

The Privatizers Are Destroying District of Columbia's Children

by Carl Osgood

A decade-long operation to phase out municipal-based child welfare services in the District of Columbia entered a new phase earlier this year, when the *Washington Post* seized upon the death of two-year-old Brianna Blackmond, who had been in the city's foster-care system. The result of the *Post*'s coverage of the little girl's death has been to convince D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams and members of the U.S. Congress to give further impetus to a plan to privatize the District's child welfare services.

But the tragic death of Brianna Blackmond can be laid right on the doorstep of the Conservative Revolutionaries, including the Gingrichite members of Congress such as Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) and Rep. Tom Davis (R-Va.), who are advocates of privatization and ripping up the principle that government must act along the lines of the Constitutional principle of the General Welfare clause.

As *EIR* has documented since the November 1994 heyday of the Gingrichite Conservative Revolution and its "Contract on America," the would-be architects of "privatizing" education, prisons, hospitals, and social services, have committed murders on a large scale. These privatizers have gutted the social services capabilities of the District, and have imposed a bankers' dictatorship, in the form of the Emergency Financial Control Board, which was created by act of Congress and passed by voice vote in the House of Representatives in March 1995. D.C.'s Brianna Blackmond is, in fact, one of these victims.

What neither the Mayor nor the Congress have acknowledged publicly is, that if D.C.'s Child and Family Services Agency is unable to deliver the services, it's supposed to deliver as a matter of law, then it's because a war has been waged against it for at least five years by a Federally mandated receivership.

A National Pattern

In some ways, the story begins in 1989, when, as part of a nationwide pattern, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a class-action lawsuit against the District and then-Mayor of Washington, Marion Barry, charging that children were being warehoused in the foster-care system without permanency plans, that is, without being placed for adoption or, alternatively, being re-united with their families.

But later developments show that the "cure" for the

abuses—a financial dictatorship over the District—has been even more deadly. Sources inside the agency have told *EIR* that, in fact, the problems described in the ACLU suit did exist, because of a lack of resources and understaffing due to economic conditions. The situation was also not unique to the District. Despite attempts to blame the problems on the "poor management" of Mayor Barry (who had also been a target of the Justice Department's "Operation Fruehmenschen" to indict and imprison African-American elected officials), similar lawsuits were filed throughout the country.

By 1991, a remedial order in the ACLU suit was issued by Federal District Court Judge Thomas Hogan, which called for massive "reform" of the Child and Family Services Division (CFSD), which is responsible for foster care. An implementation plan was developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy, the court-appointed monitor, but within two years, the plan went far beyond the requirements of the court order to include privatization of many services.

Judge Hogan's order required massive reorganization of the foster-care agency, according to rigid deadlines, but failed to provide additional money for doing so; agency personnel soon found themselves incapable of keeping up with the demands of the court order. CFSD couldn't hire additional personnel, because of the budget austerity which paralyzed the D.C. government, and it even lost its ability to maintain copier machines and vehicles, items essential to its day-to-day operations.

Financial Warfare

By early 1995, the entire Washington government administration was under assault from Wall Street's private executioners, in the midst of a concerted effort by the new Gingrich leadership of the House to eliminate welfare and social services as part of the "Contract on America." The District's bonds were downgraded to make it uncreditworthy; hospitals ran critically short of supplies; and on Feb. 23, 1995, the D.C. Superintendent of Schools made an urgent appeal for free, volunteer labor by parents and by city employees, to come and repair the schools, so that they could again open. Because of plumbing, electrical, and structural dangers, many schools had to remain closed until repairs were made. By March 29, 1995, all District administration and spending had been taken out the hands of elected officials and put under the austerity

regime of the Emergency Financial Control Board.

Under these impossible conditions, the foster-care agency was incapable of meeting the requirements of Judge Hogan's original order. In a followup hearing, Hogan placed the child welfare system into limited receivership, and appointed three "limited" receivers to oversee the agency. When this failed to produce results, he placed the entire agency into general receivership, and appointed Jerome G. Miller as the general receiver.

