

By Eric Lindbom

Hospital musical is more than the same old song and dance

THE HOSPITAL SYSTEM IN NEW York City is in crisis," laments Moe Foner, the retired executive secretary of Local 1199, a union representing more than 80,000 hospital workers in the Rotting Apple. "Hospitals are overcrowded. There are more poor people requiring care, in addition to the AIDS problem. There's a very acute shortage of nurses and technicians in hospitals, and the jobs don't pay well," he says.

This grim situation hardly seems the stuff of upbeat musical entertainment, but Foner is a producer as well as a realist. During the winter, Bread and Roses, a theater troupe he helped organize, toured *Take Care III* (an original musical revue Foner calls "the hospital workers' Chorus Line") to more than 25 city hospitals, as well as nursing homes and homeless shelters.

Take Care III, Bread and Roses' third touring musical revue, is propelled by an exuberant, multiracial cast of Equity actors (anchored by Ann Duquesnay, who played Billie Holiday in the off-Broadway *Lady Day* and sings a mean blues). Mixing spoken skits with rap, blues and calypso numbers, it serves as a cathartic pep test for hospital aides, X-ray technicians, dieticians, nurses, clerics and social workers—on their turf and on their lunch hours.

Judging from the raucous crowd reaction at a performance in a union hall, *Take Care III* provides a gospel-styled release. The audience of hospital workers and patients broke out in cheers of recognition at irreverent, unglamorous characters like an ambitious dishwasher and a sarcastic nurse's aide ("they used to call us maids but we got them to drop the 'm'").

"We look at this show as another way to unite our members; one of its values is to show that our members are working hard," says Foner. "What we wanted to say is: this is who we are—potwashers, dieticians and nurses, and our jobs are becoming increasingly difficult."

From pressure cooker to burnout: *Take Care III* manages to be optimistic but saccharine-free. The show grinds no political axes, and sloganeering is kept to a minimum. The characters, who merely want some respect, are buffeted by pressure, and the strain shows. A Spanish-speaking patient prompts a harried nurse to gripe, "Tell him to learn to speak English or get out and let somebody have his bed who does." In another scene, three nurses, hardly martyrs from the Mike Farrell era of *M*A*S*H*, bring up Florence Nightingale's name sarcastically.

One of the best sketches examines job burnout. To a dietician, burnout means doing his tedious job in a constant state of half-sleep, but to a stressed-out nurse it has a different definition.

"Burnout is when it's eight in the morning. You're working emergency. The shift's just started. A woman

comes in. Five kids. No husband. No money. She's 23 years old. No teeth. One kid's coughing. Another is cut. The woman's running a hundred and two. You take her blood pressure. You're the only one there. Her pressure is outrageous...and then the real emergencies start, and the patients keep coming, and the sickness is there, and you start to realize that it's never going to end."

For a specialized product, *Take III* boasts some heavy-duty writer credits, including Micki Grant (composer and author of the Broadway musical *Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope*), actor/playwright Ossie Davis and Alan Menken (lyricist/composer for the stage and movie version of *Little Shop of Horrors*). In a sense, the show was co-written by the union membership. More than 50 hospital workers described their jobs and day-to-day concerns at workshop sessions that provided the raw material for each sketch.

Take Care III won rave reviews from feature writers for the *New York Times*, *Post* and *Daily News*, and from *Village Voice* theater critic Jan Hoffman. But the critics the Bread and Roses staffers watch just as

carefully are the audience members who fill out evaluation sheets after each performance.

Off-off-off-Broadway: Typically, the Bread and Roses troupe performed at two hospitals a day, ultimately reaching more than 10,000 hospital workers (a bigger crowd

LABOR

than many off-Broadway shows enjoy before they close). Since performance spaces were usually cramped meeting rooms, director Tony Gilote and musical arranger Howard Roberts created a street-theater-styled production with virtually no props and a three-piece band.

Though the play was partially supported by funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the New York State Council on the Arts and the Aaron Diamond Foundation, the union also had to become involved in fundraising, as well as hiring the talent and booking hospital space for all the performances.

