

Plain Talk About Those That Got and Those that Ain't

A Gift to the Rich

BY ANITRA FREEMAN

I've been reading Patricia Palagi's poem, "Welfare Wolves" (March 1, 1997 issue) at poetry open mics — usually to loud crowd reaction. It starts with a quote from *The New Yorker* (February 26, 1996) about Congress members who "referred to women who received welfare as 'wolves' and 'alligators'."

Many politicians are fond of telling you that the reason you have to pay such high taxes is because of Welfare Moms living in \$200,000 homes and driving Cadillacs, illegal immigrants getting free medical care, the children of affluent suburban families feeding on cheap school lunches, alcoholics just too fogged to work drawing social security benefits. Why, Federal welfare programs cost you \$130 billion a year! (By the way, less than half of this covers actual services to people — the rest is administrative cost.)

Let's see — military waste and fraud costs the American taxpayer \$172 billion a year. Comedians and the *Reader's Digest* talk about it. Has either party based a major political campaign on it? Like the campaign to save you from the 42 billion dollars less than that being spent on welfare?

No one pays Social Security taxes on any income over \$62,700 a year. This exemption loses \$53 billion from the Federal budget every year — made up for by higher taxes on lower incomes. Probably yours. Do you make over \$62,700 a year?

Accelerated depreciation programs and capital gains breaks cost tax income of \$74 billion a year. The S&L bailout will cost \$32 billion a year until 2020.

And your tax problems are caused by an out-of-work legal immigrant getting \$74 a month in foodstamps?

I have long noticed that evangelists and other reformers who set out to improve the world usually aim straight at the most helpless, harmless, *easiest targets* around. Evangelists rave about pregnant teenagers. They don't get up and rave about middle-aged businessman who pay teenagers for sex. They yell at fog-bound youths about smoking pot. They seldom walk up and yell at crack dealers.

They will preach moral reform to hungry men at a soup kitchen, seven nights a week. How often do they preach moral reform to the CEO of General Motors, who received \$110,600,000 in Federal job program money in the same year that he laid off 104,000 workers?

Of course there is one point in favor of Corporate Welfare programs over public welfare ones. They seem to take much less overhead. Almost all of the money involved goes directly to the beneficiaries. Millions of dollars in military contracts can be obtained with merely thousands of dollars of campaign contributions. A politician is a very good bargain.

And almost no administrative personnel seem to be involved. If you were to announce giving a dinner in honor of social workers who distribute welfare monies to the poor, you could probably get several hundred honorees to show up in Seattle alone. But if you were to announce a dinner in honor of people who cut checks to Corporate Welfare recipients, how many folks would come forward to be recognized? Isn't it marvelous how so much can be done with so little? [E]

Penury Envy

BY WES BROWNING

Since this is the April 15th issue I have been invited by the management of this publication to use this space to serve up a rant about taxes. So this will be that rant. As usual this rant, like any other which may appear in the *Real Change*, only reflects the opinion and perspective of its author.

So what I've been hearing is that a lot of people are fed up with their taxes. They hit us with a sales tax hike. Today income taxes are due. Most of you have probably already filed, and sent in your payment or groaned at the size of your puny refund and you are angry you are fighting mad and it doesn't help to know that there are poor people out there who aren't paying any taxes at all, some of them are even *living off your tax dollars*, they wouldn't know what poor *was* until they had to pay the kind of taxes *you're* paying.

All right maybe you don't feel that way, but there are people out there who do. And it steams my shorts.

Here's the concept. The Poor: people with no money to pay taxes with. The Not-poor: people who have money to pay taxes with. The taxes have to come from somewhere, where do they come from? The Not-poor? Duh.

And does that turn the Not-poor into the Poor? Nonsense. We still have a graduated income tax at the lower incomes. By the time you are paying 30% of your income in taxes the 70% that remains is many times more than what a welfare recipient is expected to survive on.

But in addition to that almost all the money that goes to welfare each month finds its way to the pockets of the middle-class within the month of its distribution. The Food Stamp Program can be viewed as a subsidy for grocery stores and farmers and food distributors, far better for them than direct give-aways of surplus food.

The average welfare recipient is able to save around about none of his/her welfare check, which immediately gets used to support the local economy paying for rent, food, clothing. A fraction of rent goes to pay property taxes, and all non-food purchases in this state support local governments through sales tax.

Envy the poor for not having to pay taxes is a sick joke. Envy next the paraplegic for not having to buy shoes, or burn victims for getting free plastic surgery, or the dead for not having to worry about over-eating. [E]