needed a cheap labor pool, politicians gave them welfare reform that forced under-prepared recipients to enter the world of work without clear-cut pathways for upward mobility. Similar trends emerge from current policies to exploit “undocumented individuals” simply to satisfy business rather than human interests. Very few sanctions are employed when businesses hire and use undocumented immigrants. Such policies and practices are casts in the name of self-reliance when, in fact, they serve to ensure the survival of businesses as the “most fit” when compared with the poor and exploited, the “least fit.”

Other policies and practices that suggest that the poor are unworthy of survival and render them into life at the margins include the outsourcing of “good” jobs, the desire to deconstruct the Social Security system and the effort to build a prison industrial complex. We are willing to provide “full scholarships” for prisoners (food, shelter, clothing and other incidentals) for 20 years or more without effective means of rehabilitation, so that the effective time frame is unlimited. The silence is deafening as few complaints are forthcoming. However, if similar levels of funds were provided to poor and minority citizens for college, such would be labeled as affirmative action or quotas and would be vehemently opposed by politicians and some members of the general citizenry alike.

Other areas ripe for additional analysis include the trend toward writing off or dismissing the needs of urban America (the predominant residence of the poor), the location of hazardous sites in the communities of vulnerable populations, and the willingness to tolerate extremely high dropout rates among minority group school attendees. The dropout rate amongst high school students is at epidemic proportions in the poor and minority communities. Yet such conditions do not alarm many members of our society. We are willing to over-

look this dynamic, attributing its existence to “saving our schools for those who are ready to learn.” Translations — those who have the innate capacity to learn — succeed, and move up the socioeconomic ladder will gain acceptance within our public school system.

Of particular concern to social welfare professionals is the push to use “faith-based organizations” and volunteers to meet the needs of the poor. Such practices suggest the use of the interventionists who are not professionally educated or “trained” in a helping discipline when attempting to satisfy the needs of the poor. In other words, the merit system is abandoned under circumstances pertaining to the poor and to those who have committed their professional lives to helping poor people to meet their needs in a dignified manner. The poor appear not worthy of attention from professionals in the field of social work. This is not an attack on the religious community, but an attempt to show the possible influence of Darwinian notions within the social welfare system.

One of two small groups within the workshop offered its views of Social Darwinism in the field of education. The group cited the acceptance of relatively low levels of academic performance that is seen as “good” or “better” as a glaring dynamic in our educational system. The group further concluded that the “myth of the free market in education” is operative. The “free market” in education is based on tax support that is tied to property values and thus is designed to leave people out economically and socially.

The second small group sought to explore the application of neo-Darwinism in Social Security (Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance-OASDI). The privatization of this public domain could lead to a practice where the expectation for all of the affected groups — seniors, surviving spouses with children, those who are or who become disabled — is that they will work or engage in vocational rehabilitation which will lead to a job.

This workshop created opportunities for participants to identify and discuss current policies and practices that increase the range of unmet needs experienced by those who exist at the margins of our society. The multifaceted tentacles of human exploitation in the name of self-reliance must be uncovered and exposed to those willing to take decisive action aimed at halting such practices. The foundation for a plan of action by SWAA was pondered.

David Ellenbrook



SAVE THE DATE!

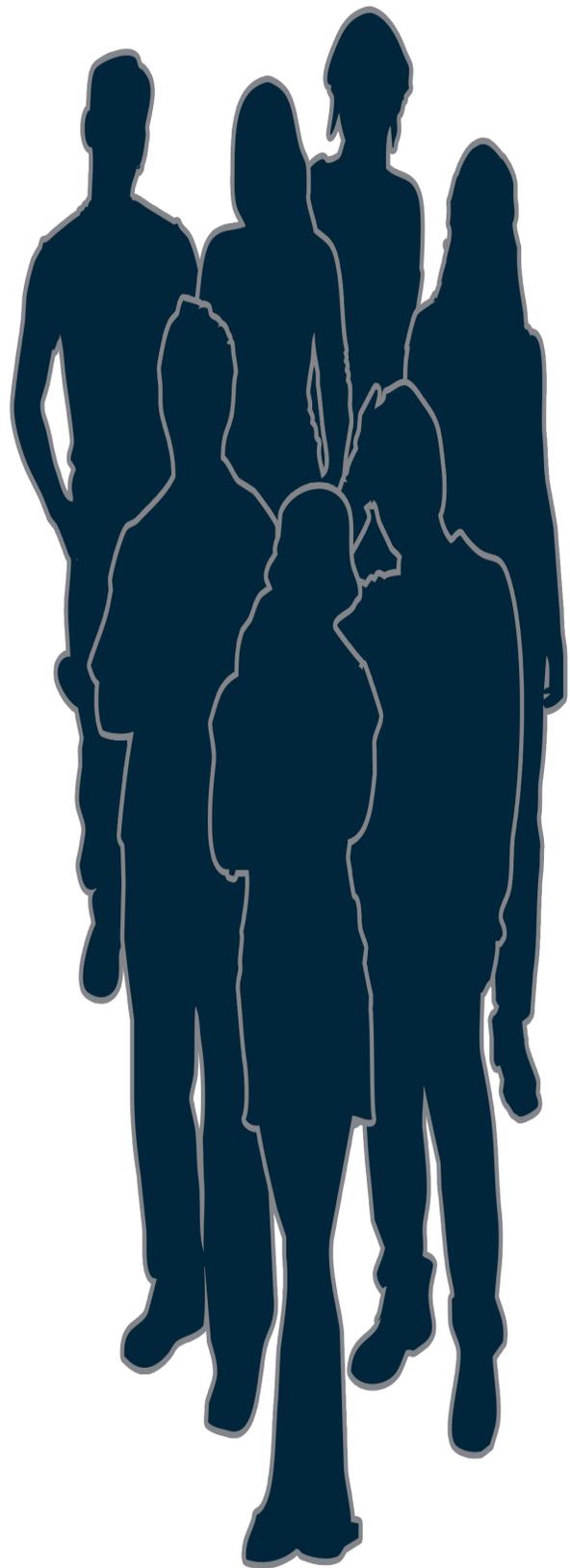
National Conference 2006: Chicago, Illinois June 16 - 17, 2006