One of the final performances was at the state capital in Albany before delegates of the Black and Puerto Rican Legislative Caucus. The pur-

pose was to bring the hospital crisis home—to the politicians who helped create it.

Gov. Mario Cuomo recently announced a plan to allocate hospitals and other health-care providers an additional \$193 million in state funds for increased salaries to help alleviate the widening nurses shortage. Even this outlay won't counteract state budget cuts that are toppling hospitals in the city's poorest sections.

"Whether or not you get adequate health care in New York is largely a function of your income and employment status," Bruce Vladeck, president of the United Hospital Fund recently told the *New York Times*. A recent Fund report, "Poverty and Health in New York City,"

In a sense, *Taking Care III* was co-written by the membership of Local 1199.

states that a "large and persistent health deficit" exists among "the poor, near-poor and minorities." Nearly one-fourth of the city's residents were living in poverty in 1985.

Local 1199 has participated in demonstrations and held meetings with editorial-page writers with the New York press to draw attention to these issues.

1199's radical past: Bread and Roses takes its name from the rallying cry of a 1912 strike at a textile mill in Lawrence, Mass. Forty-seven women and children protested a mid-winter pay cut by carrying signs reading "We Want Bread and Roses Too." (1199 eventually convinced Lawrence to hold a commemoration, which Foner claims is "the only time a town celebrated a day honoring its own radical past.")

Local 1199's past is equally radical. The union was born in 1959, when a group of pharmacists organized workers in voluntary hospitals. The workers, mostly black and Hispanic women, struck for 46 days for the right to organize. They were repudiated but didn't give up. When they struck again for 56 days in 1962, Gov. Nelson Rockefeller gave in.

Throughout the '60s the union earned a reputation as politically active. Martin Luther King called it "the conscience of the labor movement." But in 1984 the union fell into disarray. The next two years were characterized by power grabs and a disastrous strike. Lost in the political shuffle, Bread and Roses went into an extended hiatus.

New leadership in 1986 under President Dennis Rivera turned things around. Recently the union helped convince the management at Presbyterian Hospital not to fire 300 employees (150 of them union members). 1199 also won a major victory by unionizing home-care workers (a group that often earned what union employees made 30 years ago).

Yet, *Taking Care III* has been one of the union's best forms of publicity. For Foner, putting the musical revue to bed was difficult because of the emotional reactions from audiences. A mother of an AIDS patient told him, "This will be the last show my son will ever see." Even as the revue's run wound down, demand for performances continued.

To preserve the show for future use, the professional team that shot the "Sun City" rock video volunteered to tape the show. The taping session also featured interviews with hospital workers. It's presently being edited down to a 30-minute version that may emerge as a documentary. In some form, the tape will be made available to hospital workers so the play can keep hitting the road.

Taking Care III is hardly the tourniquet that will stop the New York health system from hemorrhaging. Instead, it's a psychological band-aid that shows the members of Local 1199 that somebody understands.

Eric Lindbom is a writer living in New York City.



Taking Care III takes its show on the road to New York City's Hospital for Joint Diseases.

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Xenophobia

Continued from page 3
its PAC money against legislators in Florida and California who refused to repeal a special tax on the profits of foreign multinationals. Other foreign PACs tried to block the reauthorization of the Clean Water Act in 1984. Currently Sony is funding the Electronic Industries Association's campaign against government funding of an American-owned high-definition TV industry.

But few in Congress support screening foreign multinationals and limiting their political activity. When Rep. John Bryant (D-TX) and Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) sponsored an amendment to the 1987 omnibus trade bill that would have required large-scale foreign investors to file disclosure forms, the bill narrowly passed the House but was defeated 83-to-11 in the Senate.

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The amendment's defeat demonstrated the political strength of the foreign multinationals, represented in powerful lobbies by top American officials, like former cabinet official Elliot Richardson, the spokesman for the Association for Foreign Investment in America, and former ambassador and Republican fundraiser J. William Middendorf, the head of the Association of Foreign Investors in U.S. Real Estate. But foreign multinationals also enjoyed the support of American corporate lobbies like the Business Roundtable. In their book the Tolchins write, "The list of lobbyists in the coalition against the amendment read like a Who's Who of foreign and American multinationals, business trade associations and blue-chip Washington law firms."

