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The Real Purpose of Welfare Reform

Six years have passed since Congress enacted the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. By now social workers understand the pros and cons of “welfare reform.” So we need a broader analysis of how the program fits into the big picture.

Welfare reform’s strong emphasis on deterrence and punishment is neither accidental nor simply mean spirited. Rather it is best understood as part of a broader strategy launched by President Reagan in the early 1980s and followed by every Administration since. Known as Reaganomics, Supply Side Economics, or Neo-Liberalism, the well-documented actions have promoted an upward redistribution of resources by (1) lowering the cost of labor, (2) shrinking the welfare state, (3) limiting the regulatory power of the federal government, (4) weakening social movements, and (5) advocating a narrow set of family values.

Welfare reform’s main provisions—work first, marriage promotion, and devolution — contributed to each of the above ends as did the racialization of the debate. Indeed the “reformers” built support for the program using racially-coded messages implying that crime, drug use, school drop-outs, and teen-age pregnancies were transmitted from one generation to another by husbandless women raising children on their own.

The *work first provisions* of welfare reform — time limits, stricter work rules, harsh sanctions — helped to lower labor costs by flooding local job markets with thousands of new workers. This strategy dates back the colonial poor laws which routinely set welfare benefits below the lowest prevailing wage so that only the most desperate person would choose welfare over low-paid work. Today, the resulting competition for jobs makes it easier for employers to press wages down and harder for unions to negotiate good contracts. In a recent speech, Alan Greenspan, the head of the Federal Reserve Board, affirmed that the economy’s “extraordinary” and “exceptional” performance during the late 1990s was in part, due to “a heightened sense of job insecurity” which helps to subdue wage gains.*

Welfare reform contributes to the wider “*family values*” agenda by hailing marriage as the foundation of society. To this end the law penalizes single motherhood with (1) the family cap (denies aid forever to children

born while their mother receives welfare); (2) the “illegitimacy” bonus (divides \$100 million a year among the five states that report the largest decrease in non-marital births with no increase in abortion rates); and (3) abstinence-only sex education grants (earmarks \$250 million for school programs that teach children to postpone sex until marriage but prohibits discussion of contraception or safe sex).

Such regulatory practices also have a long history. From the start US social welfare programs have defined women as “deserving” and “undeserving” of aid based on their class, race, and marital status and treated women who complied with prescribed wife and mother roles better than the others. Welfare reform is unlikely to reverse current marriage and childbearing trends which reflect powerful social forces having nothing to do with public assistance. Nonetheless, Congress continues to favor moral and patriarchal mandates over economic support for poor women. This deprives all women in need of an important economic back up and legitimizes governmental supervision of women from all walks of life.

Welfare reform also meshes well with the conservative preference for shrinking both the welfare state and the Federal government. The 1996 law shifted federal responsibility for social welfare back to the states, stripped welfare of its entitlement status, and increased privatization. These changes both eroded the foundation of the US welfare state and undermined the regulatory power of the federal government — which when allowed to work can protect consumers, workers and the environment from the profit-driven practices of corporate America.

The fifth goal of the overall agenda aimed to reduce the power of social movements which are best positioned to resist the attack on the welfare state. Since 1980s, each administration has taken back the hard-won gains made by the trade union, civil rights, women’s liberation, gay rights and other movements. But the targets of these assaults have not taken the pain or the punishment lying down. Instead the attack has unleashed waves of local activism. Not always visible on the national front, and not always victorious, hundreds of community organizations have joined forces around a wide range of issues to defend their gains, to advance new ones, and to let the powers-that-be know that their attack on the welfare state simply will not stand.

Mimi Abramowitz

* Piven. Frances Fox (1999). “The Welfare State as Work Enforcer,” *Dollars and Sense*, September, October p. 34

Note: This article was previously published in the *NASW Social Justice newsletter*.

The New Face of Student Activism

Student Social Workers' Alliance for a Progressive Society (S.S.W.A.P.S.) is an organization of student social workers committed to reclaiming the social justice tradition of the field through advocacy and activism. This organization seeks to raise political consciousness, channel the untapped energy of interested peers, and inspire those who may feel disempowered to take action. S.S.W.A.P.S. has created a momentum that continues to bring concerned and interested students to this resurgence of the progressive, action-oriented student movement.

Through the efforts of co-founders Stephanie Yazgi and Kyle Pedersen, and a dedicated core group of students from Columbia University, Hunter College, and New York University schools of social work, S.S.W.A.P.S. has reached hundreds of students in the New York City area, attracted local media interest, and gained the awareness of students from around the country. Since its inception, S.S.W.A.P.S. chapters have established themselves on these three major New York City campuses as the voice of the progressive student worker. S.S.W.A.P.S. has also influenced changes in school curriculum, enhanced networking opportunities for politically active students, and mobilized students to advocate for social change on several occasions in both New York City and Washington, D.C.

