

## Reporter

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# The Decline of Worker and Family Security in the U.S.

by Bruce Poyer

Do current government policies help parents protect their children and maintain secure families, or do they foster a fear of poverty, homelessness, and unemployment? Does our government tax, spend, and regulate with concern for children and the working family, or have we sacrificed too many humanitarian values in our pursuit of "free markets" and military security? What is left of the so-called "safety net" in our programs for health care, for fair labor standards, and for income maintenance for the aged, disabled, and unemployed?

These and related questions will be addressed by keynote speakers and panelists at a two-day conference on "The Decline of Worker and Family Security in the U.S.," to be held on April 27-28 at the Clarion Hotel near the S.F. airport. The conference is co-sponsored by the Center for Labor Research and Education (IIR) and the School of Social Welfare at U.C. Berkeley. Top labor officials who will participate as keynote speakers include John Sweeney, President of Service Employees International Union, and James R. Herman, President of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union.

## Conference Organization and Speakers

The conference will bring together many experts who are directly involved in the major programs for worker and family security. They will describe the background and the current status of these programs, and the reasons for the decline in the "safety net" that has occurred in the past decade. The reasons include the distortion or abandonment of important social insurance and welfare goals and commitments that were continuously developed from New Deal times to the late 1970s. A major conference objective will be to explore new approaches that can turn the tide of decline—especially current prospects for

improvements in legislated programs that are surfacing in the election year of 1988.

In the opening general session, Harold Wilensky, Professor of Political Science at U.C. Berkeley, will develop a recurring conference theme with his discussion of "Worker and Family Security in Industrial Nations: How America Compares." Professor Wilensky is one of the world's leading experts on comparative systems of social insurance and welfare including benefits, financing, the role of labor and government and the political structure in program implementation, and net impact on the quality of life.

The following concurrent panel discussion sessions are scheduled in the morning of the first conference day:

### (1) *Protecting Retirement and Survivor Income*

**Chair:** Bruce Poyer, Coordinator, Labor Center, U.C. Berkeley  
**Panelists:** Margaret Gordon, Research Economist, IIR, U.C. Berkeley; Jeff White, Attorney, Davis, Cowell & Bowe, San Francisco; Jake Petrosino, SEIU Local 786, and member, PERS Board of Directors

*This panel will focus on the development and current status of Social Security and SSI; on worker and family protection in private and public sector pension systems; on special problems confronting disabled workers; and on social insurance principles that must be protected and extended to prevent further deterioration of the "safety net."*

### (2) *Evaluating Tax Sources for Funding the Programs*

**Chair:** Paul Terrell, School of Social Welfare, U.C. Berkeley  
**Panelists:** (to be announced)

*This panel will discuss and evaluate the funding of the major worker and family security programs, and the impact on their funding of the "tax revolt" and "free market" policies of the Reagan era; panelists will evaluate new approaches to tax policies that are essential for improving funding.*

John Sweeney, President, SEIU, Washington, will address the full conference at the first lunch session on "New Directions for Labor's Social and Economic Agenda." Sweeney has been an outstanding leader in national efforts to improve our child care and family protection legislation, and our health care programs. He will be introduced to the conference by John F. Henning, Executive Secretary Treasurer of the California Labor Federation.

The following concurrent panel discussion sessions are scheduled in the afternoon of the first conference day:

### (3) *Achieving Common Decency in Conditions of Employment*

**Chair:** Harry Polland, Labor Economist, Beeson, Tayer & Silbert, San Francisco

Institute of Industrial Relations, 2521 Channing Way, Rm. 300, Berkeley, CA, 94720 (415) 642-0323  
University of California at Berkeley

**Panelists:** Roger Dillon, Senate Office of Research, Sacramento; Senator Bill Green, Chair, Senate Industrial Relations Committee (invited); Charles Henry, Associate Professor, Afro-American Studies, U.C. Berkeley; Paul Chown, Emeritus Chair, Labor Center, U.C. Berkeley

*This panel will assess labor's historic role in establishing more equitable conditions of employment, and will emphasize the importance to worker and family security of legislated standards including minimum wages, hours and overtime provisions, equal employment rights, health and safety. Panelists will consider major priorities for reducing social insurance and welfare needs by raising legislated employment standards which are the responsibility of all employers as the basic cost of doing business.*

