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H.E.W. SURRENDERS TO WORKFARE

The latest workfare plan, while a minor improvement over previous Dukakis proposals, still requires welfare recipients to work without pay or the promise of real jobs. The new WIN-WEP plan (which may be in effect when you read this) is identical to the original workfare concept but cuts the time participants will have to work in government or private agencies from one year to six months. Additionally, welfare rules will be changed for those men who go through the program so that if they find paying jobs after doing time on workfare, they can still be eligible for a reduced welfare benefit. Under the old rules, any man who worked over 100 hours would have found his family's benefit cut back a dollar for every dollar he earned.

The state announced the revised program on Oct. 7, in a rush to grab the media's attention from a three hour meeting in Washington on Oct. 6 between workfare opponents and H.E.W. officials. That meeting was a stormy confrontation between the bureaucrats—who seemed to have their minds made up on workfare—and the opponents, including three people who currently receive AFDC, attorneys from Mass. Law Reform and the Center on Social Policy and Law in New York, State Senator Jack Backman, State Rep. Paul Means, and other members of the Coalition Against Workfare from Boston, Worcester, and the North Shore.

The meeting presented an excellent example of how the tight relationship between politicians and bureaucrats at the state and federal level can work to lock out the public from decisions that affect us. The meeting began with H.E.W. spokesperson Eugene Eidenburg announcing that H.E.W.'s main guiding principle in reviewing the Dukakis proposal is to come up with some plan that is legally approvable, which includes a work requirement for AFDC fathers. While workfare opponents tried to focus on issues like wages, displacement of workers, and the real needs of poor people, H.E.W. officials kept coming back to narrower questions on the revised Massachusetts proposal. It became evident that H.E.W. was already committed not to "some approvable plan" but to a specific plan that opponents had seen only 48 hours before.

Members of Coalition Against Workfare at H.E.W. Headquarters in Washington.

The lock-out of the public was made clearer when attorneys tried to pin down H.E.W. on granting a 30 day comment period on any new Massachusetts proposal. Despite the fact that H.E.W. has never before approved a WIN Plan amendment in less than 30 days, Eidenburg refused to allow the public more than 14 days. His agenda was more understandable the next day when the Commonwealth formally submitted its new proposal to H.E.W. The conclusion drawn by opponents was that Eidenburg knew that the proposal was ready and had already promised the state to approve it by November 1. This impression was strengthened by Eidenburg's refusal to agree to a public hearing on the revised proposal. The state's Oct. 7 announcement served to reinforce the impression that public comment was pointless.

This situation cast into doubt whether the Carter Administration's commitment to opening government processes to the public is any more real than that of this state's administration. It did not, however, diminish the Coalition's determination to stop workfare and to let some light into the back rooms where H.E.W. and the Dukakis Administration are making their workfare deals. *J.B.*

UPDATE: Medicaid & Abortion

On September 14, 1977, the Governor vetoed the Flynn-Doyle bill, which would prevent use of state medicaid funds for abortion. On Sept. 15, 1977, the Mass. Senate voted to sustain the Governor's veto. So: the people did win one battle in the abortion fight.

But, Reps. Flynn and Doyle will not let the issue rest, along with the many other anti-abortion activists within and outside the Mass. legislature.

On Sept. 19, 1977, the Mass. House of Representatives voted to attach the Flynn-Doyle bill as an amendment to the supplementary budget before the legislature. On Sept. 28, 1977 that budget with the Doyle-Flynn amendment was sent to the Senate Committee on Ways & Means, where by a voice vote, the committee voted to separate the Flynn-Doyle amendment from the budget because a large part of that supplementary budget includes negotiated pay raises for State employees.

When that supplementary budget reached the Senate floor minus the Flynn-Doyle amendment both issues were again joined by the Senate in a very close vote.

The matter will now fall into the Governor's hands; he can either veto the supplementary budget in an effort to kill the abortion funding amendment, or test new waters and sign the supplementary budget and veto the abortion funding amendment.

We will soon know; that supplementary budget with the Flynn-Doyle amendment will arrive at his desk soon for the signature or the veto. *S.M.*

Community Congress Held in New Bedford

This is a first in New Bedford's history: the creation of a community action organization made up of large numbers of community people. Over the past year and a half, the Southeastern Massachusetts Advocacy Center, a community organizing project in New Bedford, has been putting together neighborhood block clubs, public housing tenant associations, Spanish organizations, as well as issue-oriented coalitions. They were a result of efforts on the part of active community people and organizers. Through the months of organizing, one overall goal was in everyone's mind: to bring all these smaller local groups together into one large community congress dedicated to getting action for low and moderate income people in New Bedford. Hence the name GAIN (Get Action in New Bedford) was chosen by the New Bedford Congress. And get action is what they have done and plan to do in the future.

Seventy-nine groups sent over four hundred delegates to the first annual congress, held Sunday, September 25th, at the old high school building. A new board of directors was elected during the meeting, including officers. Elected president was Pam Cruz, a member of the Westlawn Tenants Association and a spokesperson for the Coalition of Concerned Tenants Union. Mary Crovello, President of the Blue Meadows Tenants Association, was elected to the position of vice president, and will preside over the monthly GAIN senate meetings. The senate will be an ongoing forum for the important community issues and problems, some of which are the allocation of community development money, abandoned properties, public housing improvements, and utility shut-offs, as well as workfare reform, jobs and wages, better community services, and street and traffic control. Workshops at the Congress were concerned with some of these issues.

In addition to groups organized by SEMAC, various political and social organizations in New Bedford attended the Congress. Their involvement will add strength and purpose to the new organization. Among them were representatives of local churches, the YWCA, Bristol County Indian Council, and Onboard Legal Services.

continued on back page