For most social work students, making the transition from school work to social justice work is much more difficult than it should be. Founding members identified the need to create a citywide contingent of social work students to organize, strategize, investigate and mobilize around issues of social injustice. S.S.W.A.P.S. offers students the opportunity to convene, network, and enlist the support of fellow-students and colleagues, under increasing financial and administrative restrictions, and to highlight politics, advocacy and activism in the scholastic environment.

Today, S.S.W.A.P.S. continues its efforts to expand the network to other campuses and cities around the country. In September 2003, S.S.W.A.P.S. co-founders introduced their student group to the SWAA National Steering Committee. A student delegation was also invited to attend the January meeting to further discuss how these two groups can work together to support one another's efforts. By working in concert with the Social Welfare Action Alliance, S.S.W.A.P.S. hopes to create a bridge between the organizing efforts of students and workers to further the struggle for social justice.

Stephanie Yazgi



Radical Students and Workers Must Unite!

Contrary to popular belief, radical social work students and human service workers exist! Many students graduate into the human service workforce every year. However, the ability to practice radical social work is often stifled by conservative social welfare policies. This holds true for people who have been practicing for many years. Both young and experienced human service workers can benefit from a collaborative relationship. Such a relationship would support radical students prior to entering the field. Experienced human service workers benefit from the perspective and energy provided by their younger colleagues.

Student Social Workers' Alliance for a Progressive Society (S.S.W.A.P.S.) is a new organization of radical student social workers that is working with SWAA. S.S.W.A.P.S. is calling upon radical student social workers to develop a supportive partnership with experienced teachers or practitioners. This "buddying" program will partner radical students who are entering their final semester of schooling with an established radical social service worker or teacher. During this semester and the following summer, the "buddies" will work together in self-defined ways in relations to the student's job search and what it takes to maintain a radical approach to social service provision in a conservative political climate. Both student and teacher/worker participation are necessary in order for this project to be successful, but one does not have to join S.S.W.A.P.S. or SWAA to do so. "Buddies" can find each other or S.S.W.A.P.S. can help make the match. In either case we would like to hear from you.

If you are interested in participating in the project as a student, teacher or practitioner, or if you want to learn more of the details, please contact Kyle Pedersen at kpedersen@urbanjustice.org, or 646.602.5648. Establishing strong and supportive relationships between radical students and teacher/workers is critical for the advancement of radical work in the human services.

Kyle Pedersen

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 one copy in floppy disk form and four hard copies (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 the four hard copies. We also encourage submissions of poetry and short (500-1000 word) opinion pieces for our Soapbox column and letters to the editors.

The Table of Contents of the current issue (14/2) and the forthcoming issue (5/1) appear below. Also, see our CALL FOR PAPERS in this issue of the BCR Reports.

Marcia Cohen

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CHAPTER UPDATES:

Ann Arbor: We've been a hotbed of SWAA activity. 'On base' at the University of Michigan, the group essentially took over the student government. Branching out into the city, we have been involved with doing voter registration; activities around immigrant workers' rights; work with a welfare rights group in nearby Ypsilanti; work on a women's prison project; picketed at a Border's boycott; and are organizing bus to April 25th March to Save Women's Lives. Brett Seabury is the faculty advisor.

Philadelphia-area Chapter/Underground Railroad-Temple

Depot: We have been so overwhelmed by activities that we cannot produce a lengthy report! Our members have been speaking and conducting training sessions on economic human rights for social workers and human service workers throughout Pennsylvania and in North Carolina, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. We participated in the KWRU/PPEHRC march through the south commemorating the 35th anniversary of Martin Luther King's Poor People's March. We have united with several social workers who come from the ranks of the poor and are leaders in poor people's organizations in the south. We continue to organize legislative hearings of HR 144 – the Economic Human Rights resolution which our members wrote and backed in the Pennsylvania legislature. Six Temple MSW students are doing their 2nd year field placements at KWRU and have been the leaven in the chapter's bread along with the approximately 10 members who have traveled this path before them and remain active in movement work locally. The January NSC meeting was attended by Jennifer Jones, Willie Baptist, Mary Bricker-Jenkins, new member Renee Wolf, and Laura Rodgers of our sister chapter in New Jersey. A recruitment effort has just begun, spearheaded by new member Jennifer Przewoznik, a first-year Temple MSW student and long-time activist. Finally, we are proud to announce that Willie Baptist has just been named by the Pennsylvania Chapter of NASW as Public Citizen of the Year. We rock!

Portland: This Chapter is in a period of transition, and is hoping to re-engage in some activity this spring. They can be contacted at 503-280-1251, or swaapdx@hotmail.com.

