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## Workfare threatens poor

**By GEORGE PATTERSON**  
**SAN FRANCISCO**—Some liberal legislators have joined hardcore Reaganites to force a mandatory workfare program on California's 280,000 families receiving Aid for Dependent Children (AFDC).

Assembly Bill 2580 passed the Assembly Health and Human Services Committee this week on a 7-2 vote. Committee chair Tom Bates (D-Berkeley) and Burt Margolin (D-LA) cast the dissenting votes.

Titled the Agnos-Swoap Workfare Bill, the legislation is the brainchild of Art Agnos (D-SF) and David Swoap, longtime Reagan adviser and Gov. Deukmejian's appointee to the Health and Welfare Agency. The proud parents are trotting their infant about Sacramento to the applause of all conservatives and most liberals.

The workfare plan places the welfare recipient in a labyrinthine and never-ending nightmare bureaucracy. Recipients are given three weeks to find a job. If unsuccessful they enter a three month period of training, remedial education or nonpaid work.

A particularly crass aspect of the bill, according to its opponents, is that of grant diversion. The recipient's welfare grant, food stamp allotment and child support payment is "diverted" to a public or private employer. The workfare employee works at the prevailing entry-level wage (presently \$5.07 an hour) until the benefits have been worked off. The employer receives free labor and the "employee" receives welfare grant money.

All AFDC recipients with children over the age of five will be forced to participate. As 90 percent of the state's AFDC recipients are single mothers, the bill provides for payment for childcare—but not past the age

If after three months they still have not found work, they must work for a public or private firm for a period of one year—again for no pay. If after a year of working for free the recipients have still been unable to find a job, they start the entire process over again, ad infinitum.

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of 13. After that, the child is left with no provision for care or supervision while the mother works off her welfare payment.

The bill promises to provide \$63 million for childcare payment based on an assumed market rate of \$1.50 an hour for childcare.

The removal of the mother from the home and the bill's neglect of childcare after the age of 13 will produce thousands of "latch-key kids"—children with no adult supervision after school.

Martha Roditti, director of the San Francisco Children's Council, expressed concern.

"Our concern is especially with the childcare aspects," said Roditti. "We don't know where they'll find childcare. Dumping this program on people without planning and adequate funding is a setup for failure. Making the program mandatory is just harassment of poor people."

The California Dept. of Social Services, Community Care Licensing Section released figures in 1982 showing licensed childcare capacity in the state to be 228,823. Of the 4,860 licensed facilities, all are near or at capacity. The Agnos-Swoap Bill does not provide for additional childcare facilities. In fact, Deukmejian cut \$30 million in child-

care funds from the new state budget.

The Coalition of California Welfare Rights Organizations is vigorously opposing AB 2580. "It's slavefare," said Coalition member Richard L'Italien. "We are certainly not against a training and education program. The problem with this bill is that it's forced work without pay. People are not going to get training for good jobs. The Employment Development Department just doesn't have the jobs available."

As the bill goes to the Assembly Ways and Means Committee this week, it has faced vocal criticism from only three lawmakers: Tom Bates and Los Angeles Democrats Maxine Waters and Diane Watson.

In a recent article Bates criticized the premise of workfare. "Studies and experience have clearly shown that people on welfare do want to work," he wrote. "They don't need threats; they need real jobs. Recently in my district in Oakland, the Post Office announced 400 job openings; 26,000 persons applied, many of them welfare recipients."

When Bates, as chair of the Human Services Committee tried to postpone a vote on the bill to allow for further debate, Democrats and Republicans on the

committee threatened to vote him out of the chair.

Traditionally liberal Democrats are either refusing to support the rights of welfare recipients or are wholeheartedly backing the bill. The Campaign for Economic Democracy has refused to take a stand on the forced work for no pay bill.

AB 2580 provides a quarter of a million women in California employers at no cost to them. The taxpayer will pay for the estimated \$266 million to administer the program. The single mother will be forced to work for no pay while trying to survive on \$555 a month, including food stamps and MediCal.

In San Diego where the workfare program was implemented experimentally between 1982 and 1984, it proved to be a failure. Parents, unable to find childcare and not allowed to miss their forced labor assignment, had their children taken to shelters by law enforcement agencies. Illiterate recipients lost their benefits because they could not read agency documents.

After one full year the model experimental workfare program was able to publish its impact on welfare in San Diego County. In its first year of operation the number of welfare recipients increased by 22 percent.