

Massachusetts: a corporatist nightmare

by H. Graham Lowry

In his first four months in office, Massachusetts Gov. William Weld has designed a fascist program for turning the state into a corporatist jungle, complete with a genocidal scheme for writing off the poor and the sick as "useless eaters." As a club to enforce it, the blueblood bankers' boy is using a massive list of spending cuts, in the name of covering a deficit now projected at nearly 20% of the entire budget for the coming fiscal year.

The deficit for 1992, projected in January at \$1.8 billion, had grown by the end of April by an additional "half a billion to \$700 million," according to Secretary of Administration and Finance Peter Nessen. That brings the deficit for 1992 to \$2.5 billion out of a \$13 billion budget, and the total for 1991 and 1992 to \$3.5 billion. Nessen's office has compiled a list of cuts in over 300 programs for 1992, he says, and "their total will probably be over \$2 billion. . . . You've gone through so many series of cuts in the past several years, that whatever we do is deep." Many of them would throw welfare and Medicaid recipients on the scrapheap.

Privatizing the state's infrastructure

Beyond savage austerity in human services, details have begun to emerge of another major component of the plan: a corporatist policy of "privatizing" dozens of functions now performed as public services of the state. According to an internal planning document prepared by Weld's administration, a major casualty would be the state's already disintegrating infrastructure. Weld is seeking ways to turn over to private companies everything from the state's highways, rail lines, the Massachusetts Port Authority, and the Mass. Bay Transportation Authority, to waste disposal plants and incinerators. His chief of staff, Mark Robinson, who also served as his top enforcer when Weld headed the Criminal Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, says the plan is "a first step toward what Governor Weld meant by smaller government doing fewer things better . . . not just to downsize it."

Throwing aside the republican constitutional tradition of the United States, Chief Secretary John Moffitt says, "The issue is not public versus private. It is competition versus monopoly."

Not surprisingly, Weld also intends to privatize the De-

partment of Corrections, and have private companies run "prison operations and management" as well as inmate health care. Private operators would also be sought for the corrections "boot camp" Weld has proposed for some juvenile offenders, and for the juvenile detention centers currently run by Department of Health and Human Services.

The state hospital inventory would also be turned over to corporatist control. The collection of court fees would be farmed out to private firms, and even the state bar examination would be privately administered. So would the Department of Labor's employment and training functions, and the Industrial Accidents Board's arbitration and settlement collections for worker's compensation claims. Private companies would take over the management of state parks and recreation facilities, and collect all fines and fees.

Disposing of 'useless eaters'

With his rising deficit, Weld has also pressed for harsher measures against the poor. The billion-dollar list of cuts he approved on April 25 includes the elimination of general relief, a \$213 million program currently providing cash assistance to about 40,000 people who have certified disabilities or are unable to hold a job because they must care for sick relatives or children. Ninety percent of them have no income other than the \$338 a month they receive in general relief. Sue Marsh, director of the Coalition for the Homeless, said, "Most if not all are going to end up on the street."

Another proposed cut would eliminate the state's \$100 million rent-subsidy program, leaving 17,000 families without the means to pay their rent. Lisa Chapnick, director of public facilities for the city of Boston, says eliminating rent subsidies "would cause human and economic devastation. It would make small landlords' properties go from stable to unstable. It makes no sense in human terms, and in terms of dollars, because, where would these people go? Emergency assistance? Shelters? Nursing homes? All cost more."

Weld also called for cutting Medicaid by \$222 million, largely by restricting the care available under the program. Recipients would no longer be free to choose their physicians and hospitals, but would be assigned a doctor and herded into "managed care" programs similar to the notorious "triage" system of private health maintenance organizations (HMOs). Eligibility would be tightened to reduce the number of recipients, who would also be billed for part of their care. HMOs have generally discouraged tests and referrals to specialists in order to keep costs down. A 1986 study of managed care in Seattle showed that Medicaid patients, enrolled in a health maintenance organization, had higher illness and death rates than those who retained traditional medical care.

"We're talking about [eliminating] insulin for diabetics. We're talking about AZT for people with AIDS," said Neil Cronin of the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute. "This is a genocidal policy! Why aren't we screaming? Why aren't we mad?"