Rochester: In the past six months, our Chapter has been very active. We worked with local groups – Poor People United, Rochester Poor People's Coalition, and Metro Justice to protest the disastrous County Budget cuts and organized efforts to influence the budget decision-making process. We continue to build connections with the Federation of Social Workers (the union representing workers at the Department of Health and Human Services) and became a task force of Metro Justice of Rochester (a longstanding independent, grassroots, progressive membership organization). We helped the Rochester Poor

People's Coalition organize a protest at the County Legislature, and supported Poor People United in their fight to obtain a hypothermia shelter. We ran a Reality Tour in October that left us with a 25-person waiting list, and which was attended by several elected officials and "kicked-off" with an appearance from Rochester Mayor Bill Johnson. This tour (and the accompanying media coverage) helped us to expand our membership; one of our members created an excellent database for us which contains close to 300 names. We also helped poor people from Rochester get to the Kensington Welfare Rights Union march in August. More recently, we supported the local NASW's "Walk a Mile in Our Shoes" campaign.

And in related news...

- The **AFL-CIO** is doing economic reality tours through 17 electoral battleground states (more information is available on their website), (Noted by Ken Grossinger).
- The **Council of Social Work Education** (CSWE) doing a reality bus tour in the Anaheim, CA, area, as a warm-up to their annual conference. Michael Dover (formerly of University of Michigan, now of faculty at Western Michigan University) is also glad to report that the **BPD** (the network of BSW programs) has many progressive social workers, including current and former SWAA members.
- In **Seattle**, SWAA members sponsor lots of activities, especially ones focusing on welfare rights and legislation. They also work closely with the university, including having many faculty assign a macro piece to students. (Noted by Marilyn Moch).
- **New Jersey's** SWAA members helped create a free health care clinic, and continue working on health issues with the labor party there (Noted by Laura Rodgers).
- In **New York City**, they're organizing for the March (Women's Rights) conference; mobilizing the social work community for the 2004 election; continue to have a strong showing at the NY NASW conference (the NY executive director is a SWAA member, too!); and Fred Newdom is NASW's current organizing contractor.
- SWAA is working to bloom new chapters as well as re-grow some prior groups. Other areas where there is activity but perhaps not a solid chapter include **Austin, TX**; **Kalamazoo, MI**; **Northampton, MA** (though we know Smith College will stir things back up during summer session); **Los Angeles, CA**; and **Sacramento, CA**. If you are in these areas (or anywhere else in the U.S.) and would like help (re-)establishing a SWAA chapter, please let us know. Contact: Melissa Sydor at melmas1@yahoo.com or Christie Coho at cjcoho@yahoo.com.

HOW TO ORGANIZE A SWAA CHAPTER:

"How to Organize a SWAA Chapter" organizing packets are available by contacting Mel at Communication Services at (518) 438-2826, 50 Colvin Avenue, Albany, NY 12206. 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 on the Move!

The Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC) is a national network of groups and organizations that have come together to build a movement to end poverty based in the unity and leadership of the poor. The network evolved out of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union's (KWRU) first national bus tour in 1998, which was followed by the Poor People's Summit held at Temple University in October of 1998. It was at that meeting that the PPEHRC was formally established, and SWAA has been an organizational member since then.

In December 2003 representatives of member groups met for four days at the Highlander Center in Tennessee to take the next step in building organization – the formal adoption of a mission statement, structure, appointment of staff, and program goals for the upcoming period. Mary Bricker-Jenkins, one of the two SWAA representatives attended (while our other – Sarah Gentry – was otherwise engaged with Miller, her brand new baby!) The group formally adopted the following Mission Statement:

The Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign is committed to unite the poor across color lines as the leadership base for a broad movement to abolish poverty. We work to accomplish this through advancing economic human rights as named in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, such as the rights to food, housing, health, education, communication and a living wage job.

A vision statement elaborating on the mission statement was also adopted. Four organizational goals were then established:

1. Increase membership
2. Increase visibility
3. Strengthen local & regional campaigns & organizations
4. Develop leadership

Five organization-wide program emphases for the upcoming 18 months were established after considerable discussion of the opportunities for action that member groups identified as being available or necessary to develop to meet the “felt needs” of member organizations:

1) 2004 elections. Coordinated actions will include a mass march in New York City in August 2004 on the opening day of the Republican National Convention as well as local actions. One theme will be “leave no child behind,” and candidates’ platforms will be evaluated against Economic Human Rights

principle.

2) Anti-war rallies. Member groups are encouraged to participate and help people make the connection between war and violation of economic human rights.

3) Child Protective Services. Members of many groups are being “investigated” and there is a general concern that children are being removed from their parents for reasons that are, at the base, related to poverty — that is, violations of Economic Human Rights. A task force has been established to investigate issues, support local actions, and develop plans for a coordinated national action for Mother's Day 2005 (Mary B-J is on the task force and would appreciate input from SWAA members).

