

Rohatyn's Cronies Destroy Medical Care

by Patricia Salisbury

In a dramatic move Dec. 21, New York City Comptroller William C. Thompson, Jr. held a news conference on the impact of the proposed closures of New York City emergency room service. A plan to shut down nine hospitals in New York State and to reorganize 48 more, reducing the number of hospital beds in the state by over 4,200 and nursing home beds by 3,000, was scheduled to go into effect on Jan. 1, 2007. According to a report on New York public radio, Thompson told the media that the Berger Commission plan had looked too much at the economics of health care and not enough at the needs of communities. Thompson concluded that the closing of five New York City hospitals could lead to large, potentially disruptive influxes of emergency room patients at neighboring hospitals, cause reductions in ambulance availability, and require some New Yorkers to travel longer distances to reach an emergency room—taking extra minutes that could prove critical for people needing the most urgent care. Implementation of the closure recommended by the Berger Commission, Thompson found, would mean that the number of New York City emergency rooms will have decreased by 21% since 2002, and he warned against rushing to implement its recommendations.

The Berger plan is a direct continuation of the 1970s infrastructure-destroying activities of synarchist banker Felix Rohatyn's "Big MAC" and the commission dictating the plan is chaired by Stephen Berger, who headed one of the "Big MAC" enforcement agencies in the early 1970s. The Berger Commission was handed immense power by Gov. George Pataki and the state legislature; its recommendations can only be overturned by a vote of both houses of the legislature. In early December, the legislature adjourned without taking that vote.

Thompson's report, while it dealt primarily with the impact on emergency room services, also noted that several of the hospitals nearest to those recommended for closure have high occupancy rates for staffed inpatient beds, raising concerns about their capacity to handle inpatients who would have been treated at the closed facilities. "The hospitals proposed to be closed provide significant amounts of under- and unreimbursed care and essential emergency care as well as substantial amounts of primary care to vulnerable populations," he noted in the report, and concluded that "this is a

historic moment for health-care reform in New York, and it should not be carried out in a hasty manner."

Applying the Hill-Burton Standard

The recommendations of the commission are particularly outrageous, given the picture presented of New York health care when the Federal Hill-Burton criteria are applied (see article in this section). By 1980, New York, still operating off the infrastructure-building impetus of the early 1960s, had met the Hill-Burton standard of 4.5 beds per thousand people. But by 1988, it had slid down dramatically, and its ratio of beds per thousand population was less than it was in 1958. That slide has continued, and even before the planned loss of another 4,200 beds, the state's ratio was 3.3 beds per thousand population in 2005.

At least one New York State Assemblyman has called for a halt to the plan. Democratic Assemblyman Robin Schiminger made his appeal after chairing an hours-long public hearing in December, after the report was released. He called for the rejection of the commission report, because he found that because much of the work was done by health-care insiders, without input from the public. Congressman Anthony Weiner (D), who lives near New Parkway Hospital in Queens, and who was recently treated there, led a rally at which he was joined by hospital workers, other elected officials, and area residents. In addition, staff and supporters of Bellevue Woman's Hospital, one of the institutions slated to be axed, held rallies in Albany to protest the shutdown. Anne Saile, president and CEO of Bellevue, told the press that much of the information in the Berger Commission's report on the hospital is inaccurate. Specifically, Bellevue's net deficit as of December 2005 was \$1.3 million, rather than the \$17.6 million reported by the commission—a 92% error!

Other supporters of the threatened hospitals have pointed out that one of those on the closure list, Westchester Square Medical Center, was listed by the commission as having the lowest treatment cost for Medicaid patients of any hospital in The Bronx; and that it runs at a profit. They have questioned the logic of shutting down lower-cost institutions, where the average cost may be \$1,000 a day, and shunting patients to nearby institutions, where the average cost is \$1,500 a day.

Just before Christmas, organizers for the LaRouche Political Action Committee went to the threatened Cabrini Medical Center in Manhattan, with signs reading "Berger Commission Equals Nazi Policy." and a dossier on Felix Rohatyn titled "Rohatyn and the Nazis." Despite statements by hospital administrators that they would resist the order to close the facility, they were hostile to the presence of the LaRouche organizers. However, workers at the hospital reacted very differently, stopping to discuss the Rohatyn policies behind the destruction of the hospital system, as well as the need to impeach Bush and Cheney.