

# The Administrative Politics of the Closing of the Mott Haven Social Service Center in the New York City Department of Social Services

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With Endnotes and An Afterward by Robert J. Croghan, OSA Chairperson

## Introduction

The history of the New York City Department of Social Services (DSS) since the inauguration of Mayor Lindsay in January, 1966 presents a fascinating picture to students of organization behavior. Under the first Lindsay commissioner, Mitchell Ginsberg, who was brought in from his post as Dean of the Columbia University School of Social Work, the DSS was absorbed into the Human Resources Administration (HRA), a so called "super agency", and now receives 80% of the budget allocation for HRA. With the reorganization of the DSS into HRA, Ginsberg became the Commissioner of HRA and Jack Goldberg, the executive Director of Camp Well-Met, a division of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, was appointed Commissioner of the DSS. Goldberg inaugurated a reorganization of the DSS that extended to 10 or the 43 local Social Service Centers (SSC's.)

The history of the DSS under Ginsberg-Goldberg is aptly summarized in an article in the October 29, 1972 Sunday magazine section of the *New York Times*:

In 1965, when Mayor Lindsay started his first term in office, the City's welfare case load was less than a half million. In the next three years it more than doubled. All the rolls grew by more than 710,000 cases. There are now whole neighborhoods in Bedford Stuyvesant, in the South Bronx, in East Harlem, where more than 50 percent of the residents are on welfare. One out of every six New Yorkers is on the rolls. One case supervisor, not particularly happy with the way it all happened, said: "The feeling during that period was definitely one of 'don't let a riot start'. Lindsay wanted to keep the City cool and we were told to avoid trouble in the centers. Clients came in droves, sat in the centers and

demanded to get on the rolls, or they would stay all night. You couldn't arrest them. You had to let them stay all night or give them money. We gave them money."

Under increasing pressure to do something about the growing "welfare mess", in July, 1970 Lindsay regretfully accepted Ginsberg's resignation and announced the appointment of Jule M. Sugarman as the Commissioner of HRA. As reported by the *New York Times*, Sugarman's appointment was:

... a clear break with the tradition of having a social worker head the department. Sugarman's forte was pure administration. He had built a career in the federal bureaucracy with service in such agencies as the State Department, the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Sugarman brought in a whole platoon of young Ivy-League-educated administrators and managers. They were, boasted David A. Grossman, Lindsay's Budget Director, "a management team that is one of the best in the country and that I would put up against any welfare agency in the country."

One of the plans Sugarman announced upon his appointment was a halt to the Goldberg reorganization, to be replaced by a Sugarman reorganization. Shortly afterward Goldberg handed in his resignation, whereupon Sugarman took over as Commissioner of DSS so that today he wears two hats – Commissioner of both DSS and HRA.

One of the forces with which any Commissioner of the DSS must contend is the Social Service Employees Union (SSEU), a militant organization of social workers employed by the City, which in 1965 under the leadership of its then President Judith Mage<sup>1</sup>, who in 1968 was to run for Vice President of the Peace and Freedom Party ticket

headed by Eldridge Cleaver, carried on a strike that proved to be the first successful strike in the history of the City's labor-management struggles. Perhaps emboldened by this victory, the SSEU struck again in 1967 on this issue of management prerogative presenting a list of demands to the City which were in effect a series of proposals for systemic welfare reform. The strike, which lasted 48 days, was a bitterly fought, internally divisive affair which the union ultimately lost.

The events related here show the dynamic interplay between a new administrator given a mandate for change, a powerfully entrenched union itself engaged in an internal power struggle, an old line civil service managerial staff antagonistic to the new regime, the clientele of the agency, and various fiercely competitive community groups. The interaction and communication (or lack of it) between these forces, the alliances formed, the actions taken and not taken, all provide an example of the motivations and complexities of organizational behavior.

