

# Weld enforces cuts with jail threats

by H. Graham Lowry

Massachusetts Republican Gov. William Weld threatened Oct. 9 to jail state officials who refuse to implement his budget-cutting decrees. This latest move by the blueblood bankers' boy sets a new precedent in his drive to impose austerity through outright dictatorship, as the state is transformed into a hideous model for the new world order.

The threat of jail terms and removal from office was delivered to members of the state's Group Insurance Commission, just one week after they rejected his demand to cover a claimed \$45 million deficit in the state employees health insurance fund by cutting back on benefits. Weld's action also sent an unobvious message to the legislature's Democratic leadership, which had promised the insurance commissioners that a deficiency budget would be passed to maintain the fund.

In a letter drafted by Weld's Secretary of Administration and Finance Peter Nessen, the commissioners were informed that refusing to make the cuts demanded by the governor "raises important legal issues for each of you." In chilling, police-state language, the letter declares, "By refusing to make any changes of consequence, you have effectively decided not to live within your appropriation. . . . The governor has asked me to make clear his deep concern. . . . He is prepared to take whatever action is necessary in order to insure that the Commission lives within its budget. In this context, I draw your attention to section six of chapter 29, which established criminal penalties for violation of the state finance law."

The law prescribes up to \$1,000 in fines and a year in prison, but even the *Boston Globe* reported: "Never in recent memory has a governor used the threat of criminal penalties and jail terms to coerce recalcitrant political opponents on commissions and authorities to toe his fiscal line." Several commissioners reached by the local press were unwilling to comment on Weld's threat; but one responded, "If I have to go to jail to represent my constituents, I'll do it. . . . This is a rape of every public employee." Weld, of course, is well versed in police-state tactics, dating back to his stint during the Reagan administration as head of the Criminal Division of the Justice Department, and coordinator of the "Get LaRouche" task force.

## 'And the House sat mute as a mouse'

On the same day that Weld's Gestapo-like message was delivered, the Massachusetts House of Representatives

caved in to his demand to slash \$80 million from General Relief for the poor, and impose a spending cap of \$102.5 million through June 30 of next year. As many as 14,000 people will be cut off from state assistance, nearly 37% of the current recipients. Harsher medical criteria will eliminate aid for about 4,000 disabled persons; nearly 4,000 more over the age of 45 will be cut off for lack of a work history; and 2,200 families will lose their assistance because their total assets exceed \$250!

Even the fate of those still receiving aid is far from secure. The House bill also granted Weld the authority to reduce benefits and restrict eligibility as he sees fit for the remainder of the fiscal year, whenever it appears that benefit payments might exceed the cap. Weld had previously sought similar authority over virtually the entire state budget, through a proposed Emergency Control Board to be appointed by the governor, and empowered to cut spending without legislative consent. Though the scheme was rejected by the legislature last summer, the precedent for such rule by decree has now been established by the House bill.

## Budget swindles enforcing collapse

The devastating collapse of the Massachusetts economy has only accelerated with the \$2.5 billion worth of cuts Weld has rammed through since taking office in January. Unemployment has increased by more than 50%, much of it in construction, and Weld's efforts to gut capital spending for vital infrastructure have further worsened matters. The austerity-mongering *Boston Globe* issued an unusual blast at Weld Oct. 15, attacking "his decision to tolerate an unprecedented collapse in the construction industry. With bank credit evaporating, with private construction at an anemic pace, with massive layoffs in the financial, real estate and defense industries, the whole economy here is in broad retreat."

Pouring everything he can grab into filling a constantly expanding budget deficit, Weld has also drawn the ire of organized labor for his seizure of \$240 million in gas tax revenues which had been earmarked for public works. Joseph Faherty, head of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO, declared, "What Weld did with the gas-tax money is just what Reagan and Bush did with Social Security funds—use it to balance the budget, to cover the deficit."

Of the 35,000 union construction workers in the Greater Boston area, about 50% are unemployed, according to the Building Trades Council. The unions have charged that Weld's budget swindle affected hundreds of construction projects—not only in the Boston area, but in other cities such as Springfield, Worcester, and New Bedford, where unemployment among union members is reportedly running at 70-90%. In May, Weld provoked angry union demonstrations when they learned he was using convict labor—at \$2 a day—for construction and repairs at the State House. The policy continues.