

Conyers, Moore Promote Universal Health Care

by Patricia Salisbury

Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.), sponsor of H.R. 676, "The United States National Health Insurance Act," held a standing-room-only event June 20 in Washington, D.C., with filmmaker Michael Moore, to announce the escalation of the mobilization for universal health care in the United States. Moore's new movie, "Sicko," on the U.S. health-care disaster, was the result of an e-mail he sent out, soliciting health-insurance horror stories, to which he received 25,000 replies in less than one week. Several of the individuals featured in the movie, and their families, were present to give personal testimony, and clips of the movie were shown. Testimony and support were also provided by dozens of organizations and health-care professionals including Physicians for a National Health Plan, National Physicians Alliance, California Nurses Association, National Nurses Organizing Committee, and the American Medical Student Association, representing two-thirds of all medical students in the United States. In addition, many members of Congress who have signed onto H.R. 676 spoke, and related stories of their own families' experience with health care.

Both Conyers, who chairs the House Judiciary Committee, and Moore stated from the outset that in addition to the 47 million Americans without health insurance, including 8 million children, another 50 million are under-insured, meaning that they have health insurance, but with inadequate coverage or unaffordable deductibles and co-pays. The Institute of Medicine has estimated that 18,000 Americans die each year as a direct consequence of being uninsured or underinsured. Both men made the point that this is unacceptable in the richest country in the world, and the horrible consequences were dramatically illustrated in scenes from Moore's film.

H.R. 676 establishes a publicly financed, privately delivered health-care system that improves and expands the already existing Medicare program to all U.S. residents, and all residents living in U.S. territories. The goal is to ensure that all Americans will have access, guaranteed by law, to the highest quality and most effective health-care services, regardless of their employment, income, or health-care status. The bill has been endorsed by the AFL-CIO executive committee, eight international unions, 19 state AFL-CIO affiliates, 14,000 physicians, two State Houses, and dozens of county and municipal governments. As of June 20, the bill had 74 co-sponsors, and Conyers announced during the event, that as a result of

Moore's presence on the Hill, and the movie's pre-screening, many more members had agreed to sign on.

Lyndon LaRouche endorsed H.R. 676, which was first introduced in 2003, on April 10, 2006, when he characterized support for the legislation as a "litmus test" of the morality of members of Congress. In his many statements on the health-care crisis, LaRouche has stressed that not only must the HMO system be abolished, but that there must be a return to the Hill-Burton principle of providing care to all, and building the infrastructure to deliver on that principle. The 1946 Hill Burton Act—officially titled the "Hospital Survey and Construction Act," launched a Federal-state drive that resulted in a nationwide grid of over 7,000 public hospitals, equitably covering rural and urban populations, in 3,000 counties. But since the 1970s—the peak of the hospital coverage period—this grid has been continuously reduced, as the managed-care/HMO era took over, cutting both infrastructure and care.

Statistics released at the press conference by the California Nurses Association show that the 20 largest HMOs in the United States made \$10.8 billion in profits in 2005. In the course of the event, a number of health-care professionals testified that their jobs required them to figure out every possible way to deny benefits to policy-holders, and that the entire system is based on assuming that care will be denied. Moore presented HMO statistics on what percentage of people will contest unpaid claims, and showed how this is calculated as part of their business plan.

H.R. 676 is unique among all the various health-care reform proposals claiming to provide universal coverage—including those being touted by both Democratic and Republican Presidential candidates—in that it eliminates HMOs and the private insurance industry entirely from the system. The political pressure on the Presidential candidates to provide something other than rhetoric on the health-care issue will be increased as more and more people see the Moore film, and by the fact that Democratic Presidential hopeful Rep. Dennis Kucinich (Ohio) is an original co-sponsor of H.R. 676, and is aggressively promoting it in his campaign for the nomination.

National Mobilization Announced

Conyers announced that the June 20 event would be the kickoff of a national mobilization, including the June 29 opening of "Sicko," in numerous U.S. cities, and the establishment of a national headquarters and a national organization to promote H.R. 676. Conyers also announced that this event marked the first of a series of activities that he will sponsor on America's health-care crisis during the 110th Congress. On July 17, the Judiciary Subcommittee on Commercial and Administrative Law will be holding a hearing on medical debt as a contributor to bankruptcy. Figures released at the event show that half of all personal bankruptcies are caused by illness or medical bills, and that the number of medical bank-

ruptcies has increased by 2,200% since 1981. Conyers has also just put in a request to the Government Accountability Office to further examine the problems with the current system, and a request to the Congressional Budget Office to do a cost estimate for establishing a system of single payer health care.

The three clips from Moore's film were all shocking, even to an audience well-versed in the horrors of the U.S. health-care system, the more so since, in two of the three cases, the individuals involved had health insurance. In the first case, the wife of a 37-year-old African American cancer patient worked at a major hospital, and it was the CEO of the hospital who denied her husband a bone-marrow transplant, arguing that the treatment was experimental, despite submissions from the patient's physician documenting "research-based evidence" of its necessity and efficacy.

