

## Hospital Protests Are Growing: Will The Congress Act?

by Dennis Speed

With virtually all of Washington, D.C.'s 700,000 residents now following the growing battle over whether the city's public general hospital will remain open and be expanded, or shut down on Congressional orders, Rep. John Conyers (D) of Michigan hosted an extraordinary Congressional briefing March 22: "National Public Hospital Safety Net in Crisis; D.C. General In Focus." Over 300 of Washington's residents, bolstered by delegations from Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Massachusetts, and state legislators Harold James (D-Pa.) and Erik Fleming (D.-Miss.) heard the testimony that you will find exclusively reported in this issue.

Controversy surrounded the event. The *Washington Times* reported it to its readers as "Unsanctioned Briefing on D.C. General." A D.C. community newspaper called *Common Denominator* reported that "Conyers, . . . the dean of the Congressional Black Caucus and a leading advocate of universal public health care, has weighed in with support for maintaining D.C. General Hospital as a public entity. . . . Overreported objections by Mayor Anthony Williams and D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, the Detroit Democrat hosted a public briefing March 22 at the Rayburn House Office Building."

The controversy was not only due to the central role played by Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., and by Dr. Abdul Alim Muhammad of the Nation of Islam, in calling attention to the Nazi economic policy outlook behind shutting the only public hospital in the nation's capital. The "heat" around this mobilization also reflects brutal pressure being put on Washington officials, by Conservative Revolutionaries in Congress and and by Washington banking and real estate interests, to "close the damn hospital down," and make the city an example of fascist economic austerity (see article, p. 46).

Increasingly, it has become clear that winning the D.C. General fight depends upon exposing the "armies of the night" that are organized around the leadership of Katharine Graham's *Washington Post*, threaded throughout the "community action organizational network" of D.C., which have operated for decades on behalf



*The fight to “Save D.C. General Hospital” finally reaches Congress. Rep. John Conyers (D.-Mich) and State Rep. Harold James (D.-Penn.) at the dias during the March 22 Congressional briefing, which heard 17 witnesses and experts on the national and international issue at stake in the threat to close the capital’s only public hospital.*

of real estate interests dedicated to a plan of “Negro Removal.”

Doctors in Germany, Australia, and other nations, briefed on the fight to save public health in the United States, have seen the U.S. fight as identical with their own. Demonstrations against hospital shutdowns have spread from Berlin to all of eastern Germany, also with prominent participation of LaRouche’s co-thinkers. In the United States, caucuses of state legislators from four states have either urgently demanded their Congressional representatives act to save D.C. General Hospital, or were present themselves to testify at the forum convened by Conyers. The reason the protests are spreading, is the presence of the LaRouche forces’ leadership, in a situation rendered revolutionary by rapidly failing economies and public health systems. Since 1973, over 30 new diseases have emerged worldwide, many of the which have no known cure.

It is incumbent upon the United States to lead a global war against disease, starting with Congress resurrecting the 1946 Hill-Burton national standards for hospital care. That legislation provided for massive expansion of hospital infrastructure in this nation, and made it, decades ago, a model for public health systems, and for life expectancy, throughout the world. Instead, Rep. Ernest Istook of Oklahoma in July 2000, threatened to throw Mayor Williams in jail if he, or the City Council, or even the D.C. Financial Control Board, kept the hospital open, and people alive.

The world increasingly watches the drama unfolding around D.C. General. In 1999, Al Gore played a central role

in stopping the production of generic drugs to fight AIDS in South Africa. Now, the Bush Administration, through the World Trade Organization, seeks to stop highly successful programs for AIDS treatment in Brazil, and by extrapolation, India and South Africa. Mayor Williams himself, in a letter issued March 28 to the District’s citizens trying to *justify* the hospital’s shutdown, admits that in Washington “the life expectancy of its African-American men is ten years lower than the rest of America’s, and the city has the country’s highest rates of infant mortality, diabetes, and HIV infection.” Why, then close D.C.’s only public hospital, an institution that has been serving its residents since 1804?

Such policies are reminiscent only of those of Nazi medicine, the precursor to the concentration camp system. That, too, was justified as “cost effective.” Lyndon LaRouche warns, “Whatever else the early future might bring for Georgia’s Newt Gingrich, he, and his infamous ‘Contract With America’ will continue to typify the variety of fascist ideology which currently dominates the radical, populist wing of the U.S. Republican Party. This is not only a national issue of U.S. internal affairs; it is a strategic threat, both to the United States itself, and of global importance for humanity as a whole.” In a world with no public hospitals, and raging, incurable epidemics, will nations burn their dead in mass graves, rather than treat them?

Winning the fight for D.C. General could establish an American commitment to reject genocide, and to fight in favor of the general welfare of humanity as a whole. The Founders would have expected nothing less.