

Budget cutters pit poor vs. taxpayers

by H. Graham Lowry

The escalating round of budget cuts by state governments across the country is turning into an overtly fascist program for the slave-herding and outright elimination of the poor as "useless eaters." While these schemes may sound like the rantings of "former" Klansman and Nazi David Duke, a number of them have been placed on the agenda by such "moderate" Republicans as California's Gov. Pete Wilson and Gov. William Weld of Massachusetts.

In an address Dec. 9, Wilson unveiled a proposal for cutting California's welfare payments by 25%, with the supposed intent of encouraging recipients to find employment. The state has lost more than 400,000 jobs just this year, while the number of persons on welfare rose from 1.5 million in August 1989 to 2.2 million in June 1991. Governor Wilson blames the state's fiscal crisis on the influx of "indigents and immigrants"—even though payments through Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) represent only 6.6% of the budget.

Wilson's plan, dubbed the "Taxpayer Protection Act," will be proposed as a 1992 ballot referendum, designed to pit taxpayers—just hit with the biggest tax hike in state history—against the largely disenfranchised but growing poor population. The measure would also require state legislators to pass a balanced budget each year by June 15, or forfeit their salaries until they do.

The projected \$600 million cut in (AFDC) would reduce welfare payments first by 10%, and then by an additional 15% six months later. Against current law, no extra assistance would be provided for mothers bearing additional children. Teenage mothers would be cut off entirely unless they live with their parents or legal guardians, who would receive the funds directly. Future payment levels would automatically be cut if tax revenues decline or fail to cover increases in welfare caseloads.

'Workfare,' or death

Gov. William Weld of Massachusetts, no stranger to police-state methods, also has a scheme to coerce recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Earlier this year, Weld threatened to jail state officials who refused to implement his budget cuts. Now he wants to herd two-thirds of the current AFDC recipients into minimum-wage jobs—including single parents under 24 with no high school diploma or equivalency certificate!

Weld's workfare program (i.e., working low-paid jobs for a welfare check), cynically entitled Mass Jobs, would also target two-parent families who went on welfare after exhausting their unemployment benefits—because they could not find work! AFDC benefits for any "targeted" recipient who refuses workfare would be terminated, though the children's allotment would be maintained. The plan offers no suggestions as to how the parents would live.

Even more absurd, Weld's workfare program is budgeted at 25% less than the *voluntary* program funded two years ago under former Gov. Michael Dukakis. Funds for training, education, and job placement services have also been cut by one-third. Meanwhile, unemployment in Massachusetts has increased by more than 50% during Weld's first year in office. The number of two-parent families on welfare has increased by 182% since 1989.

Incentives to abort or abandon children

In New Jersey, the state legislature is considering a welfare "reform" bill which would also bar any additional payments to mothers who give birth while receiving benefits. Says Wayne Bryant, the black assemblyman and majority leader who authored the bill, "If you decide to enlarge your family, you should do as I do—get a job and earn more money."

Another of Bryant's bills would force welfare recipients whose children have reached the age of 2 to work or to enroll in job-training, or have their benefits reduced. Both measures, in effect creating financial penalties for mothers who fail to abort or abandon their infants, would require waivers of existing federal regulations.

In Michigan, where Republican Gov. John Engler eliminated the General Assistance fund on Oct. 1, and a legislative leader told the poor to move "somewhere else" if they didn't like it, the growing number of homeless persons are being driven to outdoor tents for shelter. One such encampment in Detroit has been called "Englerville Tent City." One homeless activist predicts there will be 100,000 homeless people in the Detroit area by Christmas.

Maryland has announced plans to cut Aid to Families with Dependent Children by 30%, leaving a welfare family of three with a monthly payment of only \$264. Part of the cuts may be restored for recipients who can prove that they paid their rent on time! Maryland Secretary of Human Resources Carolyn Colvin says the cuts are designed to "encourage" people to get off welfare.

The state's Emergency Assistance program, often the only source of aid to the poor who face evictions, will be terminated. No matter, says Colvin. "Most people are evicted anyway." And eligibility for the General Public Assistance program will be further restricted to eliminate 25% of current recipients. Another proposal would deny disability assistance to anyone who had been officially disabled for less one year. After that, he might receive a little money, if he were still alive to apply for it.