

New Computer System Used Against Poor

Welfare recipients targeted

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In House appropriations Bill 4445 for fiscal year 1975–1976, the State Legislature has instructed the Department of Social Services (DSS), the Department of Labor (through the MESC) and the Department of the Treasury to “develop a plan for the exchange of data as a check on the financial eligibility of recipients of financial aid.”

In effect this means that the welfare, unemployment, and tax departments are going to share records on their respective clients via computer in order to bust people for collecting state benefits “illegally.”

Using individual social security numbers and the first four letters of last names to identify people, data from the State Client Information System (CIS) Recipient file (the central file which contains basic information on all DSS clients) have been or will be compared with the following sources:

1. The State Personnel File—in order to find ADC mothers who have been given civil service jobs and who have not informed their case workers of this new income. This match produced 1,876 women who had both a civil service job and ADC grants. DSS is now refining the data on these cases to discover which ones are committing fraud.
2. 1974 tax returns—to detect persons collecting benefits with an unreported income. This is still in the planning stage.
3. The MESC’s Determination Control File—which includes such information on persons collecting unemployment as: when they filed, when their benefit year ends, and if they filed and were refused benefits and then filed again. The state will have to come up with \$7 to 8000 every two weeks to keep this file updated.

The report from which this information was obtained cited an example in Wayne County in which data sharing was used successfully to bust fraudulent welfare recipients. In this particular instance Wayne County DSS officials matched the files of General Assistance clients with those of Supplemental Security Income cases (two different classifications of welfare), and found eighty-five cases in which persons were collecting both types simultaneously.

As an added bonus DSS also found seven cases in which General Assistance and Social Security were being received simultaneously. So with just one computer match in one county, the Department was able to bust ninety-two persons “committing fraud.” Ah! The wonders of technology.

Objections to the Hook-up

There are numerous objections to be raised to this new computer system. To begin with, we must analyze the role of the poor in this society. The very existence of a class of poor people reflects not only the inadequacy of capitalism to create a decent society (in essence a liberal insight), but the underlying project of Capital.

Unconcerned with the needs of human beings in its runaway of commodity production, a reserve army of the unemployed becomes a necessary factor in the maintenance of production relations. They serve as a reserve pool of labor power to be used or neglected with the changing needs of capitalists as the world market expands or contracts.

When there is war or expanded production the poor are put to work. When Capital is plagued with labor revolt, they serve as strikebreakers and scabs to tame the working class. And in periods of generalized unemployment, they are thrown onto the street to starve.

Their plight is the logical outcome of a system based on the exploitation of labor for profits, a system which has unconsciously and consciously used every distinction of sex, race, and ethnicity to further intensify exploitation and keep oppressed groups at each others' throats fighting over crumbs.

The poorest of the poor reap the "benefits" of every dislocation and economic conflict—and the new computer data hookups are being implemented in order to regiment them into passivity and fear in order to channel their rage into whatever avenue the government bureaucracy (in the service of the capitalists) deems fit.

The poor function as the scapegoats for society's (read: Capital's) inherent problems. If taxes are too high, it's because of "welfare loafers." If the crime rate rises, it's because the poor have a genetic potential or natural tendency towards crime as an alternative to "good hard work." If a house in Grosse Pointe is robbed, it is automatically assumed that the burglar came from the inner city (thus "shoot the crud"), but if the culprit is a neighborhood kid, then he needs "help" ("we all make mistakes"). The poor "don't want to work." But the poor also "steal jobs."

The richer you are, the more you are is the creed of the American way of life, indeed of Capital universally. And "fair treatment" under such a system is a hoax. Bourgeois "justice" signifies the "right" of the capitalists to maintain their rule and property relations. As one poor black prisoner was quoted as saying, "When you go down to the courts and jails looking for justice, that is just what you find: just us."

Welfare a Shambles

And the welfare system's computerization is more of the same. "Everyone knows" that the welfare system is a shambles because the recipients "cheat," so the solution is to throw them in jail.

This mentality (pervasive even among the poor themselves) only serves to emphasize the process of dehumanization involved in receiving welfare: from the day-long lines at the welfare office to the icy stares of customers and supermarket cashiers when they see one using food stamps to the rage elicited when a desperate welfare recipient physically assaults a caseworker.

The welfare system became integral to modern capitalist society along with unemployment and the unions. Welfare and unemployment serve as buffers to stave off hunger riots and other more potentially dangerous forms of rebellion just as unions have come to serve the stopping of revolutionary activity among workers and the replacing of it with class-collaborationist support to capitalist social relations.

In the case of welfare, when the government is directly responsible for dinner, control is almost total. The new computer system is a cybernetic perfection of control such as will grind the poor into utter passivity and maintain their isolation from the proletariat. All is rationalized by a reactionary ideology which claims that the poor are responsible for their poverty and thus—in the most Christian of traditions underlying this society—must be punished.

Obviously, modern Capital cannot flog the poor or burn them at the stake (though it has been known to do so under open fascist rule). But it can subject them to further controls and police-state repression.

So the poor are provided with bare subsistence which not only gives some semblance of charitable remuneration from the government but also acts to make the government look like a generous Godfather.

But, as one author put it: "The sympathy of someone with power over you is worse than useless and more than just annoying." (Anarchy 15, "Social Workers," page 3). Thus the charity backfires and the recipients "cheat" a few more pennies out of the vast bureaucracy.

Unemployment compensation serves the same function. As outlined above, the existence of an unemployed workforce is a necessary component to capitalist rule. During such periods as the present, the scarcity of jobs is incentive enough to maintain fairly high levels of productivity (in the sense of labor-intensification). This is demon-

strated by the Ford Motor Co. which last August and September laid off nearly 1,000 workers at its River Rouge complex without cutting plant production at all.

The poor and unemployed are not the only victims of the state's ever expanding technological intervention into every aspect of life. For example, legislation pending before Congress calling for new alien registration cards specifies that the cards contain computer codes designating location, occupation, and even fingerprints of every alien in the country.

This attack on foreign-born workers follows in the wake of mass deportations and hysteria campaigns on the east coast and in the southwest aimed at blaming foreign-born workers for current high unemployment levels. Government bureaucrats explain in response that the cards in reality will "benefit the alien!"

Computer systems are also being used extensively to track down "wayward" fathers who have skipped on child-support and alimony payments. Generally, these fathers have refused to give their money to the State. The mothers already receiving minuscule stipends from ADC never see the money paid to various "Friends of the Court." Other times, the fathers are unemployed and simply have no ability to pay. This in no way halts government persecution.

The threatening juggernaut of law enforcement computer banks moves full steam ahead. It is only a matter of time until some technocratic wizard decides—in the interest of efficiency and the "public weal," of course—to hook ALL the computer banks together into one super-centralized behemoth.

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