### **The Announcement of the Closings**

In the third week of November, 1970, the regularly scheduled meeting between the Social Services Employees Union and the Labor Relations team of the New York City Department of Social Services was interrupted unexpectedly. Scarcely had the meeting begun when First Deputy Commissioner Max Waldgeir, a career civil servant who headed the Department's Labor Relations team, was handed a note by an aide who was not in attendance at the meeting. After reading the contents of the message, the Commissioner immediately requested a one hour adjournment of the meeting, apologizing for the delay and explaining that he had a pressing matter to attend to which would be of immediate interest to the union representatives. Without further explanation the Commissioner and his aides bustled off leaving the union representatives to speculate on the mysterious emergency that could precipitate such an unaccustomed break in the routine of the usually predictable Waldgeir.

The problem that necessitated Waldgeir's departure was a message from Commissioner Sugarman

requesting that Waldgeir take steps to implement an order, emanating from the Office of the Mayor, and transmitted through the Office of the Controller, that decreed that 10% of all the SSC's in the City be selected for closing, effective January 31, 1971. During the next hour Waldgeir and his aides went over the list of the 43 SSC's and selected five for closing. Three of those selected were not listed as SSC's at all, but rather were "Satellite Centers" attached to larger SSC's. The selection of these satellites, each with a staff of no more than forty people, can be construed as an evasion of the order to close 10% of the SSC's.

The two actual SSC's selected were the Bushwick Center, which had recently been opened, and had been the focal point for riots and demonstrations by client and community groups from the first day it had been operational, and the Mott Haven Center, a multi-service center which had been in existence in the South Bronx since 1966. Mott Haven had enjoyed an enviable reputation as a "country club," servicing a very small client population with a minimum of the day to day friction and disruption that had characterized the relations between many local SSC's and the communities they served from the time of the violent "up to standard" demonstrations of 1967 -1968.

Their decision having been made, Waldgeir and his staff returned to the Labor Management meeting and announced that in response to an order to close 10% of the SSC's, he had tentatively selected the Mott Haven and Bushwick SSC's and the Kingsboro, Williamsburg and Brownsville Satellites. Two days later the selection became official when Commissioner Sugarman's Public Relations Officer issued a press release designating the five units selected by Waldgeir as being scheduled to close effective January 31, 1971. The closings were described as an economy move dictated by considerations of managerial efficiency.

### **The Union's Reaction**

At the regularly scheduled Labor Management meeting in which the proposed closings were announced, the union representatives reserved com-

ment. However, the next evening, at the monthly city-wide union meeting, Stan Hill, the President of the SSEU, buttonholed Bob Croghan, the delegate from the Mott Haven SSC, and told him that the union intended to “fight” the closings. Croghan was rather startled by Hill’s reaction since the union had lost the bitterly contested 48-day strike in 1967 on the issue of management prerogative. To Croghan, the decision to close the five centers was clearly a management prerogative. Moreover, Croghan was sure that the Melrose SSC which was one of the three SSC’s earmarked to receive the Mott Haven caseload, and to which he reasonably expected to be transferred, would prove to be a much stronger power base (it had four times the staff of the Mott Haven Center) from which he could pursue his aspirations for higher union office. Nevertheless, Croghan assured Hill of his cooperation, and determined to canvass the Mott Haven staff to secure their reaction to the closing.

After discussing the closing with staff at Mott Haven, Croghan became convinced of three things:

1. That the staff was opposed (though not overwhelmingly so) to the closing of the center
2. That the closing would not really result in either more efficient or more economical operations
3. That it would be positively harmful to the Mott Haven clientele

On the first Monday after the official announcement of the closing, Hill went to the regularly scheduled meeting of the Mott Haven Social Services Employees Union. Hill addressed the staff indicating that he was opposed to the closings, but that the fight to keep the center open would primarily be the responsibility of the Mott Haven staff and the South Bronx community. At no time did he indicate that the union would endorse any kind of city-wide action designed to keep the center open.

To some observers of the meeting it seemed that Hill had already accepted the fact of the closings and was reluctant to engage the total union membership in a fight that revolved around an issue on which the union had already waged a battle and lost.

It also seemed likely that Hill wanted to make the issue of closings as “heavy” a one as possible, so that it could be “traded off” for some concession by the City on some other issue at a later date.

