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Women, Welfare & Unwaged Work

"First thing I do when I wake up is to start thinking about my financial situation and how I can handle this problem so that I can attend school in order to make a better life for myself and my son."

The above quote is from a woman, a SEEK student who is concerned about the recent allegations of welfare fraud at CUNY—this is but one of the numerous attacks on women and on students by HRA and State Comptroller Arthur Levitt.

The harassment of women on welfare is nothing new. Many women students are constantly being told by Income Maintenance workers, supervisors, etc. at the welfare offices, that they should be out working and not spend their time being students. Two assumptions are being made here: (1) women on welfare are not working, (2) being a student is not work. These are attacks not only on women on welfare who are also students, but attacks on all women and all students.

Our Senator elect Daniel P. Moynihan in his book, *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income*, states:

"If American society recognized home making and child rearing as productive work to be included in the national economic accounts... the receipt of welfare might not imply dependency."

We women know now and have always known that we are working and that we work all of our lives. We also know that women nationally and internationally are now demanding a wage directly from the government for housework; for it is clear that big business and therefore government profit from our work—as was demonstrated by a women's strike in Iceland on Oct. 24, 1975 when 90 per cent of Iceland's production was halted, when women stop, everything stops!

In the U.S., welfare is the first money that women won directly from the government for housework, the work we do as women. Some of this money in the form of Aid to Dependent Children, should according to HRA open certain possibilities for children on welfare yet when a woman (90% of welfare recipients are women) tries to become economically independent and raise her standard of living, thereby expanding the possibilities for herself and her children, she is harassed by welfare and her children are thrown out of daycare. We can only see this as an attempt to use welfare as something against us, to discourage us from collecting that money in the first place, and at the same time forcing us into the lowest paying and dirtiest jobs.

HRA's policy is also an attack on all students. What HRA is saying to all students is that being a student is not work. Those of us who are students, and we all have been students at one point or another, know very well that being a student is hard work. It is not unusual for a student to have classes from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., go to a waged job from 3-11 p.m., get home at midnight and then do homework, term papers, etc. We know that workers who have been university trained are needed by both big business and government. The big difference between a student and any other worker is the absence of a pay check.

Another concern of ours is the forced work that HRA is trying to shove down our throats by demanding that welfare recipients sign up for the WIN program and receive training for low-waged jobs, or go to a two-year college and receive training for a "career" as a technician. In other words, one is not allowed to move from welfare to physicist, but from welfare to lunchroom assistant. We are saying that welfare recipients should have access to any school or university, and we refuse to be channeled into low-waged and deadend jobs.

The College Women's Action Group is made up of black, latin and white women. We all know that we have had to bear a large part of the "budget" crisis. We are all forced to work harder on our first jobs in the home, shopping around for bargains in an attempt to stretch the disappearing dollar, hand washing clothing instead of sending them to the cleaners, denying ourselves so that our children can have the barest essentials. We know that HRA in singling out women on welfare is attempting to divide us further as if our problems and our work were not fundamentally the same—but we refuse to be divided any longer! Any women interested in building our collective power, come meet with us in Temp 3 Room 8 every Tuesday at 1:00.

Queens College Women's Action Group