#### **(4) Providing Income Maintenance for Unemployed and Disabled Workers**

**Chair:** Hank Levy, Instructor, Labor Studies Program, S.F. Community College

**Panelists:** Tom Rankin, Research Director, California Labor Federation, San Francisco; Charlie Reiter, International Representative, Laborers' International Union of North America; Kevin McCarthy, Workers' Compensation Attorney, Santa Rosa; Russell Youmans, Attorney, Jewell, Leary & Russo, Oakland

*This panel will focus on gaping new holes in the "safety net" in Unemployment Insurance, and in the disability protections of Workers' Compensation, Social Security, SSI, and California's Disability Insurance Program; and will consider what is now required to restore the basic security which these programs should provide to workers and families.*

In the first general session of the second conference day, Alvin Schorr, Professor of Family and Child Welfare at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, will analyze the requirements of "Common Decency in Health and Welfare Programs." Professor Schorr is the author of a book with the same title. He is one of the nation's best informed authorities on welfare issues, and enjoys the additional distinction of being able to define and articulate them with clarity and vision.

The following concurrent panel sessions are scheduled in the morning of the second conference day:

#### **(5) Evaluating Welfare and Workfare Programs**

**Chair:** Tim Sampson, Professor of Social Work Education, S.F. State University

**Panelists:** David Aroner, President, SEIU Local 535; Ethel Long-Scott, Co-Director, Women's Economic Agenda Project, Oakland; Julia Lopez, Chief Consultant, SEIU Local 535; (one panelist to be announced)

*This panel will review the evolution of welfare and workfare programs, the new pressures which these programs now confront, the major legislative proposals which are under consideration, and the basic reform issues that must still be addressed.*

#### **(6) Establishing Consensus for a National Health Care Program**

**Chair:** Richard Scheffler, Professor of Health Economics and Public Policy, U.C. Berkeley

**Panelists:** Bob Crane, Vice-President/Government Relations, Kaiser Health Plan, Oakland; Ronald F. Zachary, Senior Vice President, Safeway Stores, Oakland (invited); Tom Moore, Health Plan Consultant, San Francisco; Art Young, Corporate Benefits Director, Hewlett Packard Corp., Palo Alto (invited)

*This panel will review the evolution and current status of the Medicare/Medicaid fragments of a national health care program in the U.S.; and consider the requirements for consensus necessary to develop a comprehensive national health care program. Panelists will evaluate continuing cost and access problems, and consider improvements that are possible in alternative approaches to labor-management and legislated programs.*

The keynote speaker at the second lunch session will direct attention back to the central issue of adopting economic policies to provide jobs and earned income for millions of unemployed Americans who lack the most basic kind of security. The speaker will be Bert Gross, Professor in the Peace and Conflict Studies program at U.C. Berkeley. Professor Gross was a leading architect of the nation's Full Employment Act of 1946 and its Humphrey-Hawkins revival in 1978. He is still on the battlefield of current efforts to implement meaningful full-employment policies. His topic is "Fair Labor Standards and Full Employment Policies: Forgotten Concepts."

The general session in the afternoon of the second day will begin with an assessment of worker and family security in the context of Presidential election politics of 1988. The keynote speaker will be James R. Herman, President of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, San Francisco. Herman will summarize the major concerns that have emerged in the past decade, as workers see them, and discuss the extent to which the candidates and the parties and the media are prepared to recognize and to meet these concerns in the 1988 campaign.

The last panel discussion--a general session--will provide different points of view on the leading issues analyzed at the conference as they may be raised or neglected in the campaigns and platforms and media dialogue of this Presidential election year.

#### **(7) Worker and Family Security and the Future**

**Chair:** Marty Morgenstern, Chair, Center for Labor Research and Education, U.C. Berkeley

**Panelists:** Jullianne Malveaux, Adj. Associate Professor, Afro-American Studies, U.C. Berkeley; Clair Brown, Associate Professor, Department of Economics, U.C. Berkeley; Bert Gross (lunch speaker); Wille Brown, Speaker, California Assembly (invited)

Registration fees for the two-day conference are \$110 (\$100 for additional registrations from the same organization) including lunch on both days and reference materials. To register in advance, send your name and address with a check payable to "U.C. REGENTS" to the Center for Labor Research and Education, 2521 Channing Way, U.C. Berkeley, Berkeley, CA 94720. For more information about the conference, call the Center at 415-642-0323. For room reservations call the hotel at 1-800-CLARION. The special conference rate of \$65 per night single or double is available by identifying yourself as attending a conference sponsored by the "Institute of Industrial Relations, U.C. Berkeley." A free shuttle to the hotel is available 24 hours from the San Francisco Airport.

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