The SWAA Conference Planning Committee has finalized the plan to meet in the Windy City June 16 – 17, 2006. Loyola University will act as host, and have offered a great deal of support. Herman Curiel, committee chairperson, is finalizing arrangements with Loyola to ensure a smooth and engaging event. To date, three local social work schools have been part of the planning discussions – Loyola, University of Illinois – Chicago, and Chicago State. The committee appreciates their involvement to date, and look to involve all the local schools and local agencies and community organizations. To become involved in conference planning, contact Herman at hcuriel@ou.edu.

CONFERENCE CO-CHAIR EARNS HONOR

In October 2005, Herman Curiel, co-chair for the upcoming 2006 SWAA Conference in Chicago, was honored for his work as a social work educator by the Oklahoma University School of Social Work and Oklahoma Board of Visitors.

Among the many accomplishments for which he received the award is his service on many university committees and community boards, many of them involving HIV/AIDS, including being the Co-Principal Investigator with the US-Mexico Special Programs of National Significance. Quoting from the award program: “Starting out as a poor Mexican-American boy in Corpus Christi, Texas who did not speak English, he took his grandmother’s advice: She told him to get enough education so that he could get a job that would protect him from the weather. Dr. Curiel says Rhyne Hall at Oklahoma University has provided a good roof for him.”



info@socialwelfareactionalliance.org

Remembrances

CHAUNCEY ALEXANDER: ROLE MODEL AND INSPIRATION

If each generation has a responsibility to lift high the torch of economic and social justice and pass it on, we can all learn how to carry that torch from Chauncey Alexander.

A founding member of the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society (now SWAA) who never let his membership to either SWAA or the Journal of Progressive Human Services lapse, Chauncey's social work activism dates back to at least the 1940s rank-and-file movement. Mike Dover recalls, "The last time I saw Chauncey Alexander was at CSWE in 2004. I asked him about the role of the 1940s rank-and-file movement social workers in the founding of NASW in the mid-1950s. He had a simple answer: 'We demanded unity.'"

As the Executive Director of NASW from 1969 to 1982, I remember Chauncey for his launching of NASW's Political Action for Candidate Election (PACE) in 1976, and for establishing the Office of Peace and International Affairs in NASW, with Eileen Kelly as Director of the Office. Though his activities with the International Federation of Social Workers predated my involvement with the IFSW, I became involved because of his legacy. Finally, this idiosyncratic obituary notes Chauncey's role as the founding president of the First Amendment Foundation in 1985.

The activities of the Office of Peace and International Affairs under Eileen Kelly represented the only initiative that got me involved in NASW. Among her many activities, Eileen established the Violence and Development Project, a creative look at the many facets of violence — natural disasters, drugs, poverty, ethnic conflict, domestic violence — and their effect on community development. Although Chauncey was no longer the Executive Director during the Project, his impact was clearly visible through Eileen's efforts. At an organizational meeting of the six Centers of Violence and Development chapters throughout the country, I looked around me in amazement, realizing that the organizers of five of the centers — along with Eileen and her project coordinator Dorothy VanSoest — were members of BCRS. Indeed, Chauncey's efforts were about uniting social workers.

When Chauncey became the Executive Director of NASW, he made many changes to improve the relationship between the IFSW and NASW. While recalling this time, he said: "At my first meeting of the IFSW Delegate Assembly, I was taken aback with two situations: the deep hostility to the United States' past control, a kind of colonial mentality which tended to be fed back to international US agencies; and the great opportunity for social workers to influence international policy and indirectly to influence our own conservative US agencies on their approach to social problems." Chauncey researched the existing codes of ethics of international social work organizations and constructed a draft code for the IFSW. The final Code was accepted in 1976 and was widely used by many countries, including serving as the basis for a complete revision of the NASW Code of Ethics.

In 1978, Chauncey developed the IFSW policy statement on Human Rights. IFSW activism in human rights led to the establishment in 1988 of the IFSW Human Rights Commission, where I served as the Commissioner for North America from 1996-2005.

Chauncey's continuing involvement with the First Amendment Foundation led to the Committee for International Human Rights Inquiry, of which I am co-chair and which is an affiliate of SWAA. CIHRI also became a member of the National Committee Against Repressive Legislation (formerly The National Committee to Abolish HUAC), the political action committee of the Foundation.