4) Speaking tour and leadership training. Several national spokespersons will be named and a tour developed. Efforts will be made to coordinate engagements with local events and actions as well as leadership development opportunities.

5) National homelessness marathon. Groups are encouraged to participate in the radio marathon held each February.

Structure and staff for the organization were established. **Cheri Honkala**, who resigned recently as KWRU Executive Director to focus on national level work was named National Coordinator. **Cary Beckwith** will be her administrative assistant. The University of the Poor – the educational arm of the campaign – will continue to be co-coordinated by **Willie Baptist** and **Liz Theoharris**. (Within the University of the Poor, the **School for Social Workers** is convened by Mary B-J and Laura Rodgers of the NJ SWAA Chapter.) Overall policy and program for the organization are determined through the membership (organizational only) acting through its Members' Congress and its representative body, the National Committee. SWAA will continue to have representatives to the National Committee – a delegate and an alternate (Mary B-J and Sarah).

As has so often been the case, the Highlander Center was the locale for catalytic moments in the history of social movements in the United States. And, once again, SWAA stands behind its principles and in alignment with the program of the poor – a program that promises to liberate all.

Contact the PPEHRC through Cary Beckwith at cary_kwrwu@hotmail.com or, for SWAA-related input and questions, Mary B-J at mbricker@temple.edu or Sarah Gentry at sarahmaura@yahoo.com.

POINT...

The following points were made in a recent SWAA listserv discussion. The initial question posed on the listserv revolved around what SWAA's relationship should be to the profession, as represented by NASW, CSWE and rank and file workers. This debate reflects a historic tension in social work and will no doubt be part of SWAA's ongoing discussions about strategies and goals. Michael Dover converted his email views into an article for the SWAA Newsletter.

Does Social Work Need Another Rank-and-File Movement?

Nearly fifty years since the founding of NASW in 1955, our profession is once again divided. Although the re-emergence of specialty groups within social work is by and large a positive phenomenon, one by-product has been the weakening of social work's two mainstream groups, NASW and CSWE. NASW has not held an annual conference in several years and has no plans to resume such conferences. Social work is now without an annual conference that is truly open to all social workers, social work students and social work educators.

The left within social work played a major role in the 1930s and 1940s in building a rank-and-file movement within unions and professional groups, and later contributed to the founding of NASW. Perhaps we need another rank and file movement. Perhaps progressive social workers need to organize discussion groups at the local level to examine the issues that face our country and the place of social workers in addressing them. Perhaps we also need to recognize that in order for social work to become a truly important voice within growing social movements for social justice, our professional organizations must cooperate in order to provide an opportunity to gather nationally each year, so that we can compare notes about what is happening in our communities and with our clients and to our agencies.

Why should the lack of an annual conference concern activists in the field of social work? Aren't NASW and CSWE primarily mainstream groups, without a sufficient focus on the kinds of social and political action that SWAA members engage in? In my opinion, we will not be able to build a profession truly able to effectively advocate for progressive social policies as long as we don't have a national meeting whether social workers can announce important new research findings, social change coalitions, and policy proposals, engage in continuing education, and organize around the issues we care about.

As Maryann Mahaffey recent pointed out, one reason that the National Conference on Social Welfare drew widespread participation is that it addressed something about the mood in the country. Rather than merely being a narrow professional conference, it addressed issues of unemployment, poverty, etc. So the issue is not just that we need a national conference, the issue is that we need a forum within which to raise issues both for our profession and for our country. If not social workers, who?

There is a long debate within the social work left about the extent to which we should organize inside or outside mainstream professional groups. David Wagner discussed these differences in his book, [Quest for a Radical Profession](#). It was largely was an Old Left vs. New Left debate (with the Old Left arguing that it was important to organize within mainstream social work). But why not do both?

That there is a diversity of progressive social work opinion should come as no surprise. Wagner also created a typology of members of the Catalyst collective, the radical social service journal (now the Journal of Progressive Human Services.) They were of three types: those highly identified with social work, those highly critical, and those who were "bureaucratized", essentially one-time radicals who to a degree were being co-opted by the bureaucracies within which they worked, although a more charitable view was they were engaged in what others have called the "long march through the institutions." Those highly identified with social work would presumably favor organizing within mainstream social work while some of those who are highly critical of social work might prefer to give up on influencing mainstream social work.

Will SWAA be an organization in which all three kinds of progressive social workers identified by Wagner are welcome? As Maryann Mahaffey recently pointed out, "It's narrow thinking to argue we shouldn't be reaching out to social workers. That's not why Bertha Reynolds Society was founded. There should be all kinds of thinking in the group." SWAA should purposely seek to appeal to all three kinds of progressive social workers identified by Wagner.

