

# STERILIZE WELFARE MOTHERS?

Nashville, Tenn.

When black women were first brought to this continent in bondage, part of their oppression entailed forced impregnation designed to insure future generations of chattel slaves. Now this situation is being transformed into its equally odious opposite through legislative campaigns for mass sterilization of women forced onto relief by capitalism's financial crises.

A bill has been introduced in both houses of the Tennessee legislature to "offer" "voluntary" sterilization to women on welfare who have more than one "illegitimate" child. If the mother doesn't "volunteer" to be sterilized, her welfare payments would be cut off and each "illegitimate" child born after refusal would be declared "dependent," "destitute" or "orphaned" and the state would have the right to take the child from its mother.

State representative Larry Bates, sponsor of the bill in the House, reasoned in a telephone interview that since the state's maximum payment to a mother with five children was \$161 a month, women would do better with less children. He said payments to families could not be raised because state welfare costs to families with dependent children had already risen \$15 million a year for the last three years.

The root of Tennessee's problems,



Welfare Mothers Demonstrate

he said, was the number of people born into welfare's "poverty cycle." Bates' bill passed the general welfare committee with only two dissenting votes: those of the only woman and the only black representative on the committee. On April 5 a vote was scheduled on whether to put the bill on the legislative calendar.

While Bates said support for the bill "is great" in the legislature and he had 3300 letters from voters for the bill and only 20 against it, opposition to it

is mounting from welfare, student, tenant, left and religious groups, including the NAACP and the People's Rights Organization (PRO), a local of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO).

Meetings and demonstrations against the bill are escalating. On March 15, the general welfare committee heard testimony by some 50 people from around the state against it. In a press statement, newly elected black Rep. Charles Pruitt compared the bill to "Hitler's attempt to rid Germany of 'undesirables' by sterilizing masses of women." Mrs. Bonnie Peacock, president of the PRO, said the bill was "just another way of walking over poor blacks." Black state Sen. Avon Williams has pointed out most people on welfare in Tennessee are blind, disabled and old. Offering "voluntary" sterilization to women, he said, would not strike at the heart of the state's greatest welfare "burden".

On April 5, the day after the third anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King in Memphis, demonstrations for social justice were held around the nation. The demonstrations in Tennessee included the demand that women with children on welfare not be sterilized.

Reprinted from The Guardian

## THE FAMILY ASSISTANCE PLAN

### A STUDY BY THE NATIONAL WELFARE RIGHTS ORGANIZATION

PRESIDENT Nixon and key members of the administration have heralded the Family Assistance Plan (FAP) as a revolutionary reform of the welfare system.

How revolutionary is it? Now is the time to find out. FAP in some version will come before the Congress in a matter of weeks. If it passes it will be too late for America's 50 million poor people.

Here are some of the things supporters claim FAP does. Do the facts support the claims?:

#### FAP ALLEVIATES POVERTY AMONG ALL AMERICANS

\*FAP's basic grant level (\$1600 for a family of four) is \$2120 below the government's own official poverty line and \$4900 below the adequate income line (computations based on Bureau of Labor Statistics surveys.)

\*FAP does increase aid to the aged, blind, and disabled. (In fact, its benefit schedule discriminates in their favor.) But it doesn't help them out of poverty. \$1560, the maximum a single aged person could get under FAP, is still wholly inadequate.

#### FAP PROVIDES A UNIFORM NATIONAL MINIMUM INCOME FOR ALL AMERICANS

\*People in equal need are not treated equally under FAP; only some "categories" of the poor get help; single adults and childless couples get no assistance at all, no matter how desperate their need.

\*Payment levels still differ widely from state to state; in Mississippi under FAP, a family of four would get \$1600 a year; the same family would get \$3980 a year in New Jersey.

\*FAP preserves mythical notions of the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor; payments differ greatly from category to category; a single aged adult under FAP might receive almost as much as a family of four.

#### FAP INCREASES BENEFITS FOR THOSE NOW ON WELFARE

\*FAP increases benefits for only 13% of welfare families -- in 8 southern states; 60% will be frozen indefinitely at their current levels; 27% -- in 6 northern states -- may suffer drastic cuts.

\*FAP sets the ceiling for federal support at the poverty line; this means a possible loss to 1.5 million people.

\*FAP contains no automatic cost-of-living escalator; millions and millions of poor people will be condemned to increasing poverty.

#### FAP GETS PEOPLE OFF THE WELFARE ROLLS AND ONTO THE PAYROLLS

\*Most people covered by FAP who could work are already working; even under the best circumstances, only about 2% of all welfare recipients could attain self-sufficiency through employment.

\*There aren't enough jobs to go around for those already in the labor force; the official unemployment rate is over 6% subemployment rates in ghetto areas consistently run 50%.

\*There are no real "employment opportunities" available to "employable" recipients; FAP would merely force them into menial, dead-end jobs at slave wages -- and displace other workers in the process.

\*Having a job does not necessarily mean having an adequate income; 73% of the heads of poor families are working people; a family of four with a husband earning \$1.60 an hour (the federal minimum wage) is still below the poverty line; FAP contains no minimum wage protections; most recipients would have to work for much less than \$1.60 an hour.

#### FAP GREATLY ASSISTS THE WORKING POOR

\*FAP's forced-work provision compels recipients to accept any job offered, no matter what the pay, or

be cut off welfare; subsidizes employers who offer dead-end jobs at slave wages; forces other working poor people out of jobs; drives down wages for all working people.

\*FAP helps some working people a little; but its "breakeven point" (\$3920) -- the point at which earnings cancel out benefits -- is still wholly inadequate. (A family of four needs at least \$6500 a year to make ends meet.)

#### FAP PROVIDES SUBSTANTIAL WORK INCENTIVES

\*Supporters of FAP claim it provides a work incentive of 50% in other words, a recipient's benefits are reduced only 50¢ for every dollar he earns. But actual incentives are much lower and vary unfairly state to state (50% to 3%). After adding in other implicit taxes (social security and income taxes and reductions in income-conditioned benefits such as food stamps) some families may find they have 0% work incentive.

#### FAP PROMOTES STABLE FAMILY LIFE

\*Under FAP, mothers of school-age children are forced to work; a mother cannot refuse a job, no matter how low the pay; if she does, she is cut off welfare.

\*If a mother is cut off welfare, benefits to her children may be paid to a third party, somebody outside her family.

\*A stepparent is forced to support his spouse's children, whether or not he is obligated to do so under local law. This provision threatens to reinstate the unconstitutional "man-in-the-house rule;" a prime incentive to family break-up under old welfare law.

continued on page 6