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# **Regional Labor Review**

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## **RESEARCH REPORT**

# *Organizing and Identity in the New York City Workfare Program*

*By Benjamin Dulchin and Sharryn Kasmir*

**I**n the 1990s, New York City was a battleground for neo-conservatives testing their welfare-reform theories and grassroots activists who were opposing them.<sup>1</sup> One of the most important struggles was over the Work Experience Program (WEP), which forced approximately 75,000 welfare recipients a year to “earn” their public-assistance benefits by working in some capacity for the city. Conservative social reformers saw WEP as an opportunity to discipline welfare recipients and secure cheap labor for the city. Activists saw WEP as exploitation, but they also saw an extraordinary opportunity: since WEP combined the identities of welfare recipient and worker, it presented fertile ground for grassroots organizing.

In this article we discuss the efforts of WEP Workers Together! (WWT!) to organize workfare participants by focusing on their identity as workers rather than welfare recipients.<sup>2</sup> Our intention is two-fold: to describe the WWT! Campaign, and to reflect upon what WEP organizing suggests about political identities and activism. We make the point that WEP workers most keenly felt a working-class identity in the moments when they and union members recognized their similarity with each other, and we show how organizing, media campaigns, and alliance building were critical for bringing forth this mutual awareness.

However, this identification and class consciousness was temporary and unstable. Despite early success with the worker model, the organizing did not finally overcome the obstacles to sustaining worker identity and activism. WWT! and its successor groups subsequently returned to a welfare-rights, advocacy-driven agenda. Nonetheless, this case shows the importance of organizing for building political identities, even when these identities are contradictory, fluid, and short term. In evaluating the reasons for the successes and failures of WWT! we could have examined other issues, including the mistakes and inexperience of the organizers, the difficulty of coalition-based work, and the harshness of the political environment. But here we focus on identity formation because of its centrality in the campaign and its significance for a broader discussion of working-class movements. Our own organizing experience with and research on major grassroots efforts in the U.S. and abroad lead us to highlight the role of organizing in forging political and class identities.

## **Workfare in New York City**

In 1996, President Clinton signed an historic welfare-reform bill called the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. The law signaled a sea change in American welfare policy. It ended the notion of public assistance as an entitlement. Instead, the federal government would give welfare block grants to states. Individuals would receive aid as long as state funding lasted, but assistance was no longer guaranteed. This made cash grants precarious, especially in bad economic times when welfare rolls could be expected to grow. The law also introduced time limits that assigned a lifetime cap of five years of aid. Additionally, recipients were required to enroll in an “employment-type” program. The definition of employment-type program was broad under the federal law; many people could be exempted, the programs were difficult to manage, and most states began only small, tentative workfare projects.

New York City was a dramatic exception. Under Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, welfare reform had begun in 1994. By 1996 Mayor Giuliani was ready to make New York City a national model of neo-conservative social policy by implementing workfare with a dedication and on a scale not seen anywhere else in the country. Some

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.<sup>3</sup>

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:

“Well, they placed me in the Department of Social Services, in one of the IS Centers which is the Income Support Center. And I was doing clerical work there... Basically the majority of the people that were there were people that were on staff being paid a full salary and I worked alongside of those staff people. But after I was there for a few months, the director of the center was very pleased with the work that I was doing. I worked with a group of social workers, case workers, doing filing, answering phones, and what they called the Winro Report, which is a statistical report of recertification. Because there was such a backlog in our Income Support Center, they asked me to take on the role of doing just the Winro Report. In a normal setting, if I were on staff, and I had been doing that, they would have considered that a promotion, something that is generally handled by a supervisor or maybe an office manager. In my case I was just working for my benefits...

No change in salary, no change in my position. When I went into the WEP Program I already had the skills that I was doing there, so they didn't really give me that particular job skill. I brought the skill with me when I came there, but after being there for two years, we were told that our names would be submitted to personnel so that we could possibly be hired in those positions since we were already working. Rather than train somebody else for that position, let us work in those positions and put us on staff for full salary. Well my name was submitted over a year ago [in 1995] and I haven't had a response from anybody as of yet.”<sup>4</sup>

Steward's experiences were common; many WEP workers performed well at their jobs, but their efforts did not lead to employment. Given its poor record of job placement, WEP seemed to have had two real purposes: to reduce the welfare rolls by creating punishing and demeaning conditions for recipients and to enable New York City to downsize its workforce by substituting the labor of WEP workers. In these respects, WEP was successful. Between 1996 and 2000, the public-assistance rolls in the city dropped by almost one-half, a steeper decline than the national average, due in part to the fact that many recipients would choose to do anything over WEP, including taking a job that would leave them deeper in poverty. Meanwhile, in the mid-1990s, the municipal workforce was downsized by 21,000 with no loss in services because tens of thousands of unpaid WEP workers labored in place of the missing government workers.