Another way of understanding these differences is the distinction drawn by Linda Reeser and Irwin Epstein in their book, *Professionalization and Activism in Social Work*. They pointed out that professionalism is a conservatizing ideology, but professionalization itself is not inconsistent with activism. Seen in this way, the growth of specialty groups within social work (including SWAA) is consistent with professionalization and not inconsistent with activism.

Progressive social workers need to renew our efforts to organize at the grassroots within our own natural constituency: BSW and MSW social workers, social work educators and students. While we should also try to reach out to human service workers, client groups, and poor people's movements, we are not well positioned to effectively express solidarity with them if we haven't organized in our own constituency. That was one key lesson of the civil rights movement: organize your own! Another basic principle of organizing is, "go where the workers are." The workers are in NASW and CSWE as well as in unions and grassroots community groups. We can't ignore any opportunity to organize.

One strategy for doing so is to build a rank-and-file unity movement which insists that CSWE cease the practice of having social work educators meet separately from social workers and that NASW reverse the policy of not having a national NASW conference each year. CSWE and NASW should meet in the same place each year, as was called for in 2000 by the Michigan NASW Summit group (which included SWAA). Groups such as SWAA, BPD, SSWR and others could still have our own conferences, but would also be offered low-cost meeting space at such a CSWE/NASW coordinated conference (which might have separate calls for papers for educators, students and practitioners but would coordinate registration and planning to save money).

There are a number of recent indications that a rank-and-file movement may be developing.

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...COUNTERPOINT

Editor's Note: In the interests of furthering the discussion on the issues Dover raised, the newsletter decided to publish a summary of the first round of responses to Mike's comments. (We invite you to add to this discussion by submitting your thoughts for the next BCR Reports).

- We should not make NASW or CSWE the focus of our work. SWAA can't make a difference in NASW or in CSWE. We are too small and would always be on the defensive in ways that would inherently weaken our clarity. In addition, it is not at all clear what we would "win" from such inherently compromised liberal institutions. We would be in danger of dilution or cooptation or both. The leadership of the social work profession is organizationally conservative. I name the dynamic as organizationally conservative because many of the people in NASW and allied groups have relatively decent politics but are so invested in their sense of what will advance the profession that they capitulate to a very narrow vision of the possibilities and responsibilities of the organization.
- Social work as a profession is (nearly) fatally compromised as a progressive force. That doesn't mean we shun professionals or others who identify with the work. But it does mean that we have to confront the meaning of professionalism politically and offer an alternative vision for how to do the work that social workers get paid to do. That is a key role for SWAA, as I see it. Let SWAA focus on strengthening our chosen practice as radicals, not on our fatally compromised roles as "professionals."
- If we can find other ways to build our own organization, there might be an opportunity for us to have a stronger voice, and a voice more progressive than I have heard from CSWE or NASW. SWAA has no business spending our limited collective energy trying to influence NASW or CSWE.
- I have no problem with investing energy in building a rank and file movement. I just have no illusions about the impact that will have on NASW, or CSWE, or the other professional organizations as organizations. To me, a rank and file movement is about building support for SWAA and its politics.
- The most activist and radical social workers I know are activists concerned about the social and economic issues that affect them and the people they work with. They are students torn between the hope for making a difference and the awareness of how problematic their jobs are – and trying to figure out how to make a life and movement out of the contradiction. They never go to professional conferences but do go to meetings, gatherings, and demonstrations about budget cuts, privatization, and all sorts of social issues they care about. We try to recruit them to join SWAA and to come to our conferences to meet with other like-minded activists in human services, not to meet other social workers.
- There are good ways to strengthen SWAA. Our link with the Poor People's Economic Campaign was one of our better moves. Increasing our work with poor and low-income people who are protesting continued "welfare" budget cuts and generally oppressive treatment by governments, including many social workers, should arguably be our first priority. We can be real allies to low-income groups in ways that challenge us to keep developing our politics. And we can offer a needed critical perspective on domestic politics within left groups.
- Historically, SWAA (and BCRS) carefully avoided being a narrowly 'social work' organization, in part because today most of the people who are doing social welfare work are not certified social workers – they are human service workers in a wide range of private and public organizations. For most of these folks, the only NASW connection they have are perhaps their bosses, or consultants to their bosses. They experience professional social workers' roles as primarily maintaining "standards" that usually serve to distance service providers from the people they serve (and to protect against lawsuits). Or they are "therapists."
- So, when we want to go "grass roots," as we should, the place to go back to, organizationally, is not NASW but to students, and to the unions – SEIU and AFSCME. Students are the key targets, but they are reached directly in the schools through faculty and internship placements and not at professional conferences. As to the unions, if SWAA can find the energy to do serious organizational work, it should be in the unions that are making some important breakthroughs these days and have a natural base.
- Within SWAA, we are reactivating the faculty network to reach out to social work faculty and students, encouraging the larger network within the social work community itself.
- Of course, individual members of SWAA may also get involved wherever they choose – and given their jobs it surely may make sense to try to influence the institutions they happen to be a part of. SWAA chapters also get involved in all sorts of organizing around local issues and within local institutions. There are also localized and/or specific opportunities for radical work and organizing with and within (and in opposition to) NASW chapters which SWAA members and chapters have used to advantage. We just should not expect these places to be where we try to build a collective radical presence. They are too deeply a part of the liberal system to expect more in these times.
- What will really be accomplished if our focus is on the people who identify with a profession as opposed to those who identify as workers/people/citizens of the world concerned with issues that affect themselves, the people they work with, and the society?
- This is a debate we have had since our beginning as the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society, and it is critical to who we are and where we place ourselves within our increasingly undemocratic, hierarchical society.