Chauncey Alexander died on August 30, 2005 at age 89.

Marilynn Moch

REMEMBERING JANICE ANDREWS-SCHNEK

The Social Welfare Action Alliance has lost a valuable member. Janice Peterson Andrews-Schnek, who taught social work at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota, passed away at her home with her family on May 26, 2005, following a long and courageous battle with pancreatic cancer. Janice was co-author with Michael Reisch of *The Road Not Taken: A History of Radical Social Work in the United States*. The book includes important accounts of rank-and-file social work activism up to and including the founding of the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society and the subsequent renaming as the Social Welfare Action Alliance. She also authored numerous articles in the Journal of Progressive Human Services, the Social Service Review and other journals on subjects such as group work, feminism, caregiving by fathers, and social welfare history. Additionally, she worked with Michael Reisch on research on social workers during the McCarthy period, and published research on Helen Hall, Marion Hathway, & Mary Van Kleeck, three social workers who exemplified the legacy of social action by women during the period of 1920-1955. Janice joined SWAA in 1997 and despite her illness renewed her membership in Fall 2004. She will be remembered.

The following additional material was provided by an obituary published by her university: She was preceded in death by her father. She is survived by her loving family: husband, Carl Schnek; son, Jonathan (Dawn) Andrews, San Diego; step-sons, Peter Schnek (Tracy); and Tim (Amy) Schnek; mother Gwen Peterson; brother, Jerry Peterson (Judy); sister, Bonnie Peterson; 3 step-grandchildren, Ryann, Ethan and Abigail Schnek; and nieces, nephew, aunts, uncle and extended family. She had a wide group of close friends from grade school, high school, college, and graduate school, as well as close neighbors and colleagues. Jan loved life and lived it to the fullest. She found comfort and peace with her family and hard, challenging, yet fulfilling work, and hope and faith in her religion. She kept a full schedule of teaching, writing and lecturing at the University of St. Thomas where she was a professor of Social Work. She had a passion for teaching and believed in the potential of each student. She published dozens

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American Militarism and The Social Work Imagination

Social workers should have a special sensitivity to matters of war and peace. As members of the helping professions, we feel the pain of tax dollars lost from vital programs when they are poured into the military. We know what those dollars represent in squandered talent and energy. The price of American militarism also claims the lives of our disadvantaged young, pressed by economic need into joining the armed forces.

The war posture of the United States today is astounding. Ours is a military empire that supports over 725 bases in 138 foreign countries. The Department of Defense will take \$490 billion of our tax money in the next fiscal year. By conservative estimate, the United States will soon outspend the rest of the world, friend and foe *combined*, for military weaponry and personnel. Nor does that figure include the direct costs of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, which are funded by supplemental appropriations.

If we bring our minds to bear on what we can do as social workers, we can create a new voice for peace. I write this brief article as a newcomer to social work, and I have no illusions about the arduous and frustrating road ahead, pocked with ambiguity and hidden setbacks. We occupy a unique position among the helping professions, however, that can inspire our creativity. As students of the human psyche, we can analyze and confront the social and psychological dynamics that have brought our country to this abyss. As students of community and organization, we can link micro and macro in a synthesis that points the way to solutions. I offer a few suggestions for thought, argument and action, knowing that wiser and more seasoned colleagues will pick and choose among them, rejecting some but giving others life in exciting ways.

Those social workers most directly positioned to oppose militarism and the current war have jobs that put them in daily contact with youth who are vulnerable to military recruitment. Military recruiters systematically cultivate high school campuses and youth clubs in economically depressed areas with carefully crafted symbols and messages. One example is the Army's "Hispanic H2 Tour," boasting a customized Hummer replete with interactive video simulations. As the old saying in marketing has it, ads may not tell you much about the product, but they do reflect what people crave. Recruitment ads offer prestige, avenues for achievement and recognition, adventure, and mastery of powerful technologies. They also play to young men's gender identity insecurities by offering symbols of manliness.

What do we do to help young men and women in economically depressed communities to reject these dishonest pitches? Fortunately, teachers' unions and community activists are asking the same question. Just as specific communities are targeted by the military, those communities can resist — and have — as when a grassroots Latino movement in California arose to counter *militarismo* (See Roberto Lovato's "The War for Latinos," *The Nation*, October 3, 2005). We may even see broader community organizing for better schools and health care that begins in protecting the young from predatory recruit-

ing. A social work approach from the past may have some application here. Hull House taught immigrants consumer education. Military recruiters offer a prime example of manipulation by bait-and-switch advertising. Social work community educators can help our young see through slick advertising and learn the fates of real enlisted men and women lured by false promises of practical education and money for college. A good place to begin for more information would be the Project on Youth and Non-Military Opportunities (YANO, web address <http://www.projectyano.org/>), which has links to several other excellent initiatives with on-the-ground projects.

