

NEW FALL 2004

Regional Labor Review

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75,000 WEP participants were required to work for at least twenty-six hours per week to earn their household grants (cash and food stamps) at the rate of the minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour. They carried out unskilled labor such as cleaning government buildings and picking up trash in the streets and parks; those who had clerical skills were assigned office work. Many WEP workers claimed that they were improperly outfitted and treated badly by their supervisors. They worked alongside unionized city employees, but they did not receive vacation or sick leave, health and safety training, or a paycheck. Though it was billed as a job-training program, WEP never functioned as such. WEP workers nearly universally reported learning no new skills, and they were almost never hired as paid employees at their work sites when openings became available. The Parks Department hired only fifteen WEP workers in 1996, and none were hired in 1998. In 1997, public hospitals provided only thirty to forty paid jobs for WEP trainees.³

Brenda Steward was an early WWT! activist and later a paid organizer for the group. When she applied for public assistance after being laid off from her job in a youth outreach program, she was given a WEP assignment. She excelled in her post, yet she was not offered employment:

meetings attended by over 50 participants. This group named itself WEP Workers Together! to convey unity,

employees performing the same jobs and that they receive education and training to help them find permanent employment.

Resources Administration (HRA). Fifty children and adults marched into the building, hung up a sign declaring the space a day-care center, and passed out jump ropes and balls to the children. Twenty kids played energetically, and they effectively shut down the entrance to the building. This won the protesters an immediate audience with the HRA Commissioner, which resulted in some concessions.¹⁴

Other efforts were undertaken to gain rights for welfare recipients to register for education and training programs in lieu of a WEP assignment. A consensus developed within WWT! that since WEP did not offer real training or employment, public-assistance recipients were better served by learning marketable job skills. In effect, the organizing strategy had come full circle, as it now resembled a welfare-rights approach more than a worker model. WWT! (and its successor groups) went on to fight for child care, education, and training, but the

But this class identity was not set in stone; individuals moved in and out of it, and the unity it produced was never final. Significantly, this is doubtless less anomalous and less specific to WEP workers' particular circumstances than we might assume. Rather it is probably what a lot of class identity and consciousness actually is, including that of paid workers and union members: complicated, experienced and expressed in action, often momentary, and hard won.

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