In another case, an 18-month-old baby with a 104° fever was taken to the nearest hospital emergency room, but because the mother's Kaiser Permanente plan considered this an out-of-network hospital, the child was not treated, and was transported to another hospital, had a seizure en route, and died. Coincidentally, a June 22 hearing of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, chaired by Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) reported that the Department of Health and Human Services has ignored over six years of repeated warnings that America's emergency rooms are understaffed, overcrowded, underfunded, and overwhelmed.

But the last film clip was the perhaps the most shocking: It exposed the practice in which California hospitals dump indigent patients out onto the streets of Skid Row in Los Angeles. The hospitals paid the cab fare, took the patients out of their beds, in many cases with the IV still stuck in their arms, and had the cab dump them on the street. Rev. Andy Bales, director of the Union Rescue Mission, reported that he has arranged for video cameras, termed the Hospital Dump Cam, to film patients being dumped onto the street. He has also convinced the Los Angeles Police to make arrests of those responsible for this practice.

Moore demanded that Congress make it a criminal act to dump patients out of hospitals, and said that since letting someone die or causing their death is a crime, people should call 911 and report an attempted murder in process. He reported that the California Legislature was in fact debating a bill that day to make it a crime for hospitals to do this, and the HMOs were lobbying to stop the bill. The City Attorney of Los Angeles has filed criminal charges against some of the city's hospitals.

Moore had sent personal invitations for a free viewing of "Sicko" on the day of the Conyers event to over 900 health-insurance and pharmaceutical lobbyists. According to Moore, there are four health insurance lobbyists for every member of Congress. A total of 11 showed up to view the film in contrast to a later evening showing, where a large number of members of Congress attended.

International Attacks on BAE: The Real Target Is Cheney

by Nancy Spannaus

A faction fight within the ranks of the British Establishment has broken out into the open over the international scandal over BAE Systems, the British defense firm that has been exposed as the center of an arms-for-oil deal which Lyndon LaRouche has characterized as the “scandal of the century.” The target of the quarrel within British ranks, commented LaRouche on June 28, is U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, who is in deep trouble with his London friends for being unable to ensure that BAE’s filthy operations—which are estimated to have generated an \$80-100 million slush fund for Anglo-American use—never saw the light of day.

Under the now-departed prime minister Tony Blair, the British government acted decisively to squash the investigation by the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) into BAE bribes to Saudi Prince Bandar bin Sultan. Blair himself declared that the investigation would harm Britain’s “national security,” and British Attorney General Lord Goldsmith closed down the SFO probe in December 2006. News reports at the time of the Cheney visit to Riyadh revealed that Cheney took personal responsibility for shutting down the BAE probe, assuring that the Al-Yamamah project would go forward, scandal-free. According to one account, Cheney contacted Blair, and within a matter of weeks, Lord Goldsmith announced the shutdown. Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the former Saudi Ambassador in Washington and a central player in the entire BAE/Al-Yamamah scandal, also reportedly threatened the Blair government with a cutoff of Saudi cooperation in the war on terror, and this was a further factor contributing to the bungled coverup.

But action in early June by certain British factions to reopen the probe, and, most decisively, the spotlight put on the strategic significance of BAE’s Al-Yamamah deal as the biggest scandal in 100 years, by the LaRouche movement, has shot to hell the attempt to suppress it. A major investigation of BAE’s crimes is now underway by the U.S. Justice Depart-

ment (see *National*), as well as in other nations. Try as they might, the British royals are not going to be able to protect this Crown Jewel.

In fact, U.S. intelligence sources are already tracking the activities of Blair, who, they report, is quietly attempting to create a network of “charitable” organizations, which could be used to house some of the formerly BAE-managed dirty operations. These sources cite Blair’s recent pilgrimage to the Vatican, where he had an audience with Pope Benedict XVI, and announced his conversion to Catholicism. Blair, the sources say, has also been badly scarred by both the recent Scottish elections, in which the Labour Party lost its majority to a pro-separatist Scottish National Party (SNP), and by the backfire effect of his December 2006 clumsy effort to bury the BAE scandal. That Goldsmith-Blair effort was so poorly executed that there are now nearly a dozen separate investigations of BAE going on around the world—including the recently announced U.S. Department of Justice probe and the prospect of the BAE dealings with Prince Bandar being taken up by oversight committees of the U.S. Congress.

‘The U.S. Is Not a British Colony’

On June 28, LaRouche warned those forces in the United Kingdom who are thinking about stopping the U.S. investigation into the bribery practices and other crimes of the defense giant BAE, to remember that the U.S.A. is a sovereign nation, and this investigation is in the national security interests of the United States.

