

Fund to Reconstruct NWRO

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Dear Friend:

Your help is urgently needed to aid the work of a group of welfare organizers now under attack from the Nixon regime.

The president's Draconian budget cuts in every area of social welfare -- so visible in the headlines -- have been accompanied by measures generally not so visible, measures designed to prevent those hardest hit from organizing resistance.

For the past year, and especially since the November elections, Nixon, Senator Talmadge and local law-and-order politicians like Governor Reagan of California have begun implementing forced work at a wage below minimum-wage standards, or sometimes at no wage at all. This forced slave labor has been accompanied by harassment up to and including death threats and frameups for welfare fraud and arson against those courageous organizers in the Welfare Rights movement who have fought back.

It is no exaggeration to say that these slave labor programs are echoes of the economic techniques used in Nazi Germany in the 1940s. Welfare recipients must either work for any wage, at any degrading job, or starve -- those are government orders!

There are, of course, excuses. "We are providing jobs for the destitute" or "We are putting lazy welfare bums to work." But such lies can't hide the essence of these schemes. For example, there is the "brownie point plan" which the New York City Department of Social Services is planning to put into effect in the Bay Ridge section of Brooklyn.

Under this plan, a mother's present welfare check would be cut approximately in half. She could then earn "points" which would add money back onto her grant. Points are earned by a favorable school-attendance report by the child's teacher,

service by her junior or senior high school children in a volunteer (unpaid) job for a certain number of hours after school, or by the mother working for free at a certain slave-labor wage rate toward her check in either a volunteer job or a city government job.

This latter aspect of the program -- the direct attack on low-paid municipal workers' jobs -- has been implemented throughout New York City under the state workfare laws, especially in the Parks Department. Hundreds of welfare recipients are working there now in formerly unionized jobs. We talked to one former civil service employee who was laid off, had to go on welfare because he couldn't find another job, and found himself forced to work on his old Parks Department job at half his former weekly wage -- or starve. The New York Civil Liberties Union is now conducting a court suit together with District Council 37 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees against this 19th-century brutalization of welfare victims.

With these schemes in the works, Nixon doesn't want any welfare organizers around who will resist him. In fact, through the federal Department of Health, Education and Welfare and through other arms of his increasingly centralized apparatus, he is attempting to buy off demoralized local militants and turn them into a branch of city and state welfare departments, tricking them into "working within" the slave labor system rather than organizing to defeat it. Several demoralized ex-militants in the National Welfare Rights Organization have yielded to these offers of government jobs and "expense money" (see page one of The Organizer, enclosed). The old NWRO has become pretty much defunct through this process.

But on January 27, courageous organizers sparked by the efforts of Jennette Washington, NWRO founder and elected Eastern Regional alternate delegate to NWRO's National Coordinating Committee, met to call a conference for March 31 in Philadelphia. They agreed "to build a new NWRO that unites welfare recipients, veterans and other unemployed together to fight for jobs, income and dignity for all, and that will link up its struggles with that of employed workers fighting wage cuts, layoffs and speedup" (see letter on page eight of The Organizer).

This group of welfare organizers, the Committee to Re-build NWRO, does not insist that everyone agree with them on

everything to join in their work. As they declare in their Statement of Principles: "We will build and organize for the convention with every welfare organizer who understands the need to save what is left of NWRO and to rebuild it, whether or not we agree on any other issue."

Since the Committee issued its call for this special Convention, organizers are rallying around.

Some examples: The Buffalo, N.Y. and Winston-Salem, North Carolina WRO chapters are now back on their feet after a long period of inactivity. Many welfare organizers in New York have revived politically and are working with the Committee. The Eastern Farm Workers Association, struggling in a unionization drive against Long Island, NY potato growers, has affiliated with the Committee. The Puerto Rican Socialist Party has also recently joined the drive.

Of course, as is related in an enclosed letter of support from Russel Johnson of the American Friends Service Committee, this campaign has been met with purges and suspensions of organizers associated with the Committee by those NWROers who would rather work with the government.

Some more far-sighted trade unionists have also publicly supported the Reconstruction of NWRO. As Jerry Menapace, president of Local 117 of the Amalgamated Meatcutters and Butcher Workmen of North America, stated in a press release (enclosed), "The most frightening aspect of the work-fare schemes is that if all able-bodied welfare recipients are required to work or lose their means of subsistence, what will prevent this huge work force from becoming scabs? ... 'Workfare' may easily become a confrontation between workers on the one side and the unemployed on the other. Each group would be battling each other for what's left of the pie, while the wealthy ruling class observes from their perch above, waiting to take what's left from the 'winner'."

Many other trade unionists have endorsed or are circulating the Resolution on Government Organizing Against Welfare Recipients (page seven of The Organizer). Campus support groups have also been built to help defend these welfare organizers.

Now they need your support. Nixon tries to deny all --

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but especially poor people -- the right to organize, the right to inform their peers of what's being done to them and how to organize against it.

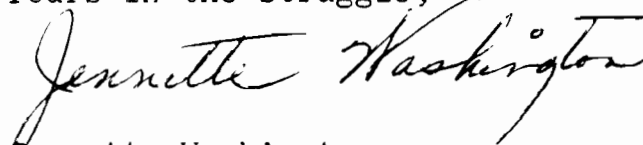
When Nixon's Department of Justice gives the signal to local prosecutors, "Open season on newspaper reporters!", these reporters have powerful newspapers backing them up, hiring lawyers and publicizing these attacks on free speech. But what chance does a courageous welfare mother have if the government threatens to throw her and her children out to starve? Who will even know?

If these welfare fighters are to keep resisting the government's attacks, they need money. If they don't have it, they won't be able to organize, and Nixon's attacks will go unopposed. A minimum national budget is enclosed to give you an idea of the money needed and what it will be used for. Note, however, that this budget does not provide for local organizing expenses, nor for the fact that as organizing becomes more successful, expenses tend to rise.

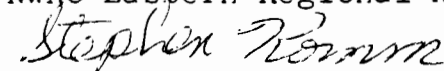
Support the fight of these welfare organizers to keep spreading the truth! Send a check today to: Fund to Reconstruct NWRO, 792 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10025

For more information, write to the Fund or call 212-865-0777. Direct donations of office equipment, supplies, travel subsidies and aid in fund-raising will also be welcome, as will offers to take responsibility for regular bills such as telephones or rent. Application for tax-exempt status for contributions to the Fund is now being made to the Internal Revenue Service.

Yours in the struggle,



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NWRO Eastern Regional Alternate



Stephen Komm
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