“BRING AMERICA HOME”: A CAMPAIGN TO END HOMELESSNESS TODAY

The National Coalition for the Homeless, along with a growing number of Democrats and Independents in Congress, believe the time to end homelessness is right now and they have a plan to do it.

The Bring America Home Act (BAHA) (H.R. 2897), introduced to the U.S. House of Representatives on July 25, 2003, was composed and launched by the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) (www.nationalhomeless.org, www.bringamericahome.org), and is the boldest national campaign ever to end homelessness in this country.

This is the most comprehensive piece of legislation yet in dealing with homelessness. It will supplement dramatically the existing McKinney-Vento Act. And this is the one piece of legislation that will make the resources available to end homelessness in this country,” says Michael Stoops of NCH.

BAHA currently has 38 Congressional co-sponsors, including Rep. Julia Carson (D-IN), Rep. John Conyers (D-MI), Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-IL), Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-OH), Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), and Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA).

The first few words of the bill identify its purpose, “To end homelessness in the United States,” (www.thomas.loc.gov) demonstrate the legislation’s seriousness. They are for real. The bill continues, “Homelessness offends the conscience of our nation.” It declares housing as a basic human right.

Provisions include:

- A National Housing Trust Fund (the creation of 1.5 million affordable units over 10 years);
- 1,500,000 Section 8 vouchers for low-income families over 10 years;
- Increased funding for HUD, USDA, and VA;
- Authorization of vacant federal property to be eligible for use as permanent housing;
- Establishment of an emergency rent relief fund;
- Provision of no-fee mailboxes by USPS for homeless individuals;
- And, among other features, the requirement that cities receiving homeless funds from the federal government must repeal “vagrancy ordinances.”

The Act also asserts that the basic causes of homelessness are unaffordable housing, insufficient wages, lack of education, and lack of health care. Currently, no family or individual working full time at minimum wage, or on SSI or TANF benefits, could afford a one or two-bedroom apartment in any U.S. city, according what the HUD guidelines state for fair-market rent.

The Bush administration has been especially hard on low-income families through huge deficit spending on tax cuts for the wealthy and an invasion of Iraq. There has been a 35-45% increase in homelessness in many cities over the last two years.

Matthew Cardinale

Matthew (mcardina@uci.edu) is a graduate student in sociology at UC Irvine. He is also a Center for the Study of Democracy fellow, and a staff writer for the Irvine Progressive.

How Is NYC Preparing For The Republican National Convention?

The Republican National Convention (RNC) is just around the corner and organizers and activists in New York City, and across the country, are eagerly preparing for their arrival. The Republican National Convention will convene in NYC from August 29th – September 4th. The majority of events will take place in or around Madison Square Garden. The New York Police Department has already zoned Madison Square Garden and the surrounding area as an “Unconstitutional Zone.” This zoning regulation overrides all constitutional rights that we have as American citizens. Unconstitutional Zones are becoming more and more common at political gatherings, i.e. Philadelphia RNC, Miami, FTAA, and numerous other events.

Activists in New York City have been holding **NoRNC** Clearinghouse meetings since September of 2003. The clearinghouse meetings are being held in order to establish a support network for activists and protesters once the RNC arrives in NYC. Currently, the working groups include, Legal, Outreach, Transportation, Housing, Media, Communications, etc. More information about the working groups and the organizing process in general can be found at: www.rncnotwelcome.org or www.counterconvention.org. Anyone who is planning on attending the RNC and lives out of NYC is urged to contact the Housing and Transportation working groups (both groups will help provide resources for traveling to NYC and housing once you arrive). There are also numerous groups planning several Poor Peoples’ marches and actions. Several of the Poor Peoples’ actions will visually demonstrate the disproportionate numbers of poor, homeless and jobless people living in NYC and throughout the United States.

