

demand for more organic foodstuffs, we must shift from commodity-based subsidies to incentives to encourage conservation, rehabilitate chemically dependent soils, protect ground water, and support family-based farming. This could be achieved through establishing land trusts for property that farmers might otherwise sell to developers, and tax incentives and other mechanisms that limit urban sprawl and environmentally destructive industrial farming.

• **Parks and Ecosystems:** Along with establishing new National Parks (as 70% of the public believes we should), we have to stop financially starving the park system we have. Along with a shift in federal funding, the public should be willing to pay the cost of a movie (\$7.50 a person or \$20 per carload) to enjoy these "crown jewels" of wilderness. At the same time, larger protected ecosystems and wildlife corridors have to be established to prevent the parks from becoming non-viable biological islands. We should stop using our tax dollars to subsidize extractive industries on public land and instead focus on protecting biodiversity for all Americans.

• **Oceans:** Either the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration should be expanded or a new cabinet-level Department of Oceans (as first proposed by Lyndon Johnson) should be established to protect the ocean's living resources. Since President Reagan declared a 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone in the waters surrounding the country (a territory larger in size than the continental United States), America's commercial fisheries have collapsed and productive coastal waters have deteriorated. Using our National Marine Sanctuaries as a model, this new agency (working in partnership with coastal communities) could help establish democratic governance over our blue frontier.

• **Toxic pollution:** Community Right to Know efforts need to be strengthened. This would be an important first step in redefining the meaning of cost-benefit analysis when it comes to synthetic chemicals. Of some 70,000 chemicals synthesized since World War II, only about 2 percent have been fully tested for human and biological health effects. Given the disturbing environmental impacts from chemicals such as DDT, PCBs and CFCs, manufacturers should have to prove a new chemical (or certain existing families of chemicals such as organochlorines) is biologically benign, alone or in combination with others, before it can be marketed. Moreover, U.S.-based manufacturers should not be allowed to sell or use domestically banned chemicals overseas either.

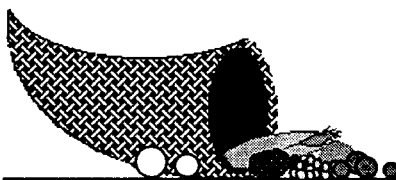
• **Climate Change:** The world's scientists now agree that human-caused climate change is real and already underway. Given that consensus, the United States' commitment this summer in Geneva to reduce global carbon dioxide production is an important first step. Fulfilling that commitment will require, at the very least, an immediate energy and gas tax (similar to the one the Clinton administration first proposed and then backed away from

in 1993), and a shift of federal tax-breaks and R & D funding from petroleum (deep ocean drilling) to renewable energy sources. Also needed are a crash program to convert from petroleum to natural gas as a transitional fuel over the next decade and concessionary technology transfers from the United States to less-developed countries to help them along a soft energy path.

• **Population:** Human population, which grew incrementally over the 40,000 years up to 1956, has doubled in the last 40, and is expected to nearly double again in the next 50. All studies indicate that increases in female education and political enfranchisement, along with improvements in rural living conditions, would result in slower population growth in both developed and developing countries. We need a population policy based on support for democracy, land reform and women's rights.

• **Sustainable Development:** The world could not sustain itself for long at the levels of consumption practiced in our country, nor can we expect to maintain our quality of life based on a theoretical system of unlimited market expansion. We've all seen a gradual loss of unique natural places and rural and urban cultures to the "malling of America." To be more than an oxymoron, sustainable development must be based on a new "resource economics" that, unlike traditional economics, recognizes the value to the earth's societies of trees left standing, rivers undammed and life in all its diversity. ◀

David Helvarg is a television producer and author of *The War Against Greens* (Sierra Club Books).



SOCIAL WELFARE

By Joel Rogers

The liberal social welfare state is being chipped away piece by piece by the Republican Congress and a president eager to garner the support of the elusive "center" of the electorate. Instead of repairing a broken system, perhaps it's time to come up with an entirely new model of social welfare.

• **Starting gate equality:** The welfare system now in existence is fundamentally flawed. We know that late-in-life interventions usually make little difference in the earnings capacity of workers, and that people hate having their money taken away from them after they've "earned" it. In the United States in particular, belated attempts to address racial injustice through preferential hiring programs are deeply unpopular social policy, violating as they do widespread perceptions of the requirements of fairness. More-

over, a welfare state that provides its most concrete rewards to the unproductive elderly risks perverse effects on the savings behavior and work effort of the young and middle-aged.