Certainly, the reception that Hill received at the union meeting in the Bushwick Center on the following day could only have served to reinforce his reluctance to affiliate the union in a losing cause. When Hill rose to speak and revealed his opposition to the closings, he was immediately beset on all sides by aroused staff members who wanted nothing more dearly than the closing of this dangerous, chaotic SSC. Indeed, the overwhelming sentiment of the Bushwick staff was that they would prefer to work in any of the other 42 SSC’s rather than remain in Bushwick. From this point on, the role of the city-wide union leadership on the issue of center closings was to be that of a detached, almost impartial, observer to the goings-on at the Mott Haven Center, until the situation reached a point where they had no choice but to take part in the ongoing scenario.

### **Relations Between Croghan and Hill**

Any action by the Mott Haven local, or by the SSEU city-wide leadership, or any interaction between the two groups was complicated by the existing relationship between Croghan and Hill.

Croghan had openly opposed the election of Hill. Moreover, on December 12, upon the announcement of the resignation of Earl Phillips,<sup>2</sup> the President of the Caseworker Chapter of the SSEU, Croghan declared his candidacy for that office in opposition to Jigg Farlano,<sup>3</sup> the official candidate of the Hill faction. This state of affairs made it necessary for Croghan to proceed with the most exquisite caution in carrying out his plans for preventing the closing of Mott Haven. Fortunately for Croghan, at the very first community meeting held to plot strategy to prevent the closing, he was able to win over a supporter that assured him he could proceed in his plan with a relatively free hand and reasonable assurance that he would not be the subject of a direct attack from union headquarters.

The meeting was called together by the owners of several small businesses (including a bar & grill and a candy store) near the Mott Haven Center who feared that the transfer of the Mott Haven staff would result in a significant decrease in their receipts.

Attending the meeting were Willie Jenkins, Director of Community Relations for the SSEU, and more importantly, David Himmelstein, the editor of *The Unionist*, the official newspaper of the SSEU. Because of his opposition to Hill, Croghan knew that Hill would not be eager to give city-wide publicity to Croghan's campaign to keep Mott Haven open. However, Croghan also knew that Himmelstein was a maverick who could not be completely controlled by Hill, and who could be counted on to give full coverage to any project he (Himmelstein) favored. When Himmelstein heard Croghan outline his plan to keep Mott Haven open by organizing the community to apply pressure on the City administration, he was ecstatic in his enthusiasm for the idea.

Indeed, the December 25, 1970 issue of *The Unionist*, the first edition that could have carried the news of the Mott Haven problems, contained a page one story on the situation, giving prominent attention to Croghan's role. Subsequent issues carried even more extensive stories, but Hill was able to see to it that Croghan was not mentioned by name again.<sup>4</sup> At any rate, Himmelstein's attendance at the meeting (and to a lesser extent the attendance of Willie Jenkins) enabled Croghan to finesse a position whereby he could be reasonably assured that he was safe in relation to union headquarters, since it was not likely that the central leadership would openly undermine the efforts of two of their own group. Croghan attributes his mid-January election to the Presidency of the Caseworker Chapter to his efforts in keeping Mott Haven open, and the publicity given those efforts by Himmelstein.

### **Bushwick Is Saved**

On December 10, 1970, Commissioner Sugarman announced that a number of developments led him to a re-evaluation of his preceding decision to close the Bushwick Center, and to substitute the Fort Greene Center for closing effective February 28,

1971. Insiders say that the number of developments was really one development-vociferous objection to the closings of the Bushwick Center by Bessie Simpson, a leader in the black community and an early Lindsay supporter who was one of the prime forces responsible for the opening of the Bushwick Center in the first place. When Miss Simpson's informal requests that Bushwick remain open fell on deaf ears at City Hall, she rallied two hundred of her most menacing supporters and sat in at the Mayor's office on December 9, 1970, threatening mayhem unless their demands were met.