Corporate lobbyists charged that the legislation was laden with anti-Japanese racism, but their real concern was that screening foreign multinationals could lead to government supervision of American multinationals. They don't want regulation of multinationals, foreign or American. Anthony Solomon, former president of the New York Federal Reserve, told *The New York Times*, "People who would have the government protect business against foreign investors would also have the government interfere in the global activities of American multinational corporations and controls on international trade."

But even with the defeat of the Bryant-Harkin amendment, the issue is unlikely to go away. There is considerable popular support for government regulation of both foreign- and American-based multinationals. In future elections Democrats running on a program of economic nationalism would be wise to avoid anti-Japanese xenophobia and also insist on regulation of all multinationals.

Daley

Continued from page 6
ing some lakefront precincts that voted for Jesse Jackson in the 1988 Democratic presidential primary. More than 70 percent of the Hispanic vote went to Daley. Black turnout increased from the primary, but remained below both the white turnout and black participation in 1983 and 1987.

Daley can now claim a coalition of white ethnics, lakefront whites and Hispanics—and with judicious distribution of some favors can probably boost his 5-7 percent share of black votes. The lakefront, white independent movement temporarily appears in shambles, raising the prospect of a city even more clearly divided by race in future elections.

Contradictions: Some observers think Daley could be like Mayor Ray Flynn of Boston, who defeated a black candidate but attempted in office to address black issues. But there has been no such populist streak in Daley's conservative past or in his sanitized mayoral campaign.

Daley's vague campaigning papered over potential contradictions among his supporters. Many neighborhood ethnics think downtown developers should pay linkage fees on new projects to develop neighborhoods, but Daley and his financial backers

are adamantly opposed. Daley promises better schools, but he has not supported higher state income taxes, which would be opposed by many of his white backers who are elderly or have children in parochial schools. Nevertheless, Rose feels that Daley's supporters are probably so content simply to have a white mayor that he could probably get away with nearly anything except building court-ordered scattered-site public housing in their neighborhoods. However, it seems more likely that the new mayor will use such freedom to defend his business friends instead of the neighborhoods, black or white.

The Chicago election clearly shows that a black strategy of hard-line race mobilization is a disaster, turning off many blacks and losing needed coalition partners. Black political aspirations must be framed to be inclusive and represent the general good. But Daley's kinder, gentler machine is no model for the Democrats, either. It did not try to unify blacks and whites but simply to mollify blacks and white liberals enough not to see Daley as a great threat. Daley may boost the Democrats among conservative whites a little, although many will still opt for Republicans in national elections. But any Democratic Party gains from Daley's victory come at the cost of alienating blacks and of neglecting serious action on the needs of the city.

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*Other workshops will be offered throughout the 10 days; for more information contact A.P.T., P.O. Box 26725, Las Vegas, NV 89126, (702) 731-9644.