Another group of social workers placed in the front line of contact with militarism are those who work in the Veterans Administration (VA). Despite politicians' "support the troops" rhetoric, too many discharged soldiers with mental illness or substance abuse problems have been left to their own devices. The VA estimates that almost 200,000 veterans are homeless, and over the course of one year over 500,000 of them experience homelessness at least once (<http://www.nchv.org/background.cfm>). Perhaps the best place to start in learning about efforts to help them from a pro-peace stance would be Veterans for Peace (<http://www.veteransforpeace.org/>). Social workers within the VA could be subject to sanctions if they affiliate with pro-peace groups — that certainly was the concern of one VA social worker of my acquaintance. A good first step in helping vets through social work would be to review the legal rights of VA social workers and strive to strengthen them.

The thorniest question of all, though, concerns how to approach our fellow social workers who placidly accept our country's march into militarism. We all interact with them at the workplace every day. I find myself resenting their complacency deeply: they ought to know better. I have to remind myself that our society has been subjected to systematic thought control by domestic militarists for the last century or more. The previously mentioned Pentagon advertising enjoys a budget in the hundreds of millions. Their advertising agency contractors use the most sophisticated techniques for persuasion, including deals with Hollywood producers that turn movies like "Pearl Harbor" into recruiting tools. Some sixty years after it ended, World War II remains the preferred image projected by media into popular discourse. They would have us focus on the more illustrious aspects of "The Good War" and ignore all the tawdry exercises in American aggression that came before and after. The efforts have paid off for politicians and media manipulators, who enjoy quick access to fabricated positive images and feelings by invoking simple phrases. We're "strong on defense" and "protecting the American Way of Life." Right-wing fund raiser Richard Viguerie said it all: "A strong national defense is a gut issue."

Applying that helpful dictum from therapy, "Start where your client is," we need to think of ways to show the connections between our colleagues' program funding problems and military budget waste. Massive military spending has been a key element in the reactionary

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How Did We Lose New Orleans?

Katrina as Our Pearl Harbor

*Panel Discussion, Central Michigan University September 15, 2005
(prior to the address to the nation that evening by President Bush)*

We lost New Orleans because it is more than the city that care forgot. It is the city that we forgot, just like we have forgotten our nation's poorest city, Detroit, and many of our other big cities. And just like we have completely forgotten about the rural poverty which was at the height of our consciousness as a nation in the early 1960s when the War on Poverty began.

We lost New Orleans because as a nation we started fighting other wars: the Vietnam war to begin and then a Cold War with military expenditures that created economies designed for national security rather than social security. We've been neglecting the infrastructure of our cities for so long now that it was not only the levees of New Orleans that weren't reinforced, it was the water supplies, mass transit systems, electrical grids, telephone systems, and every other basic aspect of our infrastructure which were allowed to decay. And with that benign neglect of our infrastructure went savage inequality in public education, incentives for manufacturers to leave the country, the lack of a national health insurance system, and so on.

After 9/11, the nation was in mourning. We were wounded, and we fought back. But we began to fight the wrong war. We could have utilized that opportunity to truly strengthen the capability of the UN (both politically and militarily, as needed) to respond to states that harbor terrorist attacks on other nations or that engage in genocide. Indeed, the UN released a draft of a document this fall which begin to do just that, provided that the US will truly support such a course of action. After 9/11, we could have begun a world-wide war on poverty, which would have been the best way to undermine the material basis for support for terrorism, but we didn't.

The way I see it, Katrina is our Pearl Harbor. Katrina changes everything, or should. Katrina, as tragic as it is for the people of the Gulf Coast, is a clarion call, which I think will be heard. True, I'm an optimist. But it took Katrina to force President Bush to begin to take stock, and each and every day there are important new developments.

[Note: Later that evening, speaking to the nation on September 15th, the President made these notable comments: "As all of us saw on television, there is also some deep, persistent poverty in this region as well. That poverty has roots in a history of racial discrimination, which cut off generations from the opportunity of America. We have a duty to confront this poverty with bold action. So let us restore all that we have cherished from yesterday and let us rise above the legacy of inequality. When the streets are rebuilt, there should be many new businesses, including minority-owned businesses, along those streets. When the houses are rebuilt, more families should own, not rent, those houses. When the regional economy revives, local people should be prepared for the jobs being created. Americans want the Gulf Coast not just to survive, but to thrive - not just to cope, but to

overcome. We want evacuees to come home, for the best of reasons - because they have a real chance at a better life in a place they love. When one resident of this city who lost his home was asked by a reporter if he would relocate, he said, 'Naw, I will rebuild - but I'll build higher.' That is our vision for the future, in this city and beyond: we'll not just rebuild, we'll build higher and better."]

Consider this report from a Democracy Now, broadcast this Fall. Amy Goodman reported that a new USA Today Poll has found that 72 percent of African-Americans feel that President Bush does not care about the country's Black population. Sixty seven percent of white respondents say he does, and let's hope they themselves do care, and let's hope they are right about the President.

According to Goodman, President Bush denied accusations that race played any role in the government's handling of the disaster. His actual words were: "My attitude is this: the storm didn't discriminate and neither will the recovery effort. . . . When those Coast Guard choppers, many of whom were first on the scene, were pulling people off roofs, they weren't checking the color of a person's skin. They wanted to save lives."

To be fair to our sitting President, Goodman mischaracterized the President's statement. He didn't deny race played any role in the past tense, he said the recovery effort "will" not discriminate, and he denied that the Coast Guard discriminated in the past, he didn't characterize FEMA and the rest of the previous effort.