The decision to keep Bushwick open was important for two reasons:

1. It convinced Croghan that Mott Haven could also be kept open, but only by using the politics of confrontation. He also realized that there was no single figure in the South Bronx comparable to Bessie Simpson in prestige and political influence, so that a total community effort (or the appearance thereof) would be necessary to block the closing.
2. It made Mott Haven the key to the whole issue of closings since Fort Greene was not scheduled to be closed until one month after the Mott Haven closing, and since the three satellites were unimportant in terms of the number of people (both clients and employees) involved.

### **Organizing Community Support**

Consistent with his belief that only by enlisting the support of the community could he expect to block the closing, Croghan discussed the problem with long term Mott Haven staff members (Croghan himself was a relative newcomer, having arrived at Mott Haven in March of 1970 just in time to win the election for union delegate in June of 1970). Particularly helpful in this regard was Joel Ackerman, a Community Affairs Consultant for both the Mott Haven and Kingsbridge SSC's, who reported directly to the Community Affairs section of the central office of the Department of Social Services. He supplied Croghan with a list of the most prominent community leaders and organizations.

The most important ally Croghan was to recruit from the community was Maria Cupril, the Presi-

dent of the South Bronx Community Corporation (funded by the Community Development Agency, and composed of twelve delegate agencies) who had been appointed to the job several months earlier to straighten out the corporation's woefully corrupt and hopelessly entangled fiscal condition.

Cupril's first reaction to Croghan's overtures was one of distaste. She told him that she disliked unions because they were too conservative, and that she particularly disliked the SSEU because she had watched the throat cutting tactics engaged in by the SSEU and a rival union, Local 371 of the Municipal Employees Union, in seeking to secure membership from the employees of the various antipoverty programs. Croghan explained that the two unions had merged so that the problem of union unity had been solved, and that he was representing the staff of Mott Haven on behalf of the union.

Croghan then launched into a fervent pitch for Cupril's support involving all the arguments against closing the Mott Haven Center that he had gleaned from his discussions with the Mott Haven staff. Cupril listened, was convinced, pledged her support, and became the pro forma leader of the community fight to keep Mott Haven open, recognizing Croghan, and only Croghan, as the official voice of both the SSEU and the Mott Haven staff throughout the whole course of the controversy.

At the first strategy meeting called together by the small businessmen in which Croghan won over Himmelstein's support, Croghan was also able to form an alliance with Raul Rivera of the Puerto Rican Student Union (PRSU), a community linkage that proved to be second in importance only to the support of Maria Cupril in terms of organizing the community and presenting the City with community demands.

The PRSU is a coalition of New York City college students of Puerto Rican descent. They emulate the Young Lords in their organization, their uniforms (red berets, combat boots, and battle fatigues), and their rhetoric (in a leaflet protesting the closing, they maintained that the Mott Haven Center was being closed because it was "so efficient in serving the people that this capitalist society feels threatened ..."). To the uninitiated, the PRSU, with its strict discipline and paramilitary trappings, gives

the air of being implacably militant. Those who came to know the individual young men who made up the union came to see them as rather pathetically middle class in their goals — one of the oft repeated plaintive comments of members of PRSU was that if Mott Haven were closed, it would indicate an intention on the City's part to attrit caseworkers, but if caseworkers were being attritted, how could they expect to get civil service jobs as caseworkers when they graduated from college?

At this first meeting Croghan was shown a leaflet that the PRSU had already issued protesting the closing of the Mott Haven Center — a leaflet that was chock full of misinformation. By diplomatically pointing out the errors in the leaflet and by outlining what he thought were the reasons for, and the expected effects of, the proposed closing, Croghan secured the allegiance of Rivera and the PRSU, and for the remainder of the controversy it was to Croghan that the PRSU would come first for information and interpretation concerning Mott Haven.

Although many other community groups were to express concern over the Mott Haven closing, and exhibit interest in organizing to keep it open, they turned out to be largely unreliable. The one exception was the Wandu Gente (The Beautiful Tribe), a junior affiliate of the Black Panthers. The Panthers have a minimum age limit of twenty-one, and the Wandu Gente's membership consisted of aspiring Panthers who could not meet this requirement.