CHICAGO April 14

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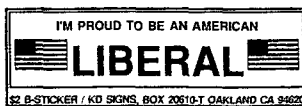
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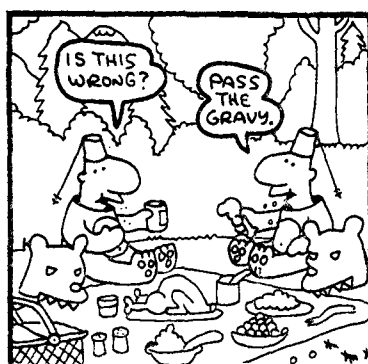
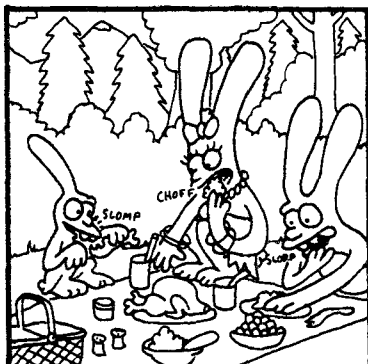
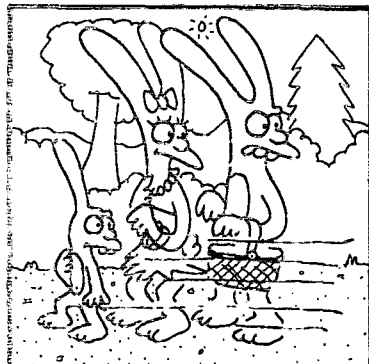
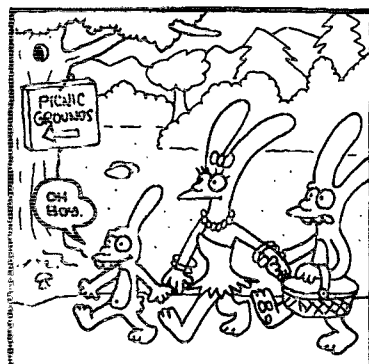
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Over Here

By Tom Engelhardt

Washington, a town ever in search of linkages, missed a crucial one at the remarkably brief hearings that confirmed Rep. Richard Cheney as the new secretary of defense. It was much noted that with Cheney at the hearing was his wife Lynne (as well as his two daughters), towering evidence of his non-womanizing nature. No one, however, noted the real linkages involved in her presence. Lynne V. Cheney heads the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). What this may mean, according to Washington insiders, is that for the first time in American history, scholars, writers, poets and artists may get a genuine break.

"You've heard of the art of war," one middle-level Pentagon official told me privately. "Well, soon you're going to hear about the war of art. Let's face it, there's hardly an area of American life that hasn't gotten a helping hand from the Pentagon. Only the other day we announced a \$30-million program to finance American electronics makers to create a new generation of high-definition television technologies.

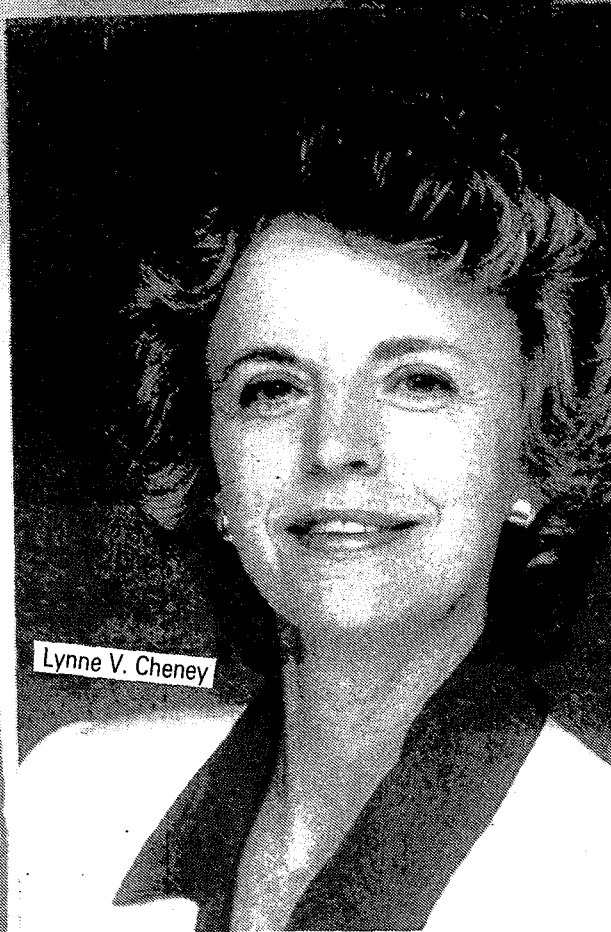
"That makes it clear that we're not about to let our technomilitary future fall into foreign hands. The same should go for art. As the Rushdie affair indicates, unless similar moves are made to shore up the arts, 21st-century America will be a pitiful helpless giant in the face of the terrorist onslaught."

