

# IN THESE TIMES

Editorial

## A solution to the health care crisis?

At the United Auto Workers convention in Los Angeles in May, President Carter got a prolonged standing ovation when he mentioned national health insurance in his speech to the delegates. The mention had not been in his original text but was hastily added after Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA) made a moving speech on the subject—a speech that the White House had tried to prevent. The response of the delegates who were, or represented, relatively better paid industrial workers demonstrated the depth of feeling that exists among working Americans on the subject of health and on the inadequacy and terrible expense of the current “system” of care. It also indicated the reluctance of the administration to act on the people's behalf on this issue, except when forced to move by popular pressure.

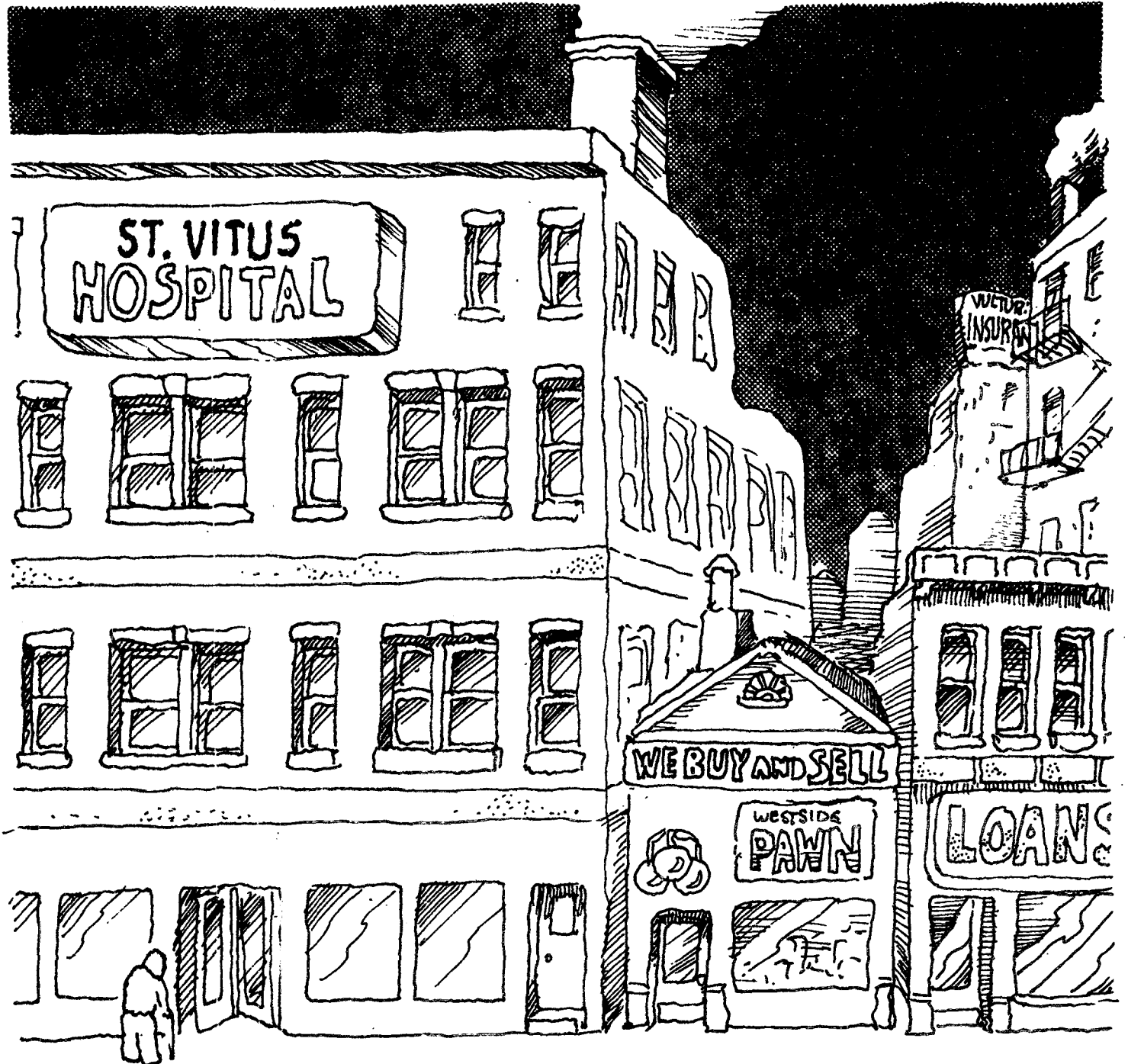
In large part, popular desire for a national health service, for some kind of socialized medicine, is the result of the disproportionately rapid rise in the cost of health care in recent decades. Total non-governmental expenditures for personal health services in 1975 were a staggering \$68.6 billion, more than a threefold increase over the amount spent in 1960. And in 1976, more than one dollar in every 12 of our gross national product went for health services, almost double the proportion of 25 years earlier. All this in the face of cutbacks in hospital services and staffs, closing of clinics and consolidations of facilities that leave the poorer sectors of the population without access to care except in the most dire emergencies.

