

# WELFARE FRAUD

By Bayard Rustin

The exploitation of the politically powerless has become a tragic consequence of the recession. Because of the sickness of the economy reactionary politicians are able to take advantage of the defenselessness of the poor, uneducated and handicapped and call their actions "reform."

In the name of "reform," Wallace, Reagan and their like are pushing through reductions in already inadequate payments to welfare families by methods often unconstitutional and always inequitable. And even in states governed by moderates and liberals there are similar efforts to reduce payments, tighten eligibility requirements and prosecute fraud. Liberals reluctantly agree to the changes out of political necessity, faced as they are with the outcries of resentful taxpayers.

What has led us to the situation where, for instance, an Alabama mother, who previously supported her three small children on \$206 a month, must now get by on \$130 because of Wallace-initiated welfare cut backs? Who is to blame?

First of all, it is unfair to reproach beleaguered taxpayers. True, the animosity with which working class people regard welfare is sometimes motivated by racial prejudice. But usually their indignation is based on economics, not race. They suffer because of inflation, and they suffer because of the government's efforts to curb inflation. Property taxes soar, and they feel their homes are jeopardized. Unemployment increases, bringing anxiety about lay offs. Feeling abandoned by government, they strike out at the most convenient target, the welfare family who, because of misleading and sensationalistic press accounts, they perceive as deceitful idlers.

Unfortunately, these myths are encouraged by cynical politicians. This approach is dishonest both to the poor and to the working class taxpayer, who is deceived into believing that the problem somehow rests with the character of the poor rather than with the conditions that created their poverty. It is these public officials who are committing the real welfare fraud.

While dishonest, this strategy does have political value. If reactionaries can convince workers that welfare families are by nature shiftless, immoral and devious they can drive a wedge between the alliance of workers and poor which has been a potent voting block for candidates who will fight for social and economic justice for all classes. It makes it increasingly difficult for liberals, who rely on the support of both the poor and workers, to pursue the struggle for economic and social reform.

Unconstitutional residency laws and massive investigations of welfare families will accomplish little beyond the soothing of a few conservative consciences. As many studies have shown, such measures will not result in any significant decrease in welfare rolls since the overwhelming majority of those on relief are

either too old to work, physically handicapped or mothers who must care for minor children.

More important, they will do nothing to eradicate the problems of poverty and ignorance which lead to bulging relief lists. Welfare in itself is nothing more than a system to permit a family to maintain an existence that is a daily struggle for survival. There is nothing in the welfare system which helps the poor break out of their cycle of poverty.

To make real gain against poverty will require a massive commitment by the federal government to improve education, job skills and health care. Poverty and welfare will only be eliminated when the unskilled are given the opportunity to train for decent paying jobs, when ghetto schools are improved and when the government ensures that there will be jobs available even for those lacking skills.

President Nixon has consistently demonstrated that the elimination of poverty occupies a low priority in his administration. He has vetoed measures to create jobs, to provide more federal funds for schools and to improve health services.

Nixon's welfare reform bill, which might do some good, has also been given a low priority. But even that measure is far from an adequate answer to the problem of poverty. The poor will not cease to exist because the federal government rather than the states, administers welfare, nor because an inadequate income is made a little less inadequate. The availability of a decent job, and the educational opportunity the job requires is the answer, not simply administrative reform.

## LV Employment Office Schedules Job Corps Program

The movie "Uphill Climb" and a visit by former Job Corpsmen will highlight a program aimed at recruiting young people into Job Corps.

The special 30 minute movie will be held at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, September 16 at the Neighborhood Council at "D" and Jackson Streets in West Las Vegas.

The program will be conducted by Carlos Buyding, Job Corps representative from the Las Vegas Employment Office. Discussion will cover educational and skill training opportunities, life in Job Corps centers and enrollment information.

Job Corps is available to youth ages 16 to 21 years old who meet certain requirements.

A second short movie will be shown followed by a question and answer period. The program is free of charge and open to the public.

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# CAPSULE COMMENT

Councilman Aaron Williams of North Las Vegas was named Vice Chairman of the District Board of Health.

Councilman Williams also was appointed a member of the committee on Human Resources of the National League of Cities.

He serves on both bodies as North Las Vegas's Representative.

## Poor People Pulling Together To Investigate Rents Of Federally-Funded Housing Projects

Beginning Tuesday, September 14, 1971, representatives of Poor People Pulling Together will be going from door to door in the public housing projects to inform residents of benefits under a federal housing regulation entitled the Brooke Amendment.

Under the Brooke Amendment residents of federally funded housing projects should only be paying 25% of their monthly adjusted income for rent.

The goal of our investigation is to insure that all residence are being charged rent in accordance with the provisions of the Brooke Amendment.

Poor People Pulling Together will publicly make known the findings of its investigation.



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