In early 1996, organizers for what would become WWT! became aware of the scale of the program and the problems it was causing, but they were wary of mounting a welfare-rights campaign. They had reason to be skeptical. Although social movements to increase benefits and to empower recipients had been important in the 1960s and 1970s, by the 1990s welfare organizing in New York City had been largely anemic for ten years. There were many, overlapping reasons for the decline of welfare organizing. The political and cultural terrain had shifted in important ways; in the 1980s the American public's long-standing dislike of welfare was intensified by the Reagan administration's structural and ideological assault on public assistance, crystallized by the much-promoted and highly misleading stereotype of the “welfare queen.” People on public assistance themselves often had a harsh and unfavorable view of welfare clients and were in some way ashamed of being part of the program. The complicated attitude of the recipients towards welfare had an impact on grassroots organizing.

### **Building the Campaign: Identity, Image and Action**

In 1996 the WEP program looked like it may have created the conditions to change the direction of welfare organizing. Organizers from three non-profit groups— the Fifth Avenue Committee, a Brooklyn-based low-income housing developer with a community-organizing and social-justice mission (where one of the authors, Benjamin Dulchin, was the Director of Community Organizing and where Brenda Steward was hired as an organizer), The Urban Justice Center, a city-wide legal and advocacy project concerned with poverty issues, and Community Voices Heard, a group of low-income New Yorkers with a focus on welfare rights— began to discuss collaborating to create a high-impact, city-wide organizing campaign. They sent organizers out to talk to WEP workers to test strategies.

On one occasion, Benjamin Dulchin found a group of fifteen WEP participants in Prospect Park who were assigned to a trash-pick-up crew. They crowded around and began to talk animatedly about how hard they worked, how inadequate their equipment was, and how badly they were treated by their supervisor. In fact, when Dulchin found the group, they had already been sitting around on their break talking with each other about these exact things. Dulchin was struck by the fact that they sounded and acted a lot more like workers than welfare recipients. Their experience was social and collective, not isolating and individualizing like welfare, and they expressed pride in their labor, not shame in being part of a stigmatized program. They felt that they deserved better treatment and real wages for their work. Organizers from all three groups had similar experiences, and they decided to collaborate in a city-wide effort that would organize WEP participants into a union-like membership by focusing on their identity and needs as workers.

The term “union-like” was adopted because the legal status of WEP workers -- were they participants in a job-training program or employees? -- was in contention. The New York State Labor Department concluded in 1995 that WEP workers were public employees and therefore entitled to labor protections. But the Labor Department recanted that ruling after the 1996 changes in federal welfare policy mandated the creation of job-training programs. Under federal law, workfare participants were “trainees,” not employees. Therefore, they were neither covered by the National Labor Relations Act, nor were they permitted to form a union or bargain collectively.<sup>5</sup>

Organizing began in the summer of 1996 as representatives from the three non-profit groups began to visit work sites across the city. Regular visits were made to sanitation garages, where WEP participants gathered before they were sent to clean the streets with brooms and rolling trashcans; to public parks, where they maintained the grounds; and to municipal office buildings, where they emptied trash cans or performed clerical tasks. Unfair treatment was common, and WEP workers complained readily and forcefully. One WEP participant assigned to a Department of Sanitation garage explained why she tied her lunch bag to the handle of garbage can she used to collect trash:

“We don't have lockers, so there's no place to store anything... We're not treated like regular sanitation workers. We don't have uniforms. We don't have shoes. We don't even get training. This is the only place I have to put my lunch. Otherwise, I have to wait 'til I get home to eat. I leave my house at 6 a.m. and don't get home again until after 3. If I don't do this I'm starved.”<sup>6</sup>