This does not mean there is no public sector of medical care in the U.S. On the contrary, some 80 million Americans are eligible to receive health care under one government program or another. In fact, the complex web of federal, state and local appropriations and programs, administered by dozens of agencies in compliance with statutes enacted over decades and reflecting changing social and political pressures is in large part responsible for the deterioration in the quality of care and for rising costs.

The existing system has failed to provide substantially equal, quality care at a reasonable social or individual cost for many reasons. Among them are:

- The use of fee-for-service pay to physicians and other health care providers.
- The absence of incentives to encourage providers to deliver or utilize health resources efficiently.
- Inflationary reimbursement systems that encourage waste and unnecessary procedures while paying out for drugs, equipment and facilities at monopolistic prices set in the private sector.
- The failure to develop effective controls over the supply and distribution of health services.
- The lack of mechanisms to ensure public accountability of health care institutions.
- The profit motive and excessive political influence of a small number of self-interested groups.
- The lack of incentives to provide preventive and occupational health services.

Aside from the idea of cutting back on hospital services, the Carter administration has no health program. But, if it follows the pattern set in welfare, energy and food stamps it will likely continue the policy of simply financing care for selected population groups. Kennedy and others, on the other hand, would expand the government role through a national insurance program that would cover most, or all, of the population. But neither plan would solve the existing problems because neither could assure timely delivery of appropriate services and medi-



Mortality Row

Jim Ignatius '77

### The Dellums bill for a national health service is a major departure from other proposals for national health service.

cine at a reasonable cost nor the rational distribution of health service personnel throughout the country. In order to achieve those goals, and to ensure democratic control of health care a decentralized public health service will be required.

#### The Dellums bill.

Unlike the health insurance plans that would simply subsidize the existing “system” of care, Rep. Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA) has introduced a Health Service Act (HR-6394) that would provide comprehensive, community based health services with progressive national financing. The Dellums bill challenges the various other proposals that would impose more controls from the top over an essentially uncontrollable and chaotic private system. And it offers a chance to move toward a democratically planned, community controlled, nationally financed health service, one that could guarantee high quality health services in every community.

The Dellums Health Service Act would establish a U.S. Health Service Organization as a non-profit corporation mandated to provide comprehensive health services, including occupational health advocacy services, without charge to everyone in the U.S.

The Health Service Organization would be governed from below through a process of “community federalism” that would parallel the health care delivery structure.

The basic governing bodies would be elected community health boards, communities being defined as geographic areas containing 25,000 people (less for isolated rural areas). These local boards would oversee the provision of primary outpatient health care as well as nursing homes and other multi-service community facilities.

District hospitals, one for each 250,000 people, would be overseen by District health boards, also elected from the population served. And, in turn, these district boards would choose members of regional boards to oversee more specialized medical centers.

Under the Dellums bill, funding of these health care services would be through a special progressive federal income tax, a system that would cost low and middle income working people much less than they now spend on medical care. The money would be equally distributed on a per capita basis to the various levels of health service.

The provisions for a system of prepaid health care with community-based budgeting, staffed by salaried doctors, nurses and other workers makes the Dellums bill a major departure from proposed systems of national health insurance. The other systems would simply subsidize, and perhaps partially plan the existing fee-for-service arrangements. The Dellums bill would allow communities to determine

their own health care needs, would provide uniform funding in all communities, and would allow democratic control and participation by all those desiring to involve themselves. To complete the program envisaged by the Dellums bill, it will be necessary ultimately to break the stranglehold of the American Medical Association over the medical profession, to expand substantially the number of medical schools, and to establish a publicly owned drug and medical equipment industry that will make their products available at cost. Nevertheless, the Dellums bill is a good beginning.

It should be no surprise that the Dellums bill has little chance of passage in this session of Congress. But even before the bill was introduced on May 4, the American Public Health Association, the 50,000-member organization of public health workers, and the United Electrical Workers had both gone on record in favor of the principles embodied in the bill. In addition, the Gray Panthers, a senior citizens organization, has declared its support.

We urge our readers to support the Dellums bill (HR-6394) by writing to your Representative in Congress, or to Dellums. Those wanting more information can write to Health Service Action, P.O. Box 6586, T Street Station, Washington, DC 20009.



