

terminated from welfare. We were told the state does not track this, and therefore nobody knows what has happened to them.

On June 11, *EIR* re-contacted Councilman Ortiz's office to see whether, three months after terminations began, there is any information available on those forced off welfare. The answer is, no. Though the press is full of "success stories" about the drop in the welfare rolls, the "Disappeared" are just that — disappeared — we were told.

In the absence of adequate information from the Commonwealth, Councilman Ortiz's office is now taking a closer look at the issue of child care for the women leaving public assistance. Who will take care of the children? Are there sufficient child care slots available in Philadelphia for thousands of additional children, whose mothers work for meager wages, either very early in the morning or late in the evening, at jobs miles away in the suburbs?

### Contacting the 'Disappeared'

Congreso de Latinos Unidos, a social service agency in Philadelphia, is one of a few such organizations to which the Department of Public Welfare, under pressure, has given the names of welfare recipients who are either about to be terminated from welfare or have already been terminated. *EIR* contacted Executive Director Alba Martinez, to ask what has happened with those recipients whom they have contacted.

Martinez told *EIR*, "From our experience, what we are finding is that a number of people are taking jobs that are very entry-level jobs, without necessarily having the skills and the training and the educational background that will help them stay permanently employed. So, folks are being pressured to move into the workforce in ways that don't necessarily help them become self-sufficient over the long term. That's one instance that we have seen.

"Another instance is that people who are required to comply with the rules don't do so because they have a lot of fear or they are in denial or they really don't feel supported in the process, so that they ignore the letters from the welfare office telling them to come in."

It's at this point that Congreso contacts the recipients, Martinez said, and tries to help prevent their termination, while helping them qualify and find a living-wage job, child care, transportation, and all the other elements of job-readiness which are not adequately covered by the city or state.

The reason for this, Martinez said, is that "people may get a job that doesn't pay very much and then they drop their welfare altogether, because they don't want to keep going back, and then they're not getting the health insurance that they're entitled to, or the food stamps. So, they end up becoming poorer than they were before."

While they have seen some "success stories," Martinez said, Congreso believes that "we need to build a different approach to this altogether. We want to see that there are training opportunities and educational opportunities for every adult in our neighborhood and that's really what we're going to aim for. This is not only about helping people who are on

these lists, which we want to do. At the same time, we're involved in a coalition that's trying to come up with an economic plan for our neighborhood that revolves around people, not around business. What are the kinds of educational programs that our people need. What are the training programs that they need and want. And then we're going to try to get them. Because training and education is really what they need."

The population served by Congreso has the additional problem that many are immigrants, most of whom are not eligible for welfare in the first place. For those who are eligible, Martinez said, "the language barrier is very important and needs to be taken into account in three ways. One, is that perhaps they don't always *get* the rules that they're being asked to follow. Secondly, it's harder to find a job when you don't speak the language that most employers require. Thirdly, there are hardly any educational training and support programs that meet their language needs. Three strikes and you're out."

The next several months will test whether the proponents of Act 35 and PRWORA can be forced to provide a humane solution to the crisis that their "welfare reform" legislation has created, or whether those who survive it will have to seek juridical remedy, as LaRouche had warned, for the crimes against humanity which are unfolding against America's "Disappeared" today in Pennsylvania and other states across the nation.

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### Interview: Henry Nicholas

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## Repeal welfare repeal, and then begin reform

*Henry Nicholas is International Vice President of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), AFL-CIO; President of the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees, AFSCME; and President of District 1199C, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was interviewed by Marianna Wertz on June 8.*



**EIR:** I want to ask you about the situation regarding workfare and welfare recipients in the third year since the Federal welfare law passed, particularly

given the amendment which Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-Minn.) introduced last week. It was defeated, but he had asked the Congress to conduct a study to see what has happened to what he called “the disappeared” people on welfare. Can you fill us in on the situation with people who have been dropped from the rolls and nobody knows where they are or what they’re doing?

**Nicholas:** I’m as much in the dark as anyone else on what is happening. Clearly, the situation is too political to get any inquiry, because it goes against the will and the desire of the states.