There was no contract, so workers were dependent on the personality and whims of their salaried supervisor. WEP workers who were picking up trash with no rain gear may have been allowed to shelter under an awning during a thunderstorm, or their supervisor may have driven by and ordered them back to work in the rain. WEP workers cleaning up debris in the park were not given gloves, but knew that a box full of gloves was available in the storeroom for salaried workers. WEP workers in clerical jobs were not allowed to use the mini-fridge to store their lunch. In one especially egregious case, a bathroom in a sanitation garage was marked with a “No WEP Workers” sign. These insults were compounded by the fact that WEP workers were doing the same work as salaried employees, but at a fraction of the “pay.” The WEP participants generally felt that in return for the hard work they did, they deserved full rights and dignified treatment. Significantly, their grievances all related to the participants’ experience as workers, not as public-assistance recipients. Although only a few organizers were working on the project, they quickly signed up almost 1,000 WEP workers and began holding bi-weekly

meetings attended by over 50 participants. This group named itself WEP Workers Together! to convey unity, strength, and a worker identity.

As worker involvement grew, WWT! formed a Steering Committee of WEP participants and paid organizers and began a media campaign to raise public awareness of the program. Over a one year period, WWT! organizers and members gave interviews, issued press releases, and staged press-worthy actions to draw media attention. As a result, numerous stories in the print and broadcast media exposed the abuses of the program, including that unionized workers were being replaced and that WEP workers faced discriminatory treatment and received inadequate safety training and equipment. The press coverage stressed the central point of WWT's strategy: WEP participants did not mind the work they were doing, but they demanded the rights that all workers had, including the right to safe and decent conditions and to be paid the going rate. In a relatively short period of time, the campaign was successful in shifting public discourse about workfare. Newspaper articles and editorials began to portray the WEP program in the language of labor: rights on the job, workplace conditions, and wages. Headlines such as "Discontented Workfare Laborers Murmur 'Union;'" "Workfare Workers Fight for Better Conditions;" and "Workfare is a Job With Rights Like Any Other" appeared in major city papers.<sup>7</sup> This dialogue contributed to a growing consciousness about welfare, disseminating the message that many recipients worked hard, and their fate was bound up with broader socio-economic changes, including public-sector downsizing and the decline in union membership.

### **Alliance, Solidarity and Consciousness**

At the same time that WWT! launched its campaign, a progressive union, Communication Workers of America (CWA) Local 1180, began sounding the alarm that the WEP program was creating an underclass of unpaid workers that would have a negative impact on the municipal workforce. Although the law prevented the city from using WEP workers to *directly* replace a paid worker, the city argued that it would downsize its workforce and maintain services through productivity gains. Thus the work done by WEP participants was an adjunct to, not a replacement for, existing services. In reality thousands of city jobs were lost and WEP workers often picked up the slack.

Despite the threat to their members, two important unions had been notably weak on the problem of WEP. The Transit Workers President Willie James agreed with Mayor Giuliani to allow thousands of WEP participants to work alongside unionized employees.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Stanley Hill, head of District Council (DC) 37, AFSCME won a five-year contract guaranteeing no layoffs for his members, but he accepted weak language regarding WEP. The contract read: "It is not the city's intention to use WEP to displace active city employees," but it provided no real safeguard against using WEP workers as a buttress against job loss through retirement (early and otherwise) and other downsizing strategies.<sup>9</sup> In testimony given to the New York City Council in 1999, DC 37 representatives estimated that from 1993-1998, the number of civilian employees in city jobs decreased 20,000; 800 positions in the Parks Department and 1,600 in Human Resources Administration were lost as a result of WEP. Most were entry-level jobs. Over the same period, DC 37 Local 1505, representing parks workers, saw its membership decline from 1,700 to 1,100.<sup>10</sup> Although it was hard hit by WEP, the union did little to organize participants or to protect its own membership. Instead CWA Local 1180 took a leading role in turning labor's attention to WEP. CWA established a monthly roundtable meeting attended by advocacy groups and unions to deal with the crisis that WEP presented.