And the very next day, for the first time in his Presidency, President Bush, clearly upset and moved, admitted that he was responsible for the failings of the relief and recovery efforts and as he clearly now recognizes, for at least some unnecessary loss of life. Perhaps he could use our help to realize that we need to unite as a nation like we did after Pearl Harbor and begin to truly work to address the nation's problems in the context of the world's problems, for which we should now realize we are no longer immune.

So, yes, let's utilize this crisis to have a conversation about race and racism, but let's see the contradictory nature of the events. For every instance of racism we see in light of Katrina, there are acts of anti-racism, and real opportunities for new forms of unity amongst people of all colors in the struggles that will emerge from Katrina's devastation.

So How Can We Bring Back New Orleans and our Gulf Coast?

One after another, our most progressive elected officials are coming to the same realization. Rep. John Lewis has said we need a new Marshall Plan-like massive effort to rebuild New Orleans and urban America as a whole. Rabbi Michael Lerner and religious leaders are also calling for

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KATRINA AND RITA: A TALE OF TWO MOVIES

Months after the fact, there's not much new to be said about the twin disasters represented by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The rhetoric and the rebuttals have lost their urgency and yet there are still lessons to be learned from those tragic events. The lessons relate both to the reasons the hurricanes were as devastating as they were and to what they mean for us in the United States in 2005.

The reasons for the sheer magnitude of the tragedy have their analogy in the film *The Perfect Storm*. In that movie, all sorts of conditions combined to make the storm at sea particularly destructive and deadly. Katrina, and then Rita, also was intensified by the convergence of multiple causes and factors. The contributions of our energy policies to the global warming phenomenon that added to the ferocity of the storms have been well documented, if not accepted by a government that can't bring itself to even acknowledge global warming, let alone our role in its growth. So, the first element in this perfect storm is that its ferocity was, in part, a result of policies that are endangering the planet.

But, there were failures as the storm approached, and after it hit, that contributed to the extent of the damage to the region and its people. Policies that neglected the infrastructure, eliminated natural wetlands barriers, and promoted development in environmentally risky areas helped to assure that this storm would be more destructive than was necessary. The response of the federal government, the only entity with sufficient resources to address an event of this magnitude, was so dreadfully inadequate both because of the lack of competence on the part of the responsible officials and because of policies that made an adequate response virtually impossible. Tax cuts, intended to starve government, took their toll as did the commitment of massive federal resources to the war on Iraq. Active duty troops and National Guard units, along with the kinds of equipment that were needed immediately, all were unavailable because of conscious choices that were made. The point is that there's nothing natural about a natural disaster. Its impact results from actions taken by people.

Adding all these factors together would have been devastating enough, even if their effects weren't compounded by the structural factors that always leave poor people and people of color most susceptible to the assaults of nature. Poor people always are the ones that die of exposure in cold winters and heat waves. Why would it be any different when hurricanes flood out people living in the lowest elevation of a flood plain and drown those without the resources to get away before the storm? The sheer lack of planning and the stunning slowness to react would be inconceivable if those affected were more powerful. And, in today's America that means wealth and whiteness.

So, multiple factors combined to create a perfect storm. Remove one or more of those and it is easy to imagine that the scale of the tragedy would have been smaller. But, the storm also raises the question that is the theme of a second movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*. In that classic

film, the central character is asked to imagine what life in his part of the world would have been like if he hadn't lived. Likewise, the Katrina and Rita experience gives us an opportunity to imagine what the absence of government would mean. We got a glimpse of that.

We live in a period in which the very idea of government, and the possibility that it can play a positive role in the lives of people, is under attack. Not being content with trying to undo the Great Society and the New Deal, the radical conservatives now in power want to take us back to the McKinley administration, before the Progressive Era reforms that interposed government between people and the unbridled power of corporations and the market.

If there were no government policies, such as the ones we fought for and won over the past 100-plus years, we would see private corporations carrying out functions we once thought would be democratically accountable and regulated to protect the public interest. We would see government by cronyism, with the attendant corruption. We would see people left to literally sink or swim as the floodwaters rise. We would see the starving of core government programs designed to protect our health and safety. We would see the return of a Social Darwinism in which wealth is seen as a sign of virtue and poverty as nature's way of ridding us of the "unfit." We would see whole sectors of the population subject to the prejudices of those born into race, gender and class privilege. In short, we would see more of what America in 2005 has become.

Katrina and Rita have given the general public a glimpse of the country the Bushies have in mind for us. And, happily, the signs are that it's not a popular vision. The recent election returns may well be a reflection of the growing unpopularity of the administration's policies and direction. This is a time in which the administration has been weakened politically and, as a consequence, an ideal time for us to advance a very different vision. Is SWAA willing to take up that challenge? Perhaps together we can help something positive come out of the tragedy created by the perfect storm.

Fred Newdom

"Social Work can defend its standards only if it realizes the organized nature of the opposition to it, why these interests are opposed, and where its own allies are to be found."

Bertha Capen Reynolds
Social Work and Social Living, NASW,
1975, p. 166.