Such an inquiry would be socially responsible, but the legislature itself is not socially responsible. So, I don’t think you can look forward to getting any relief in that regard. The first public group of eight people in Pennsylvania was dropped last week. That’s the public group. But, there obviously are more that are not public.

**EIR:** What is AFSCME’s approach to the situation with workfare?

**Nicholas:** I’m not speaking for AFSCME. I’m an advocate on the issue within the AFSCME organization. I don’t set policy for the international. That would have to come from them.

**EIR:** What are you an advocate for?

**Nicholas:** I have been the foremost advocate across the country on this issue. I’ve criss-crossed the country about 60 times, since Aug. 26, 1996, when the President signed his welfare repeal. I’ve argued that it’s not welfare reform. It was indeed welfare repeal, and history teaches us that that’s what we’re headed to. When you reform something, you fix it. When you repeal it, you eliminate it.

**EIR:** So, in your view, this basically eliminated the safety net for people.

**Nicholas:** Yes, in anybody’s view who understands reality. If they say, look, regardless of your station in life, once you’ve been in this system for five years you’re dead on arrival. Any sane person knows that there are not enough jobs to put to work the millions of people who are being replaced. There are jobs closures, workers with greater skills and current work record that get put out every day. So, these welfare repealers [recipients forced to work] have to get at the very end of the line, and I don’t know anyone [employers] dutifully looking for that population.

**EIR:** Most of those who are getting jobs are earning at or slightly above minimum wage.

**Nicholas:** But you can’t live on that. That’s imposing poverty. When you get the job, you give up your health care and your child care and all the other stuff that comes with it.

**EIR:** Are you seeing a growth in homelessness?

**Nicholas:** No, there is a transition in what is occurring, and

will occur. As we dump the poor, we increase the intensity of our industrial jail complex. Now, prisons are the fastest growing industry in the country. We are now the prison capital of the world. And, clearly, there is a moral breakdown, because those who understand the need for the quality of life issues are afraid to speak out for them.

**EIR:** It might be interesting to contrast the rise in the prison population to the fall in the welfare population.

**Nicholas:** You can begin to see it. And the criminal part of it is the flagrant human violation aspect of it; and nobody’s writing about it, nobody’s speaking about it, and that is the total privatization of prisons, and then turning prisoners into workers. If you call up to check on your credit cards, the computer part of it is in the prisons. They are working what could be a \$75,000-a-year job in prison [for poverty wages], and when they are out of prison, they can’t get employed.

In many states—Wisconsin and all those other states where prison work is commonplace—the socially minded journalists are not free to write about it.

**EIR:** Because of the governor?

**Nicholas:** I don’t know what it is. Probably because of editorial policy.

**EIR:** Where do you see a solution coming from?

**Nicholas:** You can’t get a solution on public policy unless you advance an agenda that carries with it quality-of-life issues. You can’t get that today as we enter the new millennium, with a stock market going through the roof. And, the suffering index is increased by the fact that we’re spending \$34,000 a year, minimum, per prisoner. If you gave a minimum wage of \$34,000 a year, 80% of the people wouldn’t be in prison.

**EIR:** If you gave that as a wage, instead of sending him to prison, he might be productive.

**Nicholas:** He would be productive, taking care of his family, paying taxes.

**EIR:** But there are a lot of companies which are invested in prison work and making a fortune from it.

**Nicholas:** I know. The government is working on it. That’s the problem.

**EIR:** Wellstone’s bill failed by only one vote, in demanding that there be tracking of welfare recipients who have been taken off the rolls.

**Nicholas:** Tracking is just one step. Once you track, so what?

**EIR:** Is there anything further you’d like to say?

**Nicholas:** I think there should be welfare repeal repealed. It was not welfare reform.

**EIR:** You mean there should be real reform?

**Nicholas:** No, no. It should be the repealing of welfare re-

peal, and then begin a program of welfare reform.