This union roundtable made clear another strength of organizing WEP participants as workers rather than welfare recipients: by identifying their issues as worker issues, WEP participants could build alliances with labor. This is important because while progressive unions were sometimes sympathetic to the concerns of people on public assistance, unions nonetheless did little to concretely help welfare recipients, and they often spoke in a political language that marginalized them. But seeing WEP participants as workers allowed progressive unions (and some unions that were not traditionally progressive) to understand that they needed to make common cause with WEP participants. The CWA roundtable wrote a "Points of Unity" document that declared that WEP participants were exploited workers. The document demanded that WEP workers be given all the rights of

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

The words of Local 1180 Vice-President Bill Henning illustrate the budding labor-community alliance. Henning used a language of class, labor, and solidarity to identify WEP participants as workers, associate WEP workers with union members, and create a bond between the two groups.

“We know the difference between real work and something else and WEP is real work. It benefits the city, its residents and visitors. We are impressing upon our members that there is no such thing as bad or menial work. There's only demeaning pay and bad conditions. Folks on public assistance want jobs, but we don't believe in jobs without real benefits or real pay.”<sup>11</sup>

In confirming that public-assistance recipients perform “real work” and “want jobs,” Henning presented WEP participants to his members in a sympathetic light—they are doing hard work under poor conditions, and they are worthy of solidarity and respect.

This newly forged political identity, and the reciprocal recognition which strengthened it, was publicly displayed when a contingent of WWT! members marched under their own banner in the 1996 Labor Day parade in New York City. The experience was an emotional one for WEP workers. They were accustomed to being denied the use of bathrooms at work and to doing dirty jobs without uniforms, but here they were greeted with support and cheers from union members as they marched up Fifth Avenue. They were given red union t-shirts by the Communication Workers, which did not help to publicly convey that they were a distinct group of WEP workers, but made them feel appreciated and good. In giving WEP workers the distinctive red t-shirts, CWA showed enough respect to outfit them like other workers (something the city had not done), invited WEP workers to identify with the union, and sent a message to union marchers that WEP workers were the same as other workers. For WEP workers, the parade was a stirring experience, and they felt a genuine surge of pride in their status as workers.

### **Return to a Welfare-Rights Approach**

Almost from the beginning, and in spite of significant success, the on-the-ground organizing faced serious setbacks. Favoring the worker model, organizers focused their energies on work sites; they visited WEP workplaces across the city distributing “know-your-rights” pamphlets, and they recruited for a union-like organization. However the energy level of workplace visits declined as the novelty of having an outside person to complain wore off, and meeting participation fluctuated. Organizers tried to create a shop-steward system in which each work site would elect a representative to attend monthly meetings, bring back information to the group, and mobilize his/her co-workers for actions. Although twenty workplaces elected shop stewards, this failed to substantially raise the energy level of the organizing.

Throughout 1998, organizers struggled to build a union-like group, yet they faced problems reminiscent of their experiences as welfare-rights organizers. Turnover at the work sites was high as participants were sanctioned (temporarily cut off of public assistance) for minor violations of regulations, such as failing to show up for a face-to-face meeting with their case worker, not responding in a timely fashion to a recertification letter, or falling short of one of myriad other bureaucratic hurdles created by the welfare system. The excessive sanction rate belied the dual purpose of WEP: On the one hand, it secured cheap labor for the city. On the other, it was so punitive that it forced thousands of poor people off public assistance, even if temporarily, thereby cutting city welfare rolls. Moreover, frequent crises in the lives of the most active WWT! members strained the group, and participants became frustrated by the slow pace of change. Nominal membership in WWT! was high, but active participation was low.

Organizers began to suspect that fighting for WEP participants' rights at their workplaces was a flawed strategy, that the objective conditions of the WEP program and the complicated nature of WEP participants' identities necessitated a change in approach. While WEP workers complained about their jobs like regular workers, and they wanted to fight for better conditions, this was only a part of a complex set of problems they

faced. The high sanction rate created obstacles to the cultivation of a collective worker identity. The lack of stability at the job sites meant that on-the-job grievances and a shop-steward strategy had little time to develop. While WEP participants might have identified as workers if they had had a consistent assignment at a regular site, the turnover rate made this impossible for the vast majority. Moreover, WEP workers continued to face the “ritual humiliation” characteristic of being on public assistance. Their required visits to welfare offices and with case workers reinforced feelings of passivity, and they often felt mistreated by the city rather than angry at their bosses. The union-like model faced legal barriers as well. Since WEP workers were not recognized as employees according to federal law, they were not granted NLRA protections, including the right to form a union and bargain with their employer.<sup>12</sup> After two years of an effective media campaign, high membership turnover, and numerous small demonstrations to improve working conditions, the steering committee decided to change tactics.