The average member was about nineteen, and many of the members were in special high school tutorial programs designed to eventually provide them with enough academic skills so that they could be admitted to college. They derived their image from the media, and much of their conversation consisted of memorized rhetoric and slogans. Like the PRSU, the Wandu Gente were somewhat ambivalent about their role. While they hated the police, for instance, they loved the idea of discipline, authority, badges of rank, etc., and saw themselves as rightfully fulfilling a role akin to that of the police in the community. Because the PRSU had already decided to look to Croghan for leadership, the Wandu Gente did the same as a token of their solidarity with their Puerto Rican brothers.

## The White Paper

Because of his experience with various community leaders at some of the preliminary meetings held to discuss ways and means of keeping Mott Haven open, Croghan felt that there was a great deal of misinformation concerning the closing abroad in the community, and resolved to draw up a white paper that would consolidate all the arguments against the Mott Haven closing. The paper was issued in time to be distributed on December 18 at the first open community meeting held to discuss the Mott Haven problem, and it became the source from which all arguments and all literature opposed to the closing would be drawn in the future.

The reasoning in the paper is interesting and, if nothing else, shows that the City's announced reasons for closing the center were not thought through too well (it has been suggested in some quarters that the decision to close the SSC's rather than being made for reasons of managerial efficiency and economy was made on a purely political basis – to still those critics of the Lindsay administration who demanded that something be done about skyrocketing welfare costs, and to add a touch of the hard nose manager to the Lindsay image in anticipation of his eventual run for the Democratic nomination in the spring of 1972). As reported in the December 25, 1970 issue of *The Unionist*:

The City wishes to close Mott Haven Service Center. The Union and the local staff oppose the closing for a number of reasons:

1. It is an action which will not save money.
2. It is an action which will probably cost extra money in the short run and cost still more money in the long run.
3. It is an action of no real benefit, yet one which may, and almost certainly will, cause definite harm.

Closing Mott Haven will not result in a saving of staff. The Department has already acknowledged this fact.

The Department will not save money on building rent. Mott Haven Center's location is one the City rents from a private landlord and the lease still has

about five years to run.

Plans are being made to place another agency in Mott Haven's location. But currently, as an agency of joint funding, Mott Haven's administrative costs are paid 75% by the federal government. Another agency, using Mott Haven, will cost the City at least as much in rent, etc.

Mass transfers cause errors; these errors pyramid; the quality of the work done declines. The City of New York can ill afford the cost of poor quality work done in such situations. Moreover, caseworkers become essentially well paid clerical staff in such situations since no chance for normal casework is available. People are not referred for possible employment or training, investigations become practically nonexistent and there is no time to help individuals one at a time. The short term losses due to a transfer are bad enough; the long term losses are far worse yet.

1. "Surveys" by the administration (combing through the existing caseloads to try and place eligible clients into employment and also make sure all possible cases are properly classified so as to obtain federal reimbursement) are halted by a shift of location and they may become impossible for six months to a year because the moved case loads all have new and unfamiliar caseworkers.
2. Eligibility becomes an investigated assumption, which leads to greater costs. Caseworkers are so swamped with the direct results of the changes that they are unable to investigate eligibility until a year later when they are again familiar with their caseloads.
3. Work relations between staff and client-worker relationships built up after months or years of contact will be disrupted; long term programs such as children's schooling, adult rehabilitation or the WIN Program will suffer in each case.

If Mott Haven is closed as planned, clients will have to travel farther to see their caseworkers. All caseworker-client relationships will be destroyed.

Mott Haven is a combined services center. Staff is aware the Center resulted from well-meant and constructive plans of the Department. To scrap all

the beneficial innovations with no real savings to be gained is not likely to help staff have faith that it is worthwhile to conscientiously attempt to do the best job possible while working for the City.