Continuation of “Desperate’ Dreams?” From BCR Reports Volume 16, Number 2

December 3, 2005

Letters to the Editor
New York Review of Books
1755 Broadway, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10019-3780

Dear Editor:

In his review of Jason DeParle’s *American Dream*, Christopher Jencks says that welfare reform turned out to be not so bad after all (12/15/05). While he originally thought that President Clinton should not have signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996, he has changed his mind. But Jencks is selective in his choice of data. He uses statistics about poverty and unemployment for all single-mother families to show that poverty rates went down since the passage of the welfare bill. But that doesn’t tell us what happened to welfare recipients. He admits that we don’t know anything about the millions who have left the rolls, but he doesn’t mention why that is. Although most new initiatives that Congress has passed contain provisions to study the effect of the bill, there was no provision to study the effects of the welfare bill. In other words, officials didn’t want to know what happened. Could the poverty rate have gone down because more mothers entered high paying professional jobs? Jencks doesn’t say. He also doesn’t break down his statistics by race. White welfare recipients left the rolls faster than black ones and poverty rates for blacks and Hispanics are far higher than for whites. Probably more white than black or Hispanic recipients got out of poverty, and fewer whites were unemployed.

As further proof that welfare reform wasn’t so bad, Jencks cites statistics showing less hunger and homelessness since the bill was passed. But he minimizes statistics showing a recent rise in hunger and homelessness. To buttress his argument that homelessness is decreasing, he even cites a study entitled, “2004 City of Boston Homeless Census: Homeless Families Increase Dramatically.” His rosy view is contradicted by the mayors of 25 big cities in their 2003 report. They said that soup kitchens and food pantries were swamped. Forty percent of cities were unable to provide an adequate supply of food. More than 12 million families either did not have enough food or worried about someone in the family going hungry. Requests for emergency assistance increased 88 percent. Average demand for emergency shelter increased by 13 percent in a year and requests for shelter by homeless families increased by 15 percent. An average of 30 percent of requests for emergency shelter by homeless families were unmet in the past year. People were homeless longer. Jencks also doesn’t mention that there has been a steady increase in the number of abused and neglected children referred to foster care between 1995 and 2001.

Jencks ignores or downplays data that reveal the real political purpose of welfare reform. Reducing poverty and unemployment was not a goal of welfare reform. The goals of conservatives were to slash social spending, to privatize the social spending that remains, to lower wages, to break public sector unions, and to police the behavior of low-income people, especially women, and most especially black women.

Even if Jencks doesn’t, DeParle understood that the main goal of welfare reform was to get people off the rolls. He believes that much of the decline in the rolls was due to the message effect. He says, “From the TV news to waiting-room came the same strident message: ‘Get off the rolls!’ Scared, angry, or simply confused all kinds of families simply stopped thinking of the welfare office as a place to get help.” Errors in bureaucratic paper work threw many off the rolls. A Congressional investigation found that 44 percent of the penalties imposed on people were in error. The dramatic slashing of the welfare rolls has been heralded by officials as proof of the success of reform.

Not once does Jencks mention privatization of welfare programs, even though deParle discussed this at length. The W-2 program in Wisconsin that DeParle studied was largely privatized. Both the private corporation, Maximus, and the non-profit, Goodwill, were rife with corruption. DeParle comments, “Like a gang-ridden school, Wisconsin’s largest welfare agency was being run with a cop in the hall.” William D. Eggers of the Reason Foundation, a libertarian think-tank that exists to promote the privatization of government services, said that welfare privatization is now “probably the hottest area of privatization in the country.” Lockheed Martin, Electronic Data Systems, Andersen Consulting, Unisys, and a host of smaller companies were proposing to take over welfare programs. Does Jencks think this is the way to go?

Jencks does not discuss the effect that welfare reform has on wages and unions. Privatizing welfare programs often results in weakening public service unions and lowering wages. When welfare recipients are unable to find a job, they are often placed in community service programs (called “workfare”). In Baltimore, a thousand workers had lost jobs to welfare trainees by mid-1997, despite the fact that city workers had only

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of scholarly articles, a monograph and two books. She formerly taught at Winona State University where she was the Director of the Social Work program. She received the 2005 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Minnesota Chapter of the National Association of Social Work. In addition, Augsburg College, honored her as a Distinguished Alumna in 1999. Jan graduated from Augsburg College, B.A.; Washington University, MSW; and the University of Maryland, Ph.D. She served on many boards and committees throughout her life. She was the past-president of the Minnesota Chapter of the National Association of Social Work, past chair of the Minnesota Conference of Social Work Education and the current Vice-President of the International Association for the Advancement of Social Work with Groups. She served as an elder at the Mt. Zion Lutheran Church and past chair of the social concerns committee. A memorial service was held for Jan on May 31st. Many of her friends, family, colleagues, and former students spoke of Jan's heartfelt and dedicated service to her work and community.

Marilyn Moch and Michael Dover

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agenda to starve social services since the Reagan years, but discussion of policy issues at that level may prove too abstract. In the 1960s, reactionaries criticized the War on Poverty by saying, "You can't solve a problem by throwing money at it." We can turn that criticism around to aim it at the militarists: America's stupendous geopolitical failures in Iraq and Afghanistan discredit massive military spending. The "fog of war" has given the profiteers an extremely convenient cover, but it is dissolving. At the personal level, my agency — quite rightly — must account for every cent it uses in thorough audits, but the Department of Defense and State Department award contracts for Iraq in the billions to well-connected corporations on a no-bid, cost-plus basis, and

the waste and fraud are phenomenal. The time for disillusionment ought to be ripe. Could discussion of these abuses penetrate our colleagues' pro-military feelings?