New York City promises to have strong opposition to the RNC. However, NYC cannot oppose this destructive machine alone. New York City will be a media hotbed during the convention, which will allow for unlimited exposure to the increasing political dissent in our country. New York City had nearly 500,000 people last February 15th to protest the Iraqi war. We are expecting at least double that number to convene in the streets for the RNC. Don’t miss out!

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: Call or email to arrange

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 **Sept. 1, 2004**.

SWAA IN COALITION

At the January 24 meeting, the National Steering Committee voted to ally SWAA with three upcoming organizing events. Organize, march, carry SWAA banners, participate. And share your experiences on the SWAA listserv to encourage and inspire other social workers to get involved.

March 20th: The World Still Says No To War

Momentum is building across the globe for the Global Day of Action against War and Occupation – the one-year anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. We will call for an end to the occupation of Iraq and Bush's militaristic foreign policies. For action alerts and local events, go to www.unitedforpeace.org.

April 25th: The March for Women's Lives

To demonstrate overwhelming majority support for a woman's right to choose safe, legal abortion and birth control. The largest pro-choice majority in history will march on Washington, D.C. on Sunday, April 25, 2004.

The Black Women's Health Imperative, Feminist Majority, NARAL, Pro-Choice America, National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health, NOW, and Planned Parenthood are the principal organizers. For information and updates, go to www.marchforchoice.org.

Grassroots America Defends the Bill of Rights

Organized in October, 2003 by an impressive list of endorsers, sponsors, and friends, Grassroots America coordinates efforts to strengthen local organizing on behalf of civil liberties by (1) converting the proliferation of local committees, resolutions, and other actions into coordinated, results-oriented political pressure; (2) fine-tuning the process of passing resolutions and ordinances that incorporate the strongest civil-rights terms possible; and (3) sharing strategies to monitor and publicize the enforcement of 'civil liberties safe zone' resolutions and ordinances in communities.

Among additional goals, Grassroots America attempts to build support for congressional measures that will defend and expand civil liberties and build opposition to further attempts to limit civil liberties. Two helpful websites are www.aclu.org and www.cdt.org.

HOLD THE DATE!

The 2004 SWAA National Conference:

**IF NOT NOW, WHEN?
WHAT'S AT STAKE AS WE CHALLENGE
AND CHANGE REALITIES?**

JUNE 25-27, 2004

SMITH COLLEGE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK,
NORTHAMPTON, MASSACHUSETTS

For more information, please check our new website:
www.socialwelfareactionalliance.org

CALL FOR PAPERS

The *Journal of Progressive Human Services* invites manuscripts that address critical issues for radical practice and analysis today.

The *Journal of Progressive Human Services (JPHS)* is the only journal in the United States that uses a radical framework to examine political, professional, and personal issues in the human services. Moving past more conventional conservative and liberal analyses of the problems we face and the solutions put forth to meet them. *JPHS* is committed to developing knowledge about theories, social policies, clinical practice, organizing, administration, research, and history that reflects and responds to radical concerns. The *JPHS* publishes critiques of leading social issues, fresh insights on direct practice, and reports of innovative human services in various countries. It also publishes discussions of oppressed groups, struggles by workers and clients on the job and in the community, dilemmas of practice in conservative and liberal contexts, and strategies for ending racism, sexism, ageism, hetero-sexism, and discrimination against persons who are physically challenged or psychologically distressed. International exchanges of critical ideas and information about programs among human services workers through-out the world community are promoted and encouraged. *JPHS* aims to stimulate debate about major social issues and to contribute to the development of analytic tools needed for building caring societies based on equality and justice.

Suggestions for topic areas include, but are not limited to the following:

- Abuse of Power
- Criminalization of Social Problems
- Scarcity of Services as Abuse
- Insidious Health Disparities
- Radical Analysis of Substance Abuse Policy

Date for Submissions: Open

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

TO ALL FACULTY:

As you know, in this period of conservative assault, makes the need for a strong organization of progressive social workers greater than ever! SWAA is working to expand its ranks.

The letter in this newsletter has been sent by email to current and former SWAA members as well as those who might want to join. Please help SWAA spread the word. When you receive the letter by email, please circulate it among faculty and your school as well as faculty you know elsewhere. If you have not received the email version please take the time to read and reply to the one below. If you would prefer an email copy, please contact Mimi Abramovitz (iabramov@hunter.cuny.edu) or check the SWAA website — socialwelfareactionalliance.org (our new address, which will be up and running soon).