The Mott Haven Center was the first of the multiple service centers to open. The idea was to have a center right in the neighborhood where the clients live and where the community could get many of the services that were usually spread over various parts of the Department. Therefore, not only were public assistance units established, but also Child Welfare and Homemaker Services. It was placed in the South Bronx because it was felt that the need here was great and we all think it worked. Now the community, if the HRA plan goes through, will have to go to three welfare centers for public assistance: to Bronx BCW for some Child Welfare services; to 30 Lafayette Street for other Child Welfare services and to Boulevard Center for Homemaker Services

### **Organizing Political Support**

Although the pressure exerted on the City administration by the combined staff-community coalition was responsible in the end for keeping Mott Haven open, Croghan took pains to marshal political support, enlisting in his cause (among others) Bronx Borough President Abrams, State Senator Bobby Garcia, and City Assemblyman Lawrence Podell.

The role of each politician was primarily that of an amicus curiae, and they limited themselves to making brief appearances at various community protest meetings, issuing a few press releases condemnatory of the closing, and (in Abram's case) supplying the sound truck for the demonstrations that were to come. The City administration had to keep in mind at all times that they were dealing not just with what appeared to be an outraged community, but peripherally with a potentially dangerous political coalition antagonistic to Lindsay.

### **The First Open Meeting**

On December 18, the first open meeting called to discuss strategies to prevent the closing of Mott Haven was held in the Mott Haven Community Center, located in the Mott Haven Houses, a low-income housing project. In addition to staff from Mott

Haven, Maria Cupril and her contingent from the South Bronx Community Corporation, the PRSU, and the Wandu Gente, there were representatives from the Forest General Service Center, Puerto Ricans for Political Action, Lincoln Hospital Methadone Maintenance Program, Hunts Point Community Corporation, Lincoln Mott Haven Client's Advisory Council, National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), several block associations and others for a total of about sixty people.

The immediate problem facing Croghan was that no one wanted to take over leadership of the meeting (Maria Cupril timed her arrival so that the meeting would already be in progress before she would be on hand). This was understandable since the group gathered together could easily become cannibalistic, particularly in light of the fact that many of the organizations represented were in a sense rivals, scrambling for the anti-poverty dollar, and had a history of vicious infighting carried in the past to the point, some say, of murder.

Having no recourse, Croghan reluctantly opened the meeting, distributing the white paper and explaining his reasons for believing that the closing would be both uneconomical and inefficient, and a disservice for the clientele of the Mott Haven SSC. At this point he spotted Cupril arriving with her contingent, and pleading that since he was not a community resident he really should not be chairing the meeting, urgently requested that she take over the task. Spurred on by the combined cheers of her Community Corporation employees, the PRSU, the Wandu Gente and other scattered supporters, Cupril, with a great show of reluctance took over this chore.

It is interesting to note that this meeting marked the only appearance in the Mott Haven controversy of two powerful community groups. The NWRO suggested that all those present at the meeting come down to their headquarters in Harlem to fill out membership cards for their organization, thereby making them eligible for the services of the already-demonstrated organizing skills of the NWRO. This suggestion was greeted by the jeers and catcalls of the majority of those present, whereupon the NWRO promptly decamped.

Ramon Mannegault, Cupril's counterpart at the Hunt's Point Community Corporation, offered

several suggestions concerning militant actions to be taken by the group, and indicated that he felt that the next meeting should be held in the offices of the Hunt's Point Corporation. The group responded without enthusiasm to all of Mannegault's suggestions, and although this reaction did not seem to ruffle the urbane Mannegault, his conspicuous absence from any of the subsequent incidents related to the Mott Haven closing indicates that he was probably loath to become involved in any action that did not include a central role by the Hunts Point organization.

A four-fold plan developed from the first meeting that included (1) establishment of lines of communication between all the groups; (2) the gathering of petitions protesting the closing to be presented to Commissioner Sugarman; (3) efforts to secure coverage of the story by the media; (4) protest demonstrations, the first one scheduled for January 11.

### **The First Demonstration**

The major effort of both Cupril and Croghan was directed toward the demonstration slated for January 11. With almost a month in which to organize they were confident that they could build up the kind of demonstration that would attract the wide attention of the media.