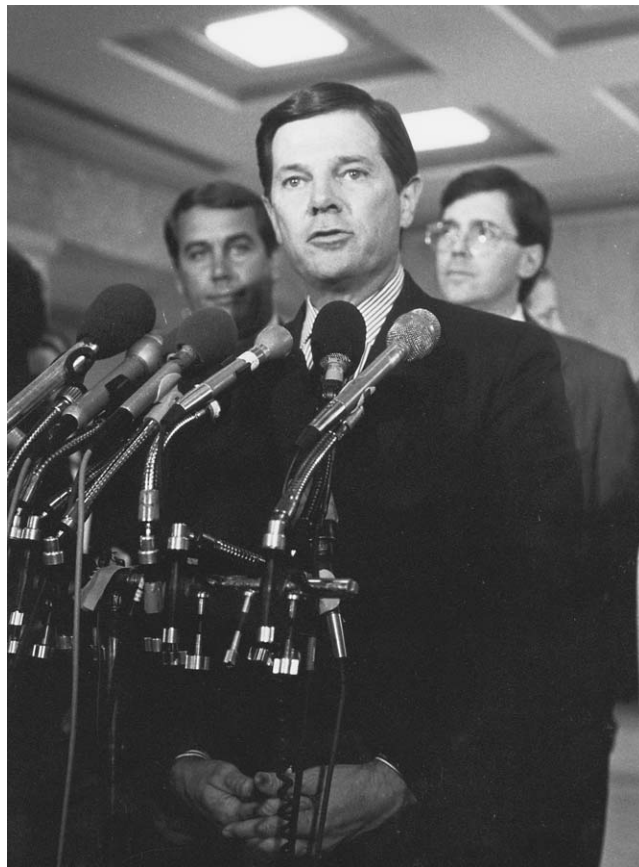
On Aug. 24, 1995, Hogan issued an order which granted the receiver "all necessary authority to carry out its responsibilities. . . . The Receiver will make reasonable efforts to exercise its authority in cooperation with District of Columbia officials and in a manner consistent with local law whenever possible. However, to the degree that local law . . . interferes with the Receiver's discharge of its responsibilities, *local law is superseded by the Receiver's authority*" (emphasis added). The remainder of the order details a plan which revolves around local-control decentralization and privatization of the District's child-welfare system.

The Mind Benders Take Over

Miller was the perfect man for the job: He has top credentials as a social control brainwasher. Miller began his career, after graduating in 1957 with a Master's degree in social work from Loyola University in Chicago, as a psychiatric social work officer with the U.S. Air Force. As he brags in his book *Last One Over the Wall*, he was one of three original officers (the other two being a psychiatrist and a psychologist) who founded the first psychiatric clinic in the Strategic Air Command. SAC Commander Gen. Curtis LeMay opposed the project, but was overruled by the Air Force surgeon general, who was in turn prevailed upon by World War II American military psychiatry pioneer Dr. Karl Menninger. Menninger, a general in the U.S. Army Reserve, wanted the clinic set up at Forbes Air Force Base, Kansas, as a satellite of his Topeka-based Menninger Clinic.

In his book, Miller relates that, as the clinic's "junior officer, I was assigned the less formal tasks, ending up as chauffeur and tour guide to Aldous Huxley, Margaret Mead, Konrad Lorenz, Nathan Ackerman, and other notables who visited the Menninger clinic in those halcyon days." The ostensible mission of the clinic was to weed out those on the SAC staff who were potentially mentally unbalanced, such as was later popularized by the 1963 film "Dr. Strangelove."

From SAC, Miller went to Catholic University of America, under USAF sponsorship, where he received his doctorate in social work, then was deployed to England (1964-68), where he was chief of USAF/Royal Air Force psychiatric social work services. Miller reports that during this time, "I got to know some of the experimental psychiatric and child care programs (such as St. Francis Redfern, August Aichhorn's and George Lyward's Finchden Manor, and A.S. Niell's Summerhill), which would never be allowed in the



House Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-Tex.). The policies of the Conservative Revolutionaries are killing children right in the backyard of the Capitol building, as the District of Columbia's child welfare services are gutted.

States, but paradoxically, the strait-laced British considered routine. . . . I also got to see the worst of organically oriented British psychiatry and authoritarian behaviorist psychology. The horrifying visions of H.G. Wells and George Orwell took life." Apparently anguished by the latter category, Miller identified himself with the former, and began to proudly label himself a "mollycoddling bleeding heart."

After leaving the Air Force in 1968, Miller embarked on a career of taking apart state systems for dealing with juvenile offenders, starting with Massachusetts in 1969 (which is the subject of his book cited above), then moving on to Illinois in 1973 and Pennsylvania in 1975. In 1977, he founded the National Center on Institutions and Alternatives, in Alexandria, Virginia, which has been his base of operations ever since.

Miller's tenure was to last only 20 months, and it was not marked by any improvement in the Child and Family Services Agency. In fact, service delivery continued to decline — and still does to this day. The number of children "languishing in foster care," the main issue in the original lawsuit, increased under Miller's tenure — and also continues to do so to this day.