# Letters

## Idiotic

Editor:

In his July 6-12 article John Judis claims that the left and gay movement mistakenly believe the anti-gay campaign appeals only to right-wingers. He suggests that it's a mistake for the gay movement to demand gay rights because anti-gay voters don't care about gay rights. They vote against gay rights because they see gay life styles as a threat to family life.

The claim is idiotic. The left and gay movement fears the anti-gay campaign *precisely because* it appeals to a majority of Americans—or may.

The suggestion is likewise idiotic. So far as homosexuality (like Jewishness or blackness) is a political problem, it is a problem about human rights. To secure rights for a politically oppressed group, you have to convince the rest of society that it is *wrong* to deny those rights, even if they do not like the oppressed group. Martin Luther King did not offer psychotherapy to the racially prejudiced; he demanded rights for blacks. Making the demand for gay rights the center of the gay movement was not a political mistake; it was a necessity—and it still is a necessity.

—Peter Eggenberger  
Davis, Calif.

*John Judis replies: Eggenberger should reread my column. My point was that anti-gay sentiment cuts across party and political lines. The gay movement should, of course, demand gay rights, but should*

*do so in a way that addresses the concerns of anti-gays and doesn't simplistically label them as "fascists" or "right-wingers."*

## Great work

Editor:

IN THESE TIMES is a splendid weekly—informative to a very high degree, news-analyzed, literate. Keep up the great work.

The idea of each reader recommending ten friends is good. See I'm for it.

—M.J. Lipschutz  
New York City

## Opportune time

Editor:

The appearance of a non-rhetorical socialist paper comes at an opportune time in America. Folks are starting to experience a few hunger pains and they don't like it.

—Donald H. Wilson  
Meadville, Pa.

## No perversions

Editor:

There seems to have been a serious shortage of niggling letters in the *ITT* letter-column of late. Not only does this make for dull reading but it leaves me no choice but to over-react to the actual contents of the paper instead of sniping at your more spectacularly illogical letter-writers. A sorry state of affairs indeed.

As a chauvinist logician (I don't want to be a chauvinist, logic keeps thrusting it upon me...) I found a half-sentence in Roberta Lynch's recent column on Porro and Power that confused my fevered brow. Roberta proffers the vision of a Socialist society that would not simply seek

to repress its "more dangerous perversions." All well and good—no complaints there. However, the question is raised, since there seemingly *are* perversions in the sexual area, with sadism and child porn apparently being two of the *more* perverse, what are the "lesser" perversions that are not as disturbing? And ultimately what is the norm against which these perversions are measured?

To answer my own question, perhaps what is implied is that there are no sexual perversions, per se, but only perverse power-relationships (master/slave, exploitation of the vulnerable child, etc.) Yes? No?

—J. Fred Muggs  
San Francisco

## Alternative Politics Conference

Editor:

David Moberg's article on the Alternative Public Policies Conference (*ITT*, July 20) highlighted the main questions facing that vital and important network of political activists. But Moberg may have distorted the general orientation of the conference's participants by quoting one woman's workshop question on how to run "people-oriented campaigns without sounding anti-business."

In fact, the conference opened with a speech by Pat Roach, Dayton city councilwoman, who identified big business as the enemy of the nation's cities to enthusiastic applause. The problem, articulated early in the conference by Berkeley city councilwoman Loni Hancock, is how to oppose business interests without losing?

The historical reality that plagues the Conference is that alternative policy only goes so far. Candidates and initiatives around the country associated with its brand of "sewer socialism" were beaten by a business offensive in the last year.

There is a growing need for organizational and strategic development beyond a loose network that exchanges ideas about policy alternatives.

Moberg is right to point to Tom Hayden and Michael Ansara's presentations as opening these issues for the conference. But there were other instances: Barney Frank's proposal that we begin now to build an opposition to Carter in 1980, "even if we don't go through with it." Nick Carbone's sense of the elements of urban political coalitions and how to construct them.

The complexity of developing a political strategy that moves beyond localism and that extends its influence to include more elements of the labor movement and minority movements without jeopardizing the position of many of the local officials in the Conference network is enormous. The Conference's slow and tentative efforts may be among the best hopes for the left today.

—Nick Rabkin  
Organizational Secretary, NAM  
Chicago

*[Moberg replies: The tension among participants at the conference was that, faced with strong business opposition, some would try to build a stronger coalition to take on the corporations directly and win, while others would back off from their attack in order to mollify business opposition. The latter choice is a road back into the swamp of Peanut Butter Politics as now practiced on the Potomac.]*

*Editor's note: Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you want to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.*

# DIALOG

## A challenge to "left hypocrisy" on abortion

Your recent editorial, "Abortion: what about life after birth?" (*ITT*, July 12) is more intelligent and sensible than most of the liberal/radical press samplings on the issue, but I still disagree. I want to dispel the implied characterization of prolife supporters and activists as fascist neanderthals in league with the Ku Klux Klan, Anita Bryant, Barry Goldwater, and the imperial segment of the Roman Catholic church's hierarchy.