Since its inception, WWT! used the slogan “Real Jobs, Not WEP” in its fliers, pamphlets, buttons, and banners. In 1999 WWT! began a campaign that acknowledged the urgency of that phrase. It formed a broad coalition of seventy unions and community and church groups to draft legislation to create the Transitional Jobs Program, which would fund 10,000 WEP positions to become permanent jobs. The strategy of organizing around worker issues bore fruit because politically powerful unions got involved, including DC 37, which had dragged its feet on the WEP issue, and the carpenters union, traditionally a conservative union that stayed away from social activism. The unions were eager to support a program that would not undercut their members the way that WEP did.

The Real Jobs campaign was victorious. After a two-year fight the Transitional Jobs Program was passed by the New York City Council. Mayor Giuliani refused to enact the program and vetoed the legislation, but the labor-community coalition had political clout, and the city council took the unusual step of overriding the veto. Organizers had hoped that the Real Jobs bill would revitalize the workplace strategy, but focusing on job creation weakened other aspects of the organizing. Designing a jobs program, drafting it into legislation, finding sponsors in the city council, seeing the bill through the hearing process, and organizing to attract more sponsors and put pressure on the council leadership to move the bill is a multi-year and abstract process. Even when it is successful, it can seem arcane and alienating, making organizing around legislation tricky. Mobilizing to get a bill passed can help to strengthen a mature organization that has a stable core of committed activists, but it is not a good way to attract and retain new people, who are more likely to be motivated by quicker, more concrete victories. This is especially so when members experience high turnover and therefore do not have the time to overcome their alienation from the legislative process and take “ownership” of the campaign.

In pursuing the Real Jobs bill, many WWT! members did attend planning meetings, testify at hearings, and lobby council members, but the campaign never built a critical mass of workers to transform it from a good advocacy project that could bring twenty workers to a hearing to argue their case, to a strong organizing drive that could mobilize workers and build genuine power through numbers. In the end, it was the unusual and strong coalition with labor unions, and the political muscle they brought to the fight, that won the day.

WWT! organizers continued to outreach to WEP participants at their work sites, and they heard a growing number of complaints about inadequate child-care arrangements. Under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, parents with children over three years of age are required to participate in workfare. While case workers were supposed to assist parents in finding suitable arrangements, and to advise them of their right to stay at home until they did, in reality, they were pressuring their clients to take WEP jobs. One study found that nearly two-thirds of WEP workers reported that case workers threatened them with severe sanctions—a \$90 loss of benefits after missing one day of work, \$150 after three days—if they were unable to find child care quickly. Only three percent were aware that they were not required to work until they found child care.<sup>13</sup> With the meager day-care allowance offered by the city (a maximum of \$77 per week to informal providers) parents were often forced to place their children in poor quality settings. WWT! began to highlight this problem, culminating in a protest that mounted a “guerilla day-care center” in the lobby of the city Human

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.<sup>14</sup>

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 workplace, union rights, and worker identity faded from organizing efforts.

## Discussion

While it did not succeed in the long term, the WWT! workplace strategy offers valuable insights for those interested in organizing and working-class movements. There was considerable early enthusiasm for the campaign. Organizers experienced this firsthand during their visits to job sites where WEP workers demanded to be treated with respect, to be issued proper equipment and training, and to be paid the same as city workers. Initial meetings were well attended and spirited, suggesting that the strategy was a sound one. However the strengths that organizers had hoped that a WEP *worker* focus would bring—the natural collectivity of the workplace, participants' sense of pride and entitlement rooted in their labor, public respect for work—were hobbled by the complicated nature of welfare recipients' identities and the objective conditions of being on public assistance. The pride WEP workers felt in doing their jobs—something that CWA's Bill Henning acknowledged when he called upon his members to appreciate WEP participants as they would their union brothers and sisters—was always mitigated by the degradation they were subjected to when they struggled with the system to comply with regulations and maintain their benefits. Their susceptibility to sanction, and the rapid turnover this caused, not only damaged the collectivity that might develop at work, but it also undermined the personal strength that an individual might derive from holding a job. This had profound effects since WEP participants were likely to be more motivated to get out of the program than they were to improve their working conditions. While they sometimes and partially thought of themselves as workers, and organizers seized this as an opportunity for making social change, they did not have the consistent, collective experience on the job to solidify this identity.

