

LaRouche campaign spearheads defeat of Nazi health care cuts in Pennsylvania

by Stephen Komm

The unexpected defeat of Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge's plan to balance his state budget with \$250 million in Nazi-style health care cuts, may set a precedent for destruction of the Gingrich-Gramm crowd on the national level.

The late-night vote of 125-76 in Pennsylvania's House of Representatives on March 25, stunned Republican Ridge and his legislative henchmen, who had been "marching in lock-step" with Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, since gaining a 102-101 Republican majority in the state House in the 1994 elections. Only two weeks previously, Ridge had introduced an addition to his "welfare reform" package that would remove all state medical assistance for 260,000 of the "working poor," and had rammed it through the Republican-controlled Senate, with no hearings, in one week. Democratic leaders were predicting a similar steamroller, with all the Republicans and at least 15 Democrats in the House arm-twisted by Ridge to support his momentarily popular "welfare reform."

Supporters of Democratic Presidential contender Lyndon LaRouche, led by campaign representative Philip Valenti, played a pivotal role, over the 96 hours before the vote, in the statewide mobilization of constituency forces that stopped the governor's murderous measures.

The insane consequences of the Gingrichites' budget-cutting, forced many groups into motion. Philadelphia Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua led a mobilization of the state Catholic Conference and state Council of Churches, in which ministers and parishioners told legislators, "Don't vote as a party member, vote as a Christian." The coalition led by the churches, but also including the state AFL-CIO, the Hospitals Association, health workers unions, and welfare advocates, dubbed Ridge's bill the "Hospital Closure Act."

But Valenti's proof that Ridge's bill was a Hitler-style crime against humanity, was essential in tipping the balance, by making the issue clear in a way that sane Republicans and wavering Democrats in the legislature could not deny.

The 'knew or should have known' principle

On March 22, Valenti issued a press release announcing the LaRouche campaign's opposition to Ridge's S.B. 1441. Valenti called the measure "a violation of the Nuremberg code, under which Nazi leaders, who 'knew, or should have

known' that their policies would result in wrongful deaths of innocent people, were tried and convicted of 'crimes against humanity.'" He quoted LaRouche's description, on his March 2 national TV broadcast, of Newt Gingrich as a "Hitler-style criminal. . . . If you kill somebody by subterfuge, it's the same as if you kill them by some other means: It's murder."

The message that Ridge's bill was a crime against humanity, was delivered to key legislators fighting the bill, and to legislators identified as "swing votes," at their homes, district offices, and town meetings, in the days before the vote. Valenti and a team of LaRouche supporters hand-delivered the release to all 203 representatives and 50 state senators in their state capital offices.

The message was reinforced by circulation to all legislators of a *Delaware County Times* news article, headlined "Ryan vs. LaRouche," which reported a demonstration by LaRouche supporters on March 22 at the Media, Pa. district office of Republican House Speaker Matthew Ryan.

The demonstrators, chanting "Ridge and Ryan are mean and greedy; they want to kill the old and needy," dominated the downtown area of Media, a wealthy Republican suburb of Philadelphia. Ryan came out and "squared off in [a] verbal jousting match [with] Lewis du Pont Smith—an heir to the du Pont chemical fortune and a longtime LaRouche supporter . . . when Smith likened Ryan and other political leaders to Nazi war criminals," said the local paper. "Protesters linked Ryan, Ridge, and a favorite target, House Speaker Newt Gingrich, to Nazi policies by virtue of their view that cuts in medical care will ultimately result in the deaths of working poor." Ryan was quoted: "I don't like being called a Nazi. It's in bad taste."

Several key Democrats said they were planning to use exactly the same approach as LaRouche's citing of the Nuremberg Tribunal's standard of "knew or should have known." One said, "That demonstration at Ryan's office was just what we needed," since Ridge had planned to steamroller his bill through "before there could be any demonstrations against it." They said they would be telling every Democratic legislator "on the fence," and all the Republicans, "This is murder by government edict, just like we prosecuted at



A demonstration in Harrisburg on March 25, against the health care cuts of Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge. LaRouche campaign spokesman Philip Valenti charged, in a widely circulated statement, that Ridge's legislation was a crime against humanity, a violation of the Nuremberg Code, under which Nazi leaders were tried. The legislation was overwhelmingly defeated.

Nuremberg. If you don't drop your support for this, LaRouche's people, and your constituents, will be picketing your office, too."

'Health care cuts are insanity'

Even before the LaRouche forces entered the fray, there were already signs of a mobilization against the governor's policy.

State Sen. Vincent Fumo (D-Philadelphia) launched the fight against Ridge's surprise health cuts, calling the bill "the most reprehensible, short-sighted, mean-spirited idea ever to come before the General Assembly."

"Labelled brutal and heartless by Democrats and advocates for the poor, [the bill] is called fiscally foolish by many in health care," said a Philadelphia *Daily News* editorial. Worst-hit were likely to be Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, but hospitals throughout the state were threatened with major cuts in service, or even with closing. Philadelphia hospitals stood to lose \$117 million in state and federal aid. Too, 17.5% of the Philadelphia labor force work in health-care-related jobs.

Richard Benfer, president of the Pittsburgh-area Brad-dock Hospital, told the press that the hospital would be forced to close within a year, as 30% of the hospital's patients are on state Medicaid. Many are former steelworkers, he said, "very proud people, who have taken lower-paying jobs with no benefits. Now this is being taken away from them."

Republican state auditor general Barbara Hafer, a former public health nurse, broke with Ridge, telling a Pittsburgh radio station that all but 3 of 17 large hospitals in the area might close. And a veteran Republican legislator anonymously told the press, "It was too much like a bank action. 'We need money; who do we foreclose on?'"

The only defense offered by Ridge's spokesman Tim Reeves was: "It's a \$21 million a month issue for taxpayers." Others said they were rushing the bill through to get "a full fiscal year's savings from the cuts."

LaRouche cites 'strategic importance'

In response to news of these developments, LaRouche announced that he has placed a priority for his Presidential primary campaign in the state of Pennsylvania, on the re-broadcast of his March 2 television show. This will be accompanied by a major advertising campaign with radio and newspaper ads. The purpose will be, to make the "knew or should have known" statement by Valenti, the focal issue of the Pennsylvania Democratic Presidential primary.

While this particular measure slashing health care has been defeated for the moment, the battle is not over, and hideous austerity measures are still before the legislature. Ridge has already demanded that legislators who voted against him find other places to cut \$250 million, or go back and cut state Medicaid.