

Massachusetts to the poor: Drop dead

by H. Graham Lowry

Massachusetts Gov. William Weld, the blueblood bankers' boy turned police-state advocate, has issued a massive austerity scheme which vividly demonstrates the genocidal intent of the New World Order—and the incompetence of the financial “remedies” associated with it.

Weld released his “Emergency Plan for Fiscal Recovery” to the legislature on Jan. 31—a 106-page document dictated by the secret group of Brahmin bankers known as “the Vault,” and cleared with Wall Street financiers who control the flow of credit for the nation’s increasingly bankrupt states. Nearly \$2.7 billion—the equivalent of 20% of the state’s \$13 billion budget—will be eliminated over the next 17 months. Through a combination of cutbacks, layoffs, shutdowns, selloffs, and just plain swindles, Weld plans to gouge \$850 million from the current fiscal budget, and more than \$1.6 billion from the next one. In vital human services programs, \$214 million will be cut by June 30, and \$618 million more during fiscal 1991-92—targeting especially the poor.

Weld’s cynical campaign pledge to revive economic growth, and trim the “fat” in government spending, has disappeared into the trash can. James Braude, director of the Tax Equity Alliance of Massachusetts, said of Weld’s budget, “The kinder, gentler candidate with a prescription for \$1 billion in painless cuts seems to be turning into Mr. Hyde.” State Democratic Assistant Majority Leader Frederick Berry said of Weld’s budget proposal, “It’s kind of like reading a Steven King manuscript for the first time.”

Don’t be born

Weld’s message to the poor is, “Drop dead—better yet, don’t be born.” An unspecified number of public hospitals will be closed; general relief payments will be terminated after one year; clothing allowances will be ended entirely; and emergency assistance for rent and utilities will cover only one month instead of four. Already on the drawing boards is a plan for forced “workfare,” with a budget provision to study its “cost effectiveness.”

All payments for prenatal care for poor women will be eliminated for the first six months of pregnancy, the period when it counts most. A sliding-fee scale will be established for programs for the mentally ill, retarded, and disabled, and

Medicaid recipients will be charged for each doctor visit. Nursing home residents will be required to use their homes as assets to pay for \$15 million of their care. Tenants in state-subsidized housing will be squeezed for 30% of income for rent payments, instead of the current 25%.

In Weld’s first month in office, the state’s official unemployment rate shot up over 16%, to 8.6%, higher than the “experts” projected it would reach by summer. Yet Weld has ordered the layoff of 6,200 more state workers, 3,000 of them within a few weeks. The remaining 63,000 will be forced to work for two weeks without pay, and beginning July 1, will be charged \$5 a day for parking! The share they pay for health insurance will be increased from 10 to 25%. Weld also plans to skip a \$134 million payment due to a state pension fund. But a \$500 million interest payment will be made in June to the banks, on debt rolled over after previous revenue shortfalls.

For the coming fiscal year, nearly \$109 million will also be cut from public education. A number of state colleges will be closed, and tuition will be increased by 33%—on top of the 50% increase imposed over the last three years. The state’s \$58 million scholarship program will be converted into a revolving loan fund. Many of the system’s 33,000 needy students are expected to drop out. Weld also announced the elimination of the state’s adult literacy program, just four days after he stood smiling with Barbara Bush promoting the project at one of its facilities in Watertown.

Budget to enforce municipal collapse

Local school systems will be the major casualty of another huge budget cut for next year—the elimination of \$270 million in state aid to cities and towns. The state will squeeze another \$29 million from local education budgets by requiring the towns to pick up 10% of teacher retirement costs. Police, fire, and sanitation services will also be jeopardized; and scores of towns teetering on the brink of bankruptcy will be pushed over the edge. Weld claims much of the local aid losses will be offset by reducing state-mandated payment levels for workmen’s compensation, health insurance, special education, and construction!

That sort of accounting swindle is woven throughout Weld’s “recovery plan.” The budget calls for selling the state-owned Quabbin Reservoir, which supplies water to 46 communities in the Boston area, to the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority for \$100 million—and paying for the “purchase” by increasing water rates. The \$24 million budgeted for removal of snow and ice from state roads would be eliminated, by transferring responsibility to the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority. Its officials say that means curtailing construction projects, which would eliminate more jobs.

If the legislature balks at the full measure of austerity Weld has demanded, he will freeze spending unilaterally, he told reporters Jan. 31, under a provision in state law empowering him to act without its consent.