**Social Welfare Action Alliance
Columbus Circle Station,
P.O. Box 20563
New York, NY 10023**

January 2004

Dear Colleague,

It is a new year. Yet in these very troubling times social workers can join forces to stem the tide of reaction and return social work to its roots. As the country lurches toward the next election, you as a social work educator and activist know what is at stake! Some much that we have worked for is threatened by mounting assault on social welfare programs for the middle class as well as the poor, the effort by the US government to impose a PAX Americana on the world, and the loss of civil liberties at home.

We are contacting you now – to help strengthen the progressive voice in social work by building a faculty network within the Social Welfare Action Alliance. As someone who is familiar with SWAA, you know that the Social Welfare Action Alliance (SWAA, formerly the Bertha Capen Reynolds Society) is a national organization of hundreds of human service workers, social work educators and students, and members of low-income community organizations. SWAA was founded in the mid-1980s amidst the rising tide of conservatism. Originally named for Bertha Capen Reynolds (1885-1978) – the eminent social work practitioner, educator, author, trade unionist and social activist – the organization renamed itself as the Social Welfare Action Alliance a few years ago.

SWAA stands for progressive social work practice, theory, and service delivery. It has become a home for social workers with these values – a place to find affirmation, build leadership, develop an analysis, improve one's practice, and to work in alliance with other progressive individuals, groups, and low-income community organizations committed to peace, justice and human rights. We have a national steering committee, local chapters (many on college campuses), publish a newsletter, hold national conferences and maintain a web site (www.socialwelfareactionalliance.org, currently being developed).

Social work faculty and students are one major constituency of SWAA. Please consider joining (or rejoining) the SWAA faculty network and /or forwarding this email to others on your faculty who might be interested in knowing about SWAA or becoming part of the faculty network – especially but not only the newer faculty in your program.

In exchange for low dues of \$35 a year, you will be linked to other like-minded social work faculty, gain access to a national network of activists, and add to the presence of a progressive voice among social workers. You will also receive discounted rates for the annual conference; reduced rates for subscriptions to the *Journal of Progressive Human Services*; a membership directory identifying SWAA members in your area; discounts on progressive publications; information and support for organizing a chapter and mobilizing people around various issues.

If you would like to join the faculty network please complete and mail the form on the back cover of this newsletter. If you have questions feel free to contact the co-chair of the National Steering Committee, Christie Coho, at cjcoho@yahoo.com or (213) 804-2340. We look forward to hearing from and working with you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Mimi Abramovitz, Professor
Hunter School of Social Work

Michael Reisch, Professor
University of Michigan. School of Social Work

Carolyn Jacobs, Professor and Dean
Smith College School for Social Work

Dorothy Van Soest, Professor and Dean
University of Washington School of Social Work

Barbara Kasper, Associate Professor
BSW Program, SUNY Brockport

SWAA National Steering Committee

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Continued from Page 6...

In New York City, a group of students at Columbia and Hunter and NYU (SSWAPS) is organizing and has used the slogan, "Take Back our Profession." In Detroit, Floyd Robinson has called for the formation of local collectives of social workers and wrote, "I fear that social work is slipping away, and I can't let that happen." Also, SWAA members have organized a Rank-and-File Unity Committee, now recognized as a SWAA task force.

Based upon discussions at BPD, SSWR, within SWAA, and with NASW activists, there is clearly growing rank and file concern in social work that we need to advocate for a new direction for our field and that we need to find a way to create a truly accessible annual national meeting. The chosen

tactic is demanding a national meeting co-sponsored by NASW and CSWE at which SWAA and other groups would be welcome. The strategy is reinvigorating social work activism by organizing local discussions and collectives of activists and by creating an annual public forum that is more participatory. The goal is to make social work the profession we were originally inspired to enter, one which lives up to the very values and ethics it professes.

(Michael recently finished the doctoral program in social work and sociology at Michigan and is now director of the BSW program at Central Michigan University. A founding member of the Bertie Reynolds Society, he recently rejoined the SWAA Membership Committee)

Join the SOCIAL WELFARE ACTION ALLIANCE!

I would like to join the Social Welfare Action Alliance

Name(please print or type)

I would like to renew my membership

Enclosed is my check:

Address

\$10 Student, unemployed,
low-income member

City, State, ZIP

\$35 Member

\$100 Sustaining Member

Institutional/Organizational Affiliation (Optional)

\$250 Institutional Member

I would like to join the Faculty Network

Telephone (Home) (Work)

I would also like a subscription to the *Journal of*

Progressive Human Services:

Email

Individual Subscription:
\$25 for SWAA Members

Please make your check payable to The Social Welfare Action Alliance and return to:

Please send me more information about SWAA

Social Welfare Action Alliance
Columbus Circle Station
P.O. Box 20563
New York, NY 10023

Sign me up for the "bertha_swaa" email discussion list

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**Please check the date on your label.
Have your membership dues expired?
Please renew soon!**

HOLD THE DATE!

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