Social workers in higher education have research and writing skills that lend themselves to cooperation with think tanks like United for a Fair Economy (<http://www.faireconomy.org/>) and efforts like the National Priorities Project (<http://www.nationalpriorities.org/>) which, in the latter's own words, "facilitates dialogue and action between national social justice and security policy groups." These groups also provide educational resources. Despite the seriousness of the subject matter, there is room for creative play here, too. What if, for example, clinically oriented educators were to organize a contest for social work students called, "Diagnose Your Country," in which geopolitical behavior gets the DSM-IV treatment? (Name the personality disorder revealed in our on-off-on relationships with figures like Saddam Hussein and Achmed Chalabi.)

None of what I've suggested is the stuff of dramatic breakthroughs, but it surely adds to a stream of thinking taking place in other social workers' minds. We shouldn't worry about "preaching to the choir" as long as we come up with fresh perspectives, information, and inspiration. Now, more than ever, like-minded social workers need to make new connections with each other. We members of SWAA could familiarize ourselves with the Social Action Social Justice Council (SASJC), organized by NASW members but not limited to NASW membership. In California, a revitalized SASJC is focusing on counter-recruitment and other efforts against militarism (see <http://www.socialactioncouncil.org/>). In all of our efforts to stem the tide of militarism in our country, we should acknowledge and promote our own special authority as social workers, and speak about legitimate, pressing needs that go unmet because of our country's misplaced priorities.

Sam Coleman

a new Marshall Plan for our cities.

Clearly, we need something on the scale of a combination of the Freedmen's Bureau, the TVA, the GI Bill, the New Deal, the Marshall Plan, and the project to put a human being on the moon. The last truly large-scale federal initiative was the mass subsidization of suburbia via home mortgages, highway construction, etc. These policies contributed to the deterioration of our central cities. Now, massive federal action must be directed at what urban affairs scholar and activist Henry Louis Taylor calls the "radical reconstruction of the inner-city built environment." By this he means "the totality of the physical and social environment that comprise that part of the central city where racial minorities and low income groups are concentrated and over represented in the population."

And this radical reconstruction of our urban built environment and the infrastructure for our urban regions is needed not only in New Orleans, but in New Haven and Cleveland and Saginaw. Every major city should have a mass transit system capable of evacuating the city in less than a day, to protect us not only against natural disasters but against the reality of the possibility of biological and chemical terrorism.

Using national security as a rationale for social security is not new; see Michael Sherry's book *In the Shadow of War* for an account of how Franklin Roosevelt talked about national security as a rationale almost every time he spoke of Social Security. Universal human rights and universal human needs and the culturally specific ways they are met are now on the agenda for mass activism, and we need to focus our theoretical conceptualizations and practical activism in this direction. As Representative Carolyn Kirkpatrick recently said about what we are seeing in the Gulf Coast, "This is real basic human need." This event shows that we need to focus our activism on demands that we as a nation — both within our borders and through international efforts — redirect our efforts towards caring, rational action that ensures basic material conditions for human survival and advancement.

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The “r” word – radical — is now on the agenda, and nothing short of radical reform of our nation’s social policies will do. Not only are such longstanding radical urbanists as Chester Hartman are using the “r” word (Hartman, Chester. *Between eminence and notoriety: Four decades of radical urban planning*. New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Urban Policy Research; 2001.), but also mainstream scholars: Hill, Edward W. and Nowak, Jeremy. “Nothing left to lose: Only radical strategies can help American’s most distressed cities.” *Brookings Review*. 2000; 18 (3, Summer): 25-28, and Katz, Bruce, “Enough of the small stuff! Towards a new urban agenda.” *Brookings Review*. 2000; 18 (3, Summer): 7-11.

As for the other “r” word — racism — explicit organizing and education can be focused in many ways, whether in New York in organizing around the Rockefeller drug laws, or in Michigan about organizing around defeating the anti-affirmative action ballot initiatives of Connerly in 2006. On a national level, it seems to me that the movement’s political focus must be on the radical reconstruction of the infrastructure of our urban regions prioritizing the most oppressed communities within those regions. Maryann Mahaffey was recently President of the SEMCOG, the Southeastern Michigan Council on Governments. She has argued that the issue is not just poverty, it is economic insecurity and this exists throughout cities and suburbs, which will be even more stressed with increasing costs of commuting.

SEMCOG is working for new mass transit initiatives, which are also important for ensuring access to jobs. Such initiatives are one reform at a time, but now we need to create truly omnibus reform packages which together represent radical reforms and real social change. This is in the interests of city and suburb, which research on the system of real property in Ohio’s urban communities show are more similar than may be apparent to the casual observer.

It is my belief that anti-racist groups must now adopt and promote this focus on the need for a new ‘new’ deal, or a Marshall Plan, or whatever we call it. And we must also

insist that liberal politicians adopt this focus and stop the kind of incremental policymaking that presents no true alternative to politics as usual.