Dirty dancing: To make any such moves Cheney and Cheney first have a clever conglomeration two-step to accomplish, though one that administration insiders believe to be well within the realm of possibility. Not only must the Pentagon fuse with the NEH, but the NEH, whose purview at present is only scholarship, must in turn absorb the still headless National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

"Conglomeration is the name of the game out there in the corporate-cultural world," says the previously quoted Pentagon official. "Seven media empires control the arts and communications, and about 10 university complexes basically control higher education. If the Pentagon's going to be an effective player in American cultural life, we'd better damn well get everything we can under one big five-pointed roof."

In the privacy of their own home the Cheneys are evidently already giving the concept of conglomeration a new meaning. Each has pledged to move swiftly (Richard Cheney as soon as he has filled the 40-odd empty posts in the Pentagon) to bring the military to bear on art and scholarship, and art and scholarship to bear on the military. Evidently, Cheney avoided the subject at his hearings for fear that the notorious congressional distaste for the arts might slow the confirmation process.

This being the Cheney's pet project, initial planning is already advancing swiftly in the Pentagon and in the NEH bureaucracy. "Look," says a Cheney aide, "once Congress and the American public get the full picture, they're going to love the idea. When the Pentagon funds a science project, immediately you're into the multibillions—the next thing you know you've got Star Wars. And with the arts you simply get more bang for your buck. Publishers get whole books for no more than a few thousand dollars each. You see, the Pentagon can fund an area like artificial intelligence up the wazoo to get itself a jet with a talking cockpit, but the point is, what's the damn thing going to say? That's where—let's face it—the arts have something to contribute. If, for instance, Shakespearean scholars or deconstructionist literary critics focus their wasted argumentative energy under military discipline, think what sort of combative plane America could field!"



Lynne V. Cheney



Richard Cheney

Merging the art of war and the war of art

Might makes write: The Pentagon, for its part, is already preparing a pilot project in which the Iowa Writers Workshop would be moved to Fort Benning, Ga., and renamed the Fort Benning School of Military Aesthetics. "If this catches on and becomes a national program, can you imagine the benefits?" adds a Pentagon procurement officer with growing enthusiasm. "Just for starters, you'd never have to read a novel set on campus again. And as for the writers, no more scrounging for freelance work that doesn't pay. No more rejections. Free food and lodging. Free computers at the motor pool. It would be paradise.

"And this is without even considering the very real benefits to the military," continued the official. "Not just superficial things like giving the army stylish urban camouflage uniforms that would blend into post-punk low-intensity warfare environments. But think of the sophistication the modern army will gain by living in the same barracks with authors, artists and scholars. With a program like this in place, we're assured that a Rushdie affair can never happen to an American author. Not with the military sensitized to literature, and writers off campuses and out of their urban hot-house environment. If they start writing not just on military bases but *about* military bases, they're sure as hell not going to insult a bunch of Moslems, are they? It's the perfect answer—just militarize the freedom of art!"

The official indicated that the Pentagon was also looking

into funding a program in which modernist literary scholars, fiction writers and performance artists would offer carefully chosen military teams a crash course entitled "Advanced Trends in World Literature." These military "SWART" teams, linked through Pentagon computer technology to global literary trends, could then spot and excise literary trouble spots around the world before terrorists even had the opportunity to take advantage of any literary endeavor—or before some possibly pernicious Third World literary trend could endanger the First World cultural canon.

"After all," adds the Pentagon official, "if there's one thing we know something about it's canons. Anyway, let's face it, it's about time somebody put a little muscle into the arts. It's not just a matter of handing a cruise missile to Norman Mailer and seeing what happens. The real question is: why should writers and artists always have to stand out there and take the flak alone?"

"It's not enough for the administration to offer a few pious words about the sacred nature of the freedom of the writer to write—not if it wants to go down in the history books as an administration that was strong on the arts. We're on a planet where the smart writer had better walk softly but carry a laser-armed pen, and I know for a fact that Dick and Lynn Cheney agree with me on that."

Tom Engelhardt is a senior editor at Pantheon Books.

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