**EIR:** What would be in that welfare reform?

**Nicholas:** Obviously, you can't talk about welfare reform if you're playing so hard for vouchers and other forms of education that eliminate the basis of the poor getting a decent education.

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## Interview: George Zeller

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# Ohio: results so bad they won't print them

*The peak welfare assistance caseload in Ohio was reached in March 1994, at 697,666. Reforms enacted throughout the 1990s (state welfare cuts began in 1994, and Federal cuts began in 1997) have steadily dropped the number of people on welfare in Ohio, including a reduction of 55,000 in the past year alone. Ohio's latest welfare reform was enacted in October 1997, limiting welfare benefits to three years for most people. The April 1999 figure, for Ohio Works First, is 271,456.*

*What is happening to those people, mostly women and children, who have been dropped from assistance? A January 1999 study by the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies, representing the state's 52 local community action organizations that provide services to the poor, hit the headlines because it showed that most former welfare recipients are not moving to work and that the number of people removed from the food stamp program has exceeded job growth in most of Ohio's 88 counties at some point in the past three years. EIR asked George Zeller, a senior researcher for the Council for Economic Opportunities, who helped prepare the report, to answer that question. He was interviewed on June 9 by Marianna Wertz.*

**EIR:** We are planning a feature article on what Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-Minn.) last week called "The Disappeared": What has happened to the people who have been dropped from the welfare rolls? He asked for a Federal study of this. You did a study of this in January for Ohio.

**Zeller:** Everything we're doing here, we're updating continuously. We have a variety of materials, mainly focussed on Ohio, or even more so on Cleveland.

One thing we did, was we compared the number of families losing welfare benefits to the total job growth simultaneously in every county across the state for the last three and a half years. In most of the counties, the number of families

leaving welfare exceeded the total number of jobs created.

There are two wage match studies that we have in Ohio. The Ohio legislation, which is very draconian compared to the other states on the welfare reforms, nevertheless has a provision in it that requires that the states do a report similar to what Senator Wellstone called for. They have to send a report to the state legislature showing the number of people who left welfare, whether or not they had jobs, and how much the jobs paid. The first month that they put the state's welfare reform into effect, they did that for one quarter. They took a look at everybody who left the first month, and matched them up with the complete jobs and earnings database that they have at the Ohio Bureau of Employment Services. The numbers came out so bad that they quit doing it.

**EIR:** Really!

**Zeller:** And they haven't filed this required report with the legislature. What they found was, that of the people who left—November 1997 was the first month that Ohio's system was in effect—36% showed up the quarter after that in the employment database. Then, they looked at three quarters subsequent to that. They went all the way to the fall of 1998, and they looked at people who stayed off welfare that whole time—so, that would be people who stayed off, not only *were* off, but *stayed* off for a year—and matched them up with that same job database, and found that 42% of them had jobs. So, somewhere between one-third and two-fifths of the people leaving welfare in Ohio have jobs, and the rest don't. The data were so bad, they ceased doing the match.

**EIR:** Were there any data on the wage level of the jobs, or how long they stayed in those jobs?

**Zeller:** That's the whole issue here in Ohio, because they are required to do that and they're not doing it. There was a separate effort done, that covered Cuyahoga County, which is Cleveland and its suburbs only. It was done by a professor [Claudia Coulton] at Case Western Reserve, under contract from the county here, rather than the state. She matched up everybody who left welfare here in Cleveland with the job database, and it did have earnings in it. Not only whether they had a job, but also how much they made. What she found is that 45% of them had no job; 12% of them had a job, but it paid less than \$4,000 in a year. [See **Figure 1**.]

**EIR:** That's below minimum wage.

**Zeller:** They may have been working at minimum wage or above, but they didn't work all year or full time. You put those two together, 45% making nothing and 12% making less than \$4,000—that's 57% were making less than \$4,000, which is the majority. About one-fifth did get jobs that actually got up to the poverty level or above. So, about one-fifth of them are succeeding here in Cleveland and four-fifths are still poor, and a large majority of that four-fifths are pretty near indigent if not literally indigent. That was consistent with the statewide