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## ALEC 'Report Card'

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# Criminal justice in the Conservative Revolution

by Marianna Wertz

The so-called "Conservative Revolution" which swept into the U.S. Congress on Nov. 8 with its "Contract with America," published its policy for criminal justice reform just before the election. A voluminous study titled "Report Card on Crime and Punishment" was issued on Nov. 2 at a press conference in Washington, D.C. by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC).

ALEC promotes itself as the nation's largest bipartisan, voluntary membership association of state legislators, with 2,600 members throughout all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Guam. It is officially "dedicated to advancing policies which expand free markets, promote economic growth, limit government, and preserve individual liberties."

At its press conference, ALEC spokesmen, including former U.S. Attorney General William Barr, argued that "increasing prison capacity is the single most effective strategy for controlling crime," as Barr wrote in the study's foreword.

One of the highest items on the agenda of the "Conservative Revolution" is to ram through a criminal justice program across the nation similar to what they just achieved in Virginia (see *EIR's* Oct. 21, 1994 *Feature*), where Barr headed up the Governor's Commission to Abolish Parole and Reform Sentencing. Called Proposal X in Virginia, the policy which was rammed through the legislature in late September combines an end to parole with lengthier sentences for violent and repeat offenders, "three strikes and you're out" legislation, and an aggressive prison-building program based on privatization of construction and services.

### **Incarceration has no effect on crime**

However, the drafters of this policy have repeatedly run up against the well-documented fact that the threat of incarceration has no tangible effect on crime; that increasing prison capacity is *not* a deterrent to crime, as study after study has demonstrated. So, rather than continue to deny reality, they decided to create their own study, to accomplish through hoked-up statistics what they couldn't achieve through rational argument.

The study reports FBI data from 1960 to 1992 on crime

rates, incarceration rates, and similar data. From these data the study draws, as the core of its argument, the stunningly fallacious conclusion that where states have toughened their incarceration policies, crime rates have dropped. Therefore, *ipso facto*, the study says, we need to toughen incarceration policies.

Dr. Christopher Baird, spokesman for the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, responded to the study in a press statement: "This is one more version of the same overly simplistic type of analysis that has been periodically rehashed since the Reagan administration. It is not research; no serious study of crime would analyze its relationship to punishment without considering other measures of social change."

The political purpose of the "Report Card" is akin to the rest of the agenda of the "Conservative Revolution": to shift the focus of blame away from social policy, in which the government is supposed to play a role, onto the segment of the population that is least able to defend itself, be it welfare mothers or the drug addicts who make up the bulk of the prison population today. Thus, the "Report Card" summary, written by Samuel A. Brunelli, president of the ALEC Foundation and executive director of ALEC, states:

"This Report Card shows what most people feel in their hearts: There is no place in society for violent criminals, and the most effective strategy we can employ is to arrest, convict, and incarcerate criminals for long periods of time."

### **Economic development needed**

Brunelli erroneously counterposes welfare spending and gun-control laws to his lock-them-up proposal, as if those were the only alternatives to stem the growth of crime. Nowhere in the study, or in any of the "Conservative Revolution" literature, is there consideration of the kind of economic development policies proposed by economist Lyndon LaRouche and *EIR*, which can in fact reverse the descent into the Dark Age of crime and drugs that has spawned the rising crime rates during recent years. To do so would be to abandon their prejudices, and face the hard task of education and rebuilding which the nation actually requires.

In fact, the only rise in violent crime in the past several decades is among black male youth, who are targeted by drug pushers in the nation's ghettos and beset by triple the unemployment rate of their white counterparts. From 1973 to 1992, aggravated assault and robbery dropped 11%; burglary, larceny, and auto theft dropped 30%; rape dropped 28%; and homicide (between 1980 and 1992) dropped 9%. But among young black males, crime skyrocketed during this period, with a murder rate of 290 per 100,000 population (compared to 20 for white males). This is the population that is targeted for lifelong incarceration, and for the slave-labor programs that private prisons are being built to run. This is the population for which ALEC says we have "no room" in our society.