Croghan concentrated on contacting the clients of the Mott Haven SSC by preparing leaflets which were to be mailed by each caseworker to each family in his caseload (the more committed workers went so far as to call each of their clients who had a telephone, selling them on the idea of participating in the demonstration). Croghan estimates that half of the staff cooperated in this venture and that as a result 2000 leaflets went out, reaching approximately 6000 people. Since it was obvious that the City would look with disfavor on an attempt by its employees to organize welfare clients to protest a decision already reached by the City, Croghan hit upon an ingenious scheme to give the flavor of legitimacy (and to boost staff morale in the process) to the enterprise.

Fastening upon a portion of the regulation that required any mail leaving the center to go over the desk of the supervisor, Croghan collected from each worker the envelopes containing the leaflets and

addressed to the clients, deposited them into a large cardboard box, and carried the box over the desk of that worker's supervisor. In addition, Croghan and the union activists at Mott Haven led a large Mott Haven contingent to the monthly city-wide union meetings where they pressed the union members from other centers to join them in the protest demonstration.

In the meantime Cupril concentrated on leafletting the whole community and securing the support of the other community groups. For three days prior to the demonstration she had her people out in sound trucks (supplied by Abrams, the Bronx Borough President) touring the South Bronx urging residents in Spanish and English to come out and support the demonstration.

But perhaps the most important step guaranteeing the eventual success of the first demonstration was Croghan's contact with Lieutenant Lombardi of the Forty-Second Precinct on December 19, the day after the first open community meeting. Lombardi was the number two man in the chain of command at the Forty-Second Precinct and Croghan established an immediate rapport with him by finding a common ground in their mutual disenchantment with Mayor Lindsay (a relatively easy task when New York City civil servants are involved). After listening to Croghan's plans for a demonstration, Lombardi freed Croghan from much red tape by dispensing with the requirement for a sound permit on the grounds that the demonstration was part of a "labor dispute."

Croghan then went on to explain the second part of his planned demonstration, namely a march down 149<sup>th</sup> Street from the Mott Haven Center to the intersection of Third Avenue, where he intended to block traffic. Lombardi made it clear that he would not tolerate a violation of the law. Croghan replied that he was only playing the Lindsay game, the politics of protest, and that he had to take some action that would focus attention on his fight. He then asked Lombardi what he would do if the demonstrators did block traffic. Lombardi replied that they would be ordered to disperse. Croghan then asked what would happen if the order to disperse were obeyed, and Lombardi replied that if the order were obeyed no further action would be taken

by the police. Both men seemed to be satisfied at this point that they had reached an unspoken agreement – that the demonstration would take place on January 11<sup>th</sup> as scheduled, that a march down 149<sup>th</sup> Street would occur, that traffic would be blocked at the intersection, but that the demonstrators would immediately disperse when ordered to do so by the police.

On the day of the demonstration a crowd estimated by the police and the media to be in excess of 1,000 people, and composed of community residents, welfare recipients and employees of the Department of Social Services, met at the Mott Haven Center to protest the closing. Croghan estimates that 40 people were union activists from other SSC's, 100 were staff members from the Mott Haven Center, 200-300 were actual welfare recipients, and the remainder were community residents turned out by the efforts of the Cupril organization. In terms of the numbers involved, Cupril was responsible for by far the greatest number of people since she had contacted both the welfare clients and the community people, so that in the case of the clients one could not know if Cupril or the Mott Haven staff was responsible for their presence, whereas the appearance of the community people could be attributed almost solely to Cupril's efforts.

A picket line was thrown up around the Center (but not for the purpose of closing the center, which operated as normally as could be expected under the conditions) and the now familiar sixties sounds of shouted slogans and chants filled the air, punctuated occasionally by fiery speeches in English and Spanish. (Cupril proved to be a marvelously effective spellbinder).

Promptly at noon,<sup>5</sup> according to plan, the contingent marched down 149<sup>th</sup> Street with Cupril and the other community people in the vanguard, and the Wandu Gente proudly acting as marshals. As fate would have it, through sheer happenstance, one of the patrolmen on duty at the intersection of 149<sup>th</sup> Street and Third Avenue was from the neighboring Fortieth Precinct, not Lt. Lombardi's Forty-Second, and for some reason had not been briefed on the demonstration. Upon seeing this mass of humanity approaching him, the unfortunate patrolman held up his hand signaling that he wanted the group to halt.