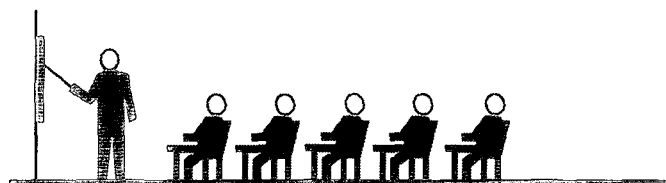
It would be altogether better if people entered the labor market with more equal endowments, thus leading “naturally” to a more equal distribution of market wages. It would be better if the prospects of all job seekers were determined by “the content of their character,” which would require more open hiring practices, and firmer penalties for race, sex and other invidious discrimination. It would also be better if the burden of protecting the frail elderly was not borne by children and young adults.

Imagine, then, a welfare state in which social expenditures were shifted forward in the life cycle, wedding popular support for “equal opportunity” to the resources needed to make it real. As a natural corollary of this move, imagine shifting policy analysis toward a lifecycle framework for measuring equality—looking at earnings and income over the course of a life—rather than a cross-sectional one. In such a frame, it should not bother us (especially in the context of a higher social wage) that young workers make considerably less than older ones, or older workers less than younger ones, so long as we have confidence that over their lifecycles everyone would get more or less the same. More generally, within such a frame, we might ask when people need money most and least during their life-cycle, and direct labor market and income policies accordingly.

• *Social wages and tax universalism:* Starting-gate equality would improve the distribution of income in this country. But for all sorts of reasons, we’re still going to want some substantial increase in the “social wage”—that basket of benefits that members of the society can get independent of their employment status. The need for national health insurance is the most obvious example of such an increase; massive support for child care and other family assistance is probably next most important. The problem is that, while providing social benefits to everyone is politically popular, it is incredibly costly. And providing only to the poor all but guarantees such benefits will be stingy and inadequate.

This circle can be squared, however, through “tax universalism,” or the taxation of social benefits as well as private income. Imagine a scheme in which social benefits were universal, but taxed on a steeply progressive basis relative to private income. Under plausible (at least arithmetically plausible) assumptions, we could pay for vast increases in the social wage *and* reduce the tax burden on the middle class. For the poor, things would get a whole lot better. For the middle class, the combination of tax cuts on private income and receipt of at least some portion of the increased social wage would also improve their after-tax position. Shared benefit from the new regime would help unite the middle class and poor around it. Welfare state fiscal stability would be restored. And poverty traps would be eliminated, as work would “pay” for people at all income levels. ◀

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EDUCATION

By Deborah Meier

⁶⁶Today’s Democratic Party knows that education is the key to opportunity,” says the Democratic platform. And so it is, but opportunity to what? To “prosper” in “the new global economy,” says the platform. “Cutting education as we move into the 21st century would be like cutting defense spending at the height of the cold war.” Given this statement of the problem, the wan, half-baked solutions—more vocational programs with names like “School-to-Work”; getting “every classroom wired to the Information Super-highway”—aren’t surprising. A real progressive program, which saw our children not as little MX missiles and Polaris subs aimed at Germany and Japan but as future citizens, would look quite different.

The platform should spell out more clearly what is at stake. The purpose of education should be building democracy and strengthening the nation as a whole, not just individual economic advancement. We need to remember Thomas Jefferson’s words: “I know no safety depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves: And if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to educate their discretion.” It’s a tall order for a complex modern society, but it’s within our powers. To shrink from that responsibility is to risk undermining our democracy.

If we want all citizens to be capable of exercising high levels of judgment—as voters, jurors, community activists, neighbors and productive members of the workforce—then we need a public education system that addresses the circumstances and needs of today’s children. The system we designed a century or more ago for a small, largely male and white elite won’t do any longer. In so far as it ever served us well, it presupposed that most citizens would be educated largely outside of formal schooling—in small town meetings, union halls, political clubs, churches, neighborhood organizations and formal as well as informal apprenticeships. That’s where most people learned the arts and crafts of civics and character education, picked up the know-how as well as knowledge to participate in public life, and learned the skills needed to be productive workers. But in the last century, the American student body has increased a hundredfold, while the American education system has crowded out all alternative forms of education and training. And we’re surprised that kids are in trouble?

We’ve placed on the agenda expectations for our children and schools without providing either the moral or