The hypocrisy of most radicals on the issue of abortion never ceases to amaze me. The typical arguments about "deprived" and unwanted children betray an arrogant, elitist, condescending, and class-bound attitude towards the poor: namely, that the life of the poor and the unwanted is simply not worthwhile. But many great men and women (from Harriet Tubman to Malcolm X) have emerged from "abused" and "deprived" backgrounds.

The unsaid propositions underlying such a perspective reflect a poor opinion of humanity, one that inherently denies the possibility of a man or woman overcoming the oppression and degradation imposed by our sick capitalist society. This, in turn, denies all that is good in

human beings and everything that inspires hope for a new and better world.

A consistent stance in support of basic human rights demands courageous opposition to abortion (which is simply another form of infanticide) as well as opposition to nuclear genocide, militarism, racism, sexism, and the exploitation of wage labor. I am arguing for mature and disciplined human responsibility for *all* human life. If we really believe in social and collective responsibility, it is time to accept the consequences of *all* our actions (sexual as well as political) that affect other human beings.

Once a human life is created, one must do everything possible to ensure it the best chance to achieve its full potential. But the individual has a personal responsibility as well as a collective responsibility to ensure such a good life (the latter being achieved through political struggle).

Since *Roe vs. Wade*, abortion has promoted an increasingly calloused attitude toward the sanctity and dignity of every human life. Something is terribly wrong when abortions (many of them the third, fourth, or fifth for one woman) begin to outnumber childbirths.

The argument that the prohibition of abortion would "impose a religious conviction by state action" is ludicrous on its face. We as a society impose many responsibilities on ourselves through the rule of law on the basis of collective "moral" or "religious" convictions. Legislation punishing murder "coerces" people whose personal views may not consider human life (at any stage of its development) worthy of protection.

We should not allow, encourage, or support irresponsible and systematic extermination of human life through legal abortions. As to the dangers of continued illicit abortions, we as a people are under no obligation to provide a safe and comfortable refuge for people to commit infanticide with our collective

support and consent.

In a truly equalitarian society, an individual is not "free" to act according to his/her personal moral code in such a way as to violate the basic rights of other human beings (especially the helpless). In an equalitarian society we have obligations and responsibilities as well as rights.

To turn around a phrase used in your editorial, the dignity of a person after birth is thus impossible without protection of basic human rights before birth. As Che Guevara once said, "It is easier to kill a revolutionary in the womb than it is in the mountains."

—Michael Stone  
St. Louis, Mo.

## Perhaps Kinoy was not merely grasping at straws

In your reply to Arthur Kinoy's resignation from *ITT* sponsorship (July 13) you profess your agreement with the belief of the late UE leader James Matles that the working people of this country need a "mass political party of their own." You further assert that the "disagreement, if there is any (and as far as Matles is concerned we can never know) is over how to achieve that goal."

Your attempts to smooth over the contradictions in your position raised by Kinoy's objections on this point should not go unchallenged. Matles certainly believed that working people needed a party, "a mass political party of their own" (emphasis added). But by no stretch of the imagination should this be construed to mean a more "progres-

sive" version of the Democratic party. Matles himself emphasized this very point in his farewell address before the 40th International Convention of the UE in San Francisco in September, 1975, five days before his death:

"If the CIO was not split, if the CIO was not wrecked by the corporations and their flunkies in Congress, and if the labor leadership had not caved in and crawled on its belly, this country would be in different shape today. For one thing, by this time we would have a labor party in America. That's what we would have had. (Applause)

"...Today we have two great big company unions in America: A Republican company union and a Democratic company union. That's a new standard.

"...Don't let anyone get up and talk about one company union being better than the other. They are all lousy."

## Not grasping at straws.

In light of the above, perhaps you'll agree that Kinoy was not merely grasping at straws when he cited Matles in support of his position. Your assertion that we'll never know how Matles felt about the question is a bit rash, I think, as is your statement that "after almost 40 years as a leader of UE, however, his union members show no increased signs of socialist consciousness." The condescension inherent in this statement is more than a little irritating, considering that you are referring to the most progressive rank-and-file democratic union in the U.S. Pray tell, just what are these "increased signs of socialist consciousness?" A subscription to *In These Times*, perhaps?

Political realities being what they are, the UE does not feel constrained to highlight the "socialist" aspects of its program in contrast to its general purpose as a union defending the interests of working people. *ITT* editors should be able to appreciate this point, having themselves removed any reference to socialism from the cover of *ITT*. I suggest taking a look at the UE legislative program, reading a few issues of the *UE News*, examining their literature for political education, and experiencing

*Continued on page 18.*