

WEAP and the Campaign for a National Health Program
By Rochelle Robinson

Last August, the Women's Economic Agenda Project (WEAP), as part of the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC), joined thousands in NYC during the Republican Convention week to protest and bring attention to the economic human rights violations being perpetrated on this nation's poor and working class families. During this time WEAP attended and participated in the Campaign for a National Health Program NOW (CNHP NOW) conference: "Health Care Crisis and Election2004." WEAP joined CNHP's efforts because we both agree that the health care is an economic human right and both have taken an affirmative stand on this issue. Also attending this conference were participants from various healthcare, labor and faith based communities along with Representative John Conyers, chair of the 46 member Congressional Universal Health Care Task Force, and Kim Gandy, President of the National Organization for Women (NOW). The various panels and presentations were designed to bring national attention to the issue of health care. Many of the speakers, including Ethel Long-Scott, Executive Director of WEAP, spoke passionately and eloquently about a health care system that is seriously flawed. As Mrs. Long-Scott put it, this system "makes me want to holler!"

Nine WEAP representatives attended the conference and raised at every opportunity the need for not just good policy but for an organized movement of poor and working people to fight for achieving that good policy. Mrs. Long-Scott spoke on two panels, including one on reproductive health, women's rights and our economic human right to health care. Three WEAP women spoke from the floor about the struggle they and their community have had trying to seek recovery from drugs, treatment and rehabilitation for breast cancer, access to rape counseling, and basic access to Medicaid.

Both CNHP and WEAP understand that it is not only poor people who are uninsured; in fact, in California alone, eighty percent of those uninsured come from working families with 1 in 3 earning as much as \$50, 000 a year. Throughout the US, nearly 45 million people have no health coverage at this moment. Hospitals are closing and waiting rooms are jam-packed, labor unions are struggling to negotiate contracts to provide health insurance for their members and an unrealistic mandatory for-profit health insurance plan is being considered in California—this in the face of rising health care costs as services decrease for low-income families. CNHP and WEAP have in common the belief that a single payer health care system is what is needed to provide healthcare to ALL. This system is not intended to mimic the current system of a profit driven health industry. Instead of a system that puts profits over people, the single payer health care plan reverses this trend while saving taxpayer dollars. It does not serve the interests of the uninsured or this nation's economy to suggest that people take ownership of their healthcare by "bargaining with the health care industry on their own." This is absurd because our government will just allow the insurance companies to get rich off the backs of those who could least afford to pay for their "own" insurance.

It has been estimated that within the last two years over 11 million Californians went without health insurance. WEAP's proposal of a "Just Health Care," a universal health care plan that would cover all US residents from birth to death, with a savings of 95% of taxpayer money (in California this savings would amount to a whopping \$37

million dollars), is a smart and effective plan supported by labor unions, faith-based communities and other local and national organizations with an inclusive, people first health care agenda.