“Some people in London may not understand that, contrary to what appear to be their persisting wishes, the United States is not a British colony. That ended with the Declaration of Independence in 1776.”

“The point is, the U.S. government is sovereign and has a right to conduct a full investigation,” LaRouche said. “Some

people in London may not yet understand that the United States became sovereign with its Declaration of Independence, and remains sovereign despite some irregularities betwixt and between. And thus, if the charges against BAE concern an international affair that rightly affects the interests of the United States, the United States has a perfect sovereign right to investigate, or challenge this.”

LaRouche cautioned that, “maybe the continued existence or fall of the newly constituted [Gordon] Brown government may depend upon his rising to the occasion on this one. Maybe the rise or fall of the Brown government may depend upon his coming to his senses on this matter.”

Which Way Will the British Go?

As Gordon Brown moves into the Prime Minister’s office, the faction fight within the British ranks over BAE is raging.

Taking the side of pursuing the BAE matter by, among other things, providing assistance to the U.S. Justice Department investigation, is the *Financial Times*, which penned a scathing second editorial on June 28. Since the U.S. press persists in refusing to cover the scandal beyond the most meager headlines, we provide substantial quotes from the editorial statement, which was titled, “Shaming Britain: Department of Justice is right to investigate BAE Systems”:

“The US Department of Justice has decided to launch its own probe into whether BAE systems, the British defence contractor that is also a large supplier to the Pentagon, has violated the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. That decision shows the UK government’s arguments for suspending its investigation—that it would wreck a vital national security relationship with the Saudis and cost thousands of jobs—for what they are: specious realpolitik and economic excuses. . . .

“Allegations of bribery should be investigated: the law is the law. There are many in Saudi Arabia who want more transparency and the Saudis were never likely to cut off cooperation on national security matters. Britain might lose future arms sales if wrongdoing is exposed, but ignoring the law for the sake of economic expedience is an action of the mercenary and the cynical.

“Those in the Saudi government who put pressure on Britain to abandon the probe have served their country poorly. They have turned a UK investigation into a U.S. inquiry and thrust Al-Yamamah into the international spotlight. . . .” Gordon Brown should order cooperation with the DoJ probe for “redemption.”

Dragging Their Feet

A rather different tone was taken by the London *Times* in its story on June 28. The story claimed that the British government is “scrambling . . . to find out how wide and deep” the DoJ investigation into BAE will be, and that the government is anxiously awaiting information on how extensive and embarrassing the investigation might be.

The London *Independent*, on June 27, wrote that the Brit-

ish government and BAE would have been better off keeping the investigation in London, because now, “being immersed in the icy waters of the Justice Department,” there’s no telling what will happen, penalties are likely to be harsher, etc. “BAE Systems hoped to bury the past. Instead, there now appears to be no stopping it being exhumed. With so much to lose in the US, BAE has no option but to co-operate fully.”

But the *Daily Telegraph* of June 29 didn’t leave any question as to where its faction of the British Establishment stands. “BAE is none of Washington’s business,” trumpeted a signed column. Con Coughlin, a senior writer for the *Telegraph* (also known as the *Torygraph*, because of its role as a mouthpiece for the Conservative Party), reflects the anger of certain circles in Britain who are not amused by the fact that BAE is under criminal investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice. Coughlin lamely tries to dismiss the investigation as being “motivated by jealousy over the vast profits that BAE and the Government have derived from the initial deal.”

“And there are suspicions,” Coughlin continues, “that the Americans are trying to derail the latest arms agreement between Britain and Saudi Arabia—‘Son of al-Yamamah.’” Coughlin threatens the U.S. that it will be faced with anger and retaliation on the part of the Saudis, and concludes, “Certainly, the attitude of both the British and Saudi governments is that whatever deals they may have done in the past, they are none of Washington’s business.”

But in another article, the *Telegraph* admits that the Ministry of Defence has little choice but to collaborate with the U.S. probe—if Britain wants to maintain any credibility with Washington.

Scandal Spreads Worldwide

There is no unanimity in Saudi Arabia over the BAE revelations either. There is reportedly a split within the Saudi royal family over how to deal with the scandal, now that it has become a legal matter in the United States, and more than a little rage at Cheney, who was unable to protect BAE from criminal investigation.

Nor is Saudi Arabia the only place where BAE’s financial crimes, or worse, have become matters of official concern. *EIR* has uncovered reports of official active probes in at least seven countries in addition to Britain and the United States. They include: Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Sweden, and Switzerland. Most of the allegations under investigation involve charges of bribery, although illegal arms trafficking has also been suggested.

Much of the investigation has been centered in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which has been looking at BAE’s activities for years. Interestingly, the individual who will head the DoJ’s criminal probe into BAE, Mark Mendelsohn, is a career prosecutor, who is the point person at the Justice Department for working with the OECD Bribery Task Force.