Still, the workplace campaign won victories that went beyond those first imagined. As evidenced by the press coverage, public discourse shifted dramatically as the media adopted the language and perspective of the campaign. WWT! waged an effective ideological battle over the terms of exploitation and the inter-related interests of the poor and the working class. Students of social movements as well as organizers can recognize this as an important achievement, particularly given that it occurred in the years following the historic assault on welfare mounted by the Reagan-Bush administrations and continued through the neo-liberal policies of the Clinton White House. The growing public awareness of the connection between WEP, city services, and the decline in union membership brought stronger relationships with unions than organizers had anticipated. These alliances were determinate in the real gains secured by WWT! More than this, labor unions were influenced to adopt more progressive positions, as those like DC 37 and the carpenters, as well as CWA, brought a consciousness about poverty, work, and welfare to their membership.

More broadly, the WWT! case shows that identities are malleable and made in the arena of social action.<sup>15</sup> WEP participants had complicated identities; in some settings and in some political moments, they saw themselves as unpaid and poorly treated workers, and political mobilizing successfully called upon this awareness. The 1996 Labor Day Parade was a particularly dramatic moment that demonstrated the potential for WEP workers and union members to develop mutual recognition, shared interest, and a collective class identity.



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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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Society for the Anthropology of North America, April 2004, Atlanta, GA. Thanks to Geraldine Casey, Ian Skoggard, and Sandy Smith-Nonini for their comments.

<sup>2</sup> Other groups were at the same time organizing WEP workers into union-like groups, including Workfairness and the ACORN WEP Worker Organizing Committee. Viewed from the outside, these efforts seem to have followed a course similar to the one we describe for WWT!

<sup>3</sup> Joe Sexton, "Discontented Workfare Laborers Murmur 'Union,'" *NY Times*. (9/2796): B1, B3.

<sup>4</sup> Interviewed by Janine Jackson, 1996, *Labor at the Crossroads* <[www.historymatters.gmu.edu](http://www.historymatters.gmu.edu)>

<sup>5</sup> Paul Moses, "Equal Rights: Workfare workers fight for better conditions." *Newsday* (Jan.. 20, 1997): A6, A35; "Workfare Is a Job With Rights Like Any Other." *NY Times*. (2/2797).

<sup>6</sup> Interviewed by Eleanor J. Bader "Workfare, Unfair!" *Dollars & Sense*. Issue #213 (September-October 1997). <[www.dollarsandsense.org](http://www.dollarsandsense.org)>

<sup>7</sup> Joe Sexton, *Ibid.*; Paul Moses, *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Joe Sexton, *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Kim Nauer, "Making Rudy Pay." *Village Voice*. (August/September 1996): 27-29.

<sup>10</sup> Testimonies before the New York City Council General Welfare Committee by Lee Saunders and Michael Hood (9/29/99).

<sup>11</sup> Eleanor J. Bader *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Around this time, ACORN carried out a union card campaign. WEP workers signed cards which were then presented to former New York City Mayor Dinkins who, in a symbolic act, recognized the union. In reality, the union had no legal standing.

<sup>13</sup> Survey of 234 parents carried out by the office of then-Public Advocate Mark Green. Reported by Brooke Richie and Robin Epstein, "Daycareless." *City Limits* (August-September, 1997). <[www.citylimits.org](http://www.citylimits.org)>

<sup>14</sup> Brooke Richie and Robin Epstein, *Ibid.* Brooke Richie, "WEP Moms 'Lobby' Barrios-Paoli on Workfare Child Care." *City Limits* (6/23/97).

<sup>15</sup> As anthropologist Geraldine Casey has put it, class identity has to be "named, claimed and mobilized in the arena of social action." From Bootstrap to Shoulderstrap: Women Secretaries and Class, Culture, and Voice in Contemporary Puerto Rico. Ph.D. Dissertation, Graduate Center of the City University of New York (2002): 6.

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