Labor in Focus by Marianna Wertz

California enacts 'workfare'

Single mothers are being put to work at slave-labor wages, and the unions are hopping mad.

On Sept. 26, President Reagan's home state of California passed legislation to establish the most far-reaching "workfare" program in the nation. The work-for-welfare law is the brainchild of California State Health and Welfare Secretary David B. Swoap, a longtime Reagan supporter who moved with the President from California to the nation's capital, where he rewrote much of federal welfare policy over the last five years.

According to the Oct. 3 *San Francisco Chronicle*, Swoap is the leading contender to replace outgoing U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Margaret Heckler. Representative Silvio Conte (R-Mass.) told the *Chronicle*, after meeting with White House aides, that Swoap's role in pushing through the workfare program was a "remarkable achievement."

"A first-of-its-kind state law forcing most welfare recipients to seek jobs or job training will help California's poor take care of themselves while easing costs for taxpayers," Gov. George Deukmejian said, signing the bill into law. The legislation will affect an estimated 175,500 welfare recipients, mostly single women with children. It will require them to work for their government checks in return for increased child-care and transportation services. Women with children under age six will be exempt.

The legislation has been broadly denounced by trade unions, led by the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), whose October 1985 issue of *Public Employee* carries the front page headline, "Workfare: It Doesn't Work and It Isn't Fair."

AFSCME charges that "study after study has shown that workfare doesn't work—because it's administratively unworkable or because most people on welfare simply can't work because they are sick or disabled or have small children, or because there often aren't enough jobs to go around."

The California bill would affect roughly 32% of recipients of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program.

The Reagan administration's backing for this bill, motivated by the President's misguided notion of "free enterprise," made possible an unprecedented coalition of "liberals" and "conservatives" in the state legislature to pass the bill. "We've done something that never has been done, and that is to bring the liberals and the conservatives together," Swoap told the *Washington Post* on Oct. 4. The bill passed by a broad majority in the Democratic-controlled legislature.

The "liberals" and "conservatives" backing this bill share the same Malthusian outlook that motivates the conditionality policies of the International Monetary Fund. The IMF forces the target nation to export such essentials as food and steel to pay the debt, as a condition for further loans. Both the IMF and the authors of workfare don the robe of righteous guardians of the public trust, "saving the taxpayer's dollar," demanding repayment of money "freely given."

Indeed, both are slave labor schemes, designed by advocates of population reduction, whose only real concern is to wipe out of existence institutions like the trade unions, which stand in the way of their deindustrialization policies.

The New York case, the most advanced in the nation, proves that workfare is nothing but IMF austerity for the Third World come home to roost in the United States. New York City, which passed workfare in 1959, has pioneered in using workfare to recycle the workforce down from unionized, skilled labor into involuntary servants of the city's financial elite. Since the mid-'70s, New York has increasingly assigned workers from welfare rolls to fill vacancies in the public sector—vacancies which occur when city budgets can't cover necessary services.

AFSCME points to one case, Sam Chini, who worked in garbage collection until he was laid off three years ago. After six months on unemployment, and three months of welfare, he was put on workfare and sent to work in the same department he used to work in—only he earns the minimum wage and lost five years seniority. This situation is by no means an isolated occurrence.

The biggest, glaring fallacy behind workfare is the question, where do the jobs come from? There are only two possible sources: Either they are created in the public sector, which generates runaway inflation in the economy; or they are taken from somebody else. If they were created as a result of an expanding economy, workfare wouldn't be necessary, as full employment would occur by itself.

Swoap's role in passing the California law, rather than a ticket into the Reagan administration, should qualify him for a trial at Nuremberg.