However, there is still the need for a very specific initiative to rebuild New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. The best model for this may be the TVA, Tennessee Valley Authority. There must be provisions for democratically elected positions (including districting) that ensure representatives from many parts of New Orleans and other devastated cities, and not some kind of undemocratic Port Authority structure. One way or another there needs to be a mechanism established to ensure that there is a real response targeted to that region. However, it should be developed along with a nationwide response to address the problems of urban and rural poverty.

Is this utopian? I don’t think so. Once Pearl Harbor shook the nation out of its lethargy, isolationism and unwillingness to truly stand up to fascism, we did tremendous things as a nation. I’m hoping that Katrina will be our generation’s Pearl Harbor, your generation’s Pearl Harbor, and that I can live to see your generation do something as a nation that would make us as proud as we all are today of what the greatest generation did in World War II and in the crucial years afterwards.

Michael Dover

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two years before won a city ordinance guaranteeing a living wage to anyone employed under contracts with the city. In New York City, thousands of workfare participants now do the work once done by higher paid city workers.

Jencks does not discuss the influence of the religious right in policies that police welfare recipients’ behavior. These include: the Family Cap (refusing to give cash assistance to a baby born while the mother receives assistance); “Learnfare” (reducing or ending assistance if a child is absent from school); “Shotfare” (reducing or ending assistance if a parent fails to get immunization shots for

a child); marriage promotion programs; requiring teen parents to live either with an adult or in a special residential program. These punish children but are ineffective. Learnfare didn’t boost school attendance. A Rutgers University study of the Family Cap showed that it didn’t decrease pregnancies, but it did slightly increase the abortion rate. The state of New Jersey squelched the study, fearing the wrath of the Catholic Church.

Jencks says that the official poverty line has serious flaws in that it omits food stamps, free medical care, housing subsidies, and taxes. That argument has two flaws: the poverty line grossly understates how much it actually costs to live, and a majority of people don’t get those other benefits. Wider Opportunities for Women has done a study of how much income it takes for working families to meet their basic needs without public or private subsidies in specific locations, which they call the Self-Sufficiency Standard. They found that in all parts of the country, low-wage work alone is not enough to make ends meet. Across 10 communities, their sample family of a single working parent with an infant and preschool-age child needed \$27,660 per year (or \$13.10 per hour) in the lowest-cost location (New Orleans) and \$59,544 per year (or \$28.19 per hour) in the highest-cost location (Boston) just to meet its basic needs in 2003. With a full package of work supports in place (child care, medical insurance, housing subsidy, food stamps) nowhere in the 10 communities do average welfare-leaver earnings allow the sample parent to make ends meet; her earnings plus full work supports package cover on average only 83 percent of basic needs.

Work supports are becoming increasingly inaccessible. Eligible families stopped applying for other programs, such as Medicaid and food stamps. Nationwide, about 2/3 of adults who left welfare lost Medicaid, as the number of uninsured grew to over 45 million in 2004. Wider Opportunities for Women points out that only 10 to 15 percent of eligible children receive child care assistance; only about 12 percent of eligible families receive housing aid or live in public

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housing; only 60 percent of those eligible for Food Stamps received benefits in 2000, and during 2002 and 2003, 36.7 percent of all children in the US went without health insurance.

Wider Opportunities for Women recommends increasing the federal minimum wage from the present \$5.15 an hour, creating jobs, increasing work supports, and expanding education and job training opportunities. The present TANF program does none of those, with its mantra of “Work First.” It allows only 12 months of vocational training, and the House of Representative’s proposal for reauthorization of the welfare bill proposes cutting that to 3 months. Officials do not want welfare recipients to have a college education, even though higher education is the surest route out of poverty. In Wisconsin in 1998 only

one of six former recipients had a job that lifted her out of poverty, but the average salary of someone with a one or two year degree from Milwaukee Area Technical College ranged between \$20,000 and \$24,000. There has been a precipitous drop in college enrollment since the welfare bill was passed. Enrollment of welfare recipients in City College of New York dropped from 27,000 in 1994 to 14,000 in 1998; in Milwaukee Area technical College dropped from 6,455 to 274 in four years. If officials were serious about reducing teen pregnancy, they would encourage higher education. The most powerful factor in the decision to delay pregnancy until later in life is an adolescent’s commitment to education and a future career apart from motherhood.

Jencks concludes that there is no going back. America will not revive welfare “as we knew it.” Gwendolyn Mink says, “We do indeed need to end welfare — but as poor mothers

experience it, not as middle class moralizers imagine it.” There is, in fact, a better welfare program that has existed since 1935. It is called Social Security. In 1999 the Census Bureau showed there were 3,795,000 children, along with their parents, receiving Social Security. A widowed mother or father with 2 children would have received benefits totaling \$20,712 a year. Who knew? This is one of the best kept secrets of the nation. The families just get their checks until the children grow up, with no caseworkers to pry into their private lives. The late great British welfare scholar Richard Titmuss said, “Programs for the poor are poor programs.” Poor people have little political clout. Social Security survives because it is politically protected by middle class people.

Sincerely,

*Betty Reid Mandell
Professor Emerita, Bridgewater State College*



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