

Who's at the Trough?

TAKE THE RICH OFF WELFARE
BY MARK ZEPEZAUER & ARTHUR NAIMAN
PUBLISHED BY ODONIAN PRESS, 1996, \$9.00
REVIEW BY ANITRA FREEMAN

If you are a member of the two-thirds of the country who has felt your grip on the American Dream slip more and more over the years, this book will verify your cynical suspicion that somebody out there is getting rich off of you. If you are one of the dwindling few who still believe in Reaganomics and the trickle-down theory, *What's Good for Business is Good for the Country*, this book may be your wake-up coffee. If you are active in any branch of the campaign for social justice, or even if you just like to goad your Republican father-in-law, this book is full of ammunition.

It is small — 177 pages, the size of a very thin paperback — and cheap — \$9. Well, cheap for a non-fiction book. It's part of a series of controversial topic books put out by Odonian Press called Real Story that includes such titles as *The CIA's Greatest Hits*, *The Greenpeace Guide to Anti-Environmental Organizations*, and *Noam Chomsky's Secrets, Lies and Democracy*. All the books are small, fully packed, and accessibly priced.

Take the Rich Off Welfare starts out with a bang. U.S. taxpayers hand corporations and wealthy individuals \$448 billion a year. The federal deficit is running at \$117 billion a year. We could eliminate the federal deficit by cutting wealthfare by only 26%. Wealthfare for the rich costs 3 1/2 times as much as welfare for the poor. (And gets what percentage of the political attention?) Eleven and one-third years of welfare for the rich equal 200 years of deficit spending by the entire federal government.

You get all that and more on the first page. And it doesn't slow down. You get figures on who ends up paying the taxes in this country, and who ends up with the money — military waste and fraud, the S&L bailout, agribusiness subsidies, and media handouts.

There is also a very clear breakdown of where the welfare for the poor money actually goes, and what it buys. There is a detailed seventeen page bibliography listing

exactly where each fact came from — which is a lot more than I've seen from any of the welfare reformers who want to cut aid to the poor. And there is a wonderful glossary, extremely helpful if you, like me, ever feel your head spin reading news stories on the economy. Keep this handy and you can look up what "prime rate", "regressive tax" and "amortization" really mean.

I have successfully changed the opinions of several friends, using this book. While my conservative, pro-business friend was not really surprised to hear that General Electric pleaded guilty to 108 counts of fraud on a Minuteman missile contract in 1985, or that Boeing charged the government \$1,118 for a plastic cap that goes over the end of a stool leg, he was rocked to realize that the sum total of all this waste and fraud amounts by a *conservative estimate* to \$172 billion a year.

Which is sizeably more than the \$130 billion a year for aid to the poor that was in the 1996 budget. Of course, aid to the poor is being cut drastically in 1997's budget, by the politicians who care so much about your tax money. And what are they doing to protect your tax money from military waste and fraud? Well, gee, Defense PAC's (lobbyists) gave Congress \$7.5 million in 1993 and 1994. Of the \$4.5 billion in unrequested weapons funding added to the Pentagon budget for 1996, 74% was spent in or near the home districts of representatives who sit on the House National Security Committee. Another \$290 million was spent in or around Newt Gingrich's home district, Cobb County, Georgia.

Mothers who receive Aid to Dependent Children aren't able to make large campaign

contributions. Aid to Dependent Children is being cut this year. The Defense budget isn't.

Do you think there's a connection?

If anyone out there still believes in the trickle-down theory, that if you throw enough money at any large corporation — including the Pentagon — it will eventually benefit society as a whole, Zepezauer and Naiman have some zippy little figures for that, too.

"The Congressional Budget Office concluded that a billion dollars spent on successfully promoting arms exports creates 25,000 jobs, but if that same billion is spent on mass transit, it creates 30,000 jobs; on housing, 36,000 jobs; on education, 41,000 jobs; or on health care, 47,000 jobs."

Here's another figure for you — every \$1 spent on Head Start is estimated to save \$3 in social costs on prisons, welfare, and other damage-control programs.

How does it benefit society to pay \$41 million this year to subsidize tobacco growers?

I've only detailed part of the book — I don't have 177 pages. I hope I've made you interested in getting it, reading it — and using it. Because there's a chapter on *What you can do about all this*.

The first line of the program is "take politicians off the auction block." Included is a list of everyone up for election in 1996 who voted *against* campaign reform. (I've noticed politicians become less greedy for money when they can no longer buy votes with it.)

Take the Rich Off Welfare, and other books in the Real Story series, are available at Elliott Bay Books, at Red&Black Books, and other Seattle bookstores. Nine of the titles in the Real Story series, including this one, are carried by the Seattle Public Library. ☐

