

**Not Welfare, Not Workfare: The Right to a 40-Hour Workweek**  
From CSWA News Winter 1998-1999 Volume 6 Issue 1

Conservative proponents of welfare reform argue that those who don't work shouldn't be supported by the taxes the rest of us pay. Liberal critics of welfare reform and workfare respond that corporations receive more "welfare" from the government — through subsidies, tax breaks, and other forms — than all welfare recipients combined. They raise the question: should we have welfare for the poor and needy or welfare for the corporations and the rich?

Neither side recognizes the many hours of hard work that people do when they are not at their jobs. Work like raising children in the home, keeping neighborhoods clean and safe, taking care of the elderly and sick, etc. Both liberals and conservatives refuse to recognize that many people are overworked — particularly single parents — even if they do not have a job. They seem to think that the efforts of rich people who spend their time playing golf are more important for society to support.

The point is not to argue for workfare versus welfare. The point is not to argue for "jobs for all," for "full employment," or for a living wage alone. We need to get back to basic values. The work that day-to-day people do for society should be recognized and compensated. People should have the right to a 40-hour workweek at a living wage, which should include many labors that are done outside what is usually called the "workplace." Single parents, for example, should not have to work two "jobs" in order to survive — one at home and the other for a boss. Aren't the labors of women and men who raise children, the future of our society, worth more than those of speculators and stock brokers? Too often employers underpay desperate single parents, using them to undermine conditions for other workers. Instead, people should be able to receive a living wage for the hours of important work they contribute to society — whether they have a job or not. Without these labors our economy and government could not function.

There is no lack of work in society today. It is time our society recognizes the work that many of us do and compensate us for it. We are not here to fight for "job" creation, but to demand that our labor be recognized.