Miller's tenure was also marked by racial tension in a city which is 60% African-American. Miller was eventually replaced by Ernestine Jones, who came to the city from Lockheed Martin IMS, which has generated much of its business in the aftermath of the 1996 welfare reform bill.

People both inside and outside the foster-care agency thought that Jones, an African-American woman, would bring an entirely different perspective to the agency. Instead, she is known, as described to *EIR*, as "Jerome Miller in drag." Jones runs the agency much as Miller did, as her own personal empire, not accountable to either D.C. laws or the court system. When the agency went into receivership in 1995, it had about a dozen top-level managers. Under Jones, the top-level bureaucracy has grown to 100 to 200 highly paid managers and consultants from the private sector, report sources familiar with these operations. In 1999, the agency ran \$24 million over budget, the most of any D.C. government agency (even though it's run by a receiver, the agency still gets its budget from the D.C. government). Alongside the budget deficit, Jones attracted criticism for spending \$3.5 million for new furniture to outfit executive offices in a new building to which the agency is moving in Southwest Washington.

Washington Post Escalates Its War

The campaign against the agency entered a new phase, however, with the death of Brianna Blackmond, who died of blunt-force injury to her head, three weeks after being returned to her mother by order of a D.C. Superior Court judge. Mayor Williams, community leaders, and members of Congress are convinced that the little girl's death was the result of some failure by the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA), even though the circumstances of her return to her mother have yet to be adequately explained. *EIR* has been told that, supposedly, both the social worker and the District's assistant corporation counsel opposed returning Brianna to her mother, but the judge went ahead made the decision without the required report from the social worker and without a custody hearing. That the social worker failed to submit her report on time, is not unusual. The average case load for social workers in the agency is so great that court reports are rarely submitted on time. The judge apparently made the decision based solely on the say-so of the mother's attorney. While exactly what happened is murky, there's no evidence that the social worker was responsible for Brianna's death, yet the *Washington Post* has city and community leaders screaming that "the agency failed this child and this child died."

Mayor Williams's response to the *Post*'s coverage was to state, in so many words, that the agency ought to be privatized. Williams's remarks came in the context of a report his administration released on Jan. 19 on the city's services for the mentally retarded. Williams had just turned over temporary administration of the Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Agency to the Joseph P. Kennedy Institute, a private organization that provides services to the mentally handi-

capped. Williams can't actually do anything, however, while CFSA is in receivership.

'Conservative Revolution' Resurfaces

The *Washington Post*'s coverage, screaming from the front page regularly throughout February and into March, also led to a May 5 hearing by the D.C. Oversight Subcommittee of the House Government Reform and Oversight Committee, chaired by Representative Davis. In his opening statement, Davis noted that, after five years of receivership, the agency has failed to meet the reforms mandated by Judge Hogan's order. It was this same committee that created Washington's the Emergency Financial Control Board, in 1995—an updated version of the 1975 "Big MAC" that wrecked New York City.

Davis never questioned the *agenda* of the receivership, rather declaring that Brianna's death "clearly reveals a breakdown not only within the Child and Family Services Agency, but with the inter-government agency relationship governing children who are innocent victims of abuse and neglect."

The actual agenda of the hearing, however, was revealed by the opening witness, House Majority Whip DeLay, who openly advocated bringing the private sector in to help "the overburdened public sector." He called for the use of "court-appointed special advocates." CASAs are volunteers who handle one or two cases at a time and have 30 to 50 hours of training, as compared to the Masters degrees of the professional social workers employed by the agency. "Remember," DeLay declared, "this is about the child who has died and will die again when deadlines come and go and reports are not completed. . . . I see this as an opportunity to actually do something here, something that the nation can use as a model."

That Davis and DeLay should suddenly insert themselves into this privatization drive should not be surprising. Davis was the driving force behind the creation of the Emergency Financial Control Board in 1995, which stripped Mayor Barry of most of his authority. One of the technocrats brought in by the Financial Control Board to run the city's finances was a little-known lawyer by the name of Anthony Williams. Williams's tenure as the city's chief financial officer became his springboard to become elected mayor of Washington, in 1998. DeLay praised Williams, in the May 5 hearing, for his "commitment to meeting the needs of the District's children" who are at-risk. Davis is also an important cog in DeLay's money machine, as chairman of the National Republican Campaign Committee, the fundraising arm of the House GOP caucus. Going right along with this operation is D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D), just as she did when Davis was engineering the set-up of the Financial Control Board. When the whole picture is known, it's not surprising that D.C.'s Child and Family Services Agency can't deliver the services it's supposed to. Under the privatizers, those services are to be eliminated.