Of course he was ignored by the exuberant, singing, chanting, slogan-shouting, sign-waving group, and he was slowly being engulfed in it. Then in his confusion he apparently signaled a bus waiting at an adjacent corner to move ahead. The startled bus driver released his brake and the bus jerked forward, almost striking Maria Cupril. Cupril and her cohorts seemed to be amused by this brief incident, but to William Jenkins it provided and excellent excuse to let loose a stream of finger pointing rhetoric in the direction of the bewildered patrolman. A brief scuffle broke out, and Jenkins was hustled to an awaiting patrol car by the police who promptly came to the aid of their beleaguered colleague. However, the patrol car was immediately surrounded by a mob of demonstrators who angrily demanded Jenkins' release, underlining their displeasure by rocking the patrol car back and forth on its axles.

An ugly incident was avoided when Croghan gave the signal to the Wandu Gente to cool the crowd, which they did, allowing the patrol car to remove Jenkins from the scene (he was released without being booked upon his arrival at the 42<sup>nd</sup> precinct). A television newsman noticing the deference with which the crowd was treating both Croghan and Cupril asked to interview both of them. Cupril immediately acceded, but Croghan modestly disclaimed any important role in the demonstration, maintaining that it was a spontaneous community uprising supported by the staff of the Mott Haven Center and the SSEU. Croghan gently suggested that the newsman interview Stan Hill (who was present as a reluctant participant in the demonstration). Hill leaped at the opportunity to appear on TV, and gave an angry speech denouncing the City for its callous disregard for the residents of the South Bronx.

The demonstration was successful beyond the wildest dreams of both Cupril and Croghan. It received extensive TV coverage on the 6 o'clock news. The disciplined chanting, the martial bearing of the PRSU and the Wandu Gente, and the rocking of the police car all combined to give the impression that a dangerous situation was brewing in the Bronx, potentially involving riot and mayhem. Of course, the ushering of Stan Hill into a public statement of

support for the demonstration was an unexpected plus.

### **The Second Demonstration**

A community meeting to discuss further strategy was scheduled for the night of the first demonstration. Croghan, who was being attacked by some of the Mott Haven staff for being more interested in the needs of the community than the needs of the union members, had more reason than ever to refuse to chair the meeting. As was her wont, Cupril had no intention of arriving until the meeting was well underway. Raul Rivera stepped into the vacuum and volunteered to chair the meeting. It was a turbulent affair, dragging on for hours. The PRSU and the Wandu Gente, intoxicated by the events of the day, wanted to schedule another demonstration for the next day, and to “take over” the center. Both Cupril and Croghan opposed this idea since they knew that an effective demonstration could not be organized overnight, were fearful of becoming involved in a clearly illegal action, and already had tentative plans to increase the pressure on Sugarman by staging a demonstration in the HRA headquarters at 250 Church Street.

During the course of the endless bickering that took place that night there was a gradual attrition (most prominently, of Maria Cupril) of those present until, at about 4 AM, no one was left but Croghan, Himmelstein, Jenkins, the Wandu Gente, the PRSU and five caseworkers from the Bergen SSC who were activists in the Progressive Labor Party. Instead of a demonstration the following day featuring a takeover of the Mott Haven Center, Croghan persuaded the most militant members of the group (i.e. the Wandu Gente, the PRSU and the Progressive Labor caseworkers) to limit themselves to a demonstration at Mott Haven on January 15.

Croghan made it clear that he would personally take part in the demonstration, but that the recent criticisms of him by certain segments of the Mott Haven staff making it necessary for him to mend fences at home, made it impossible for him either to help in the organization of the demonstration, or to urge the staff at Mott Haven to participate in it.

The planning for the second demonstration pointed up the weaknesses of both the Wandu Gente and the PRSU, who could organize only to the

extent of visualizing their own role in the demonstration (i.e. policemen). Moreover, the Progressive Labor people had no roots in the community, so that they were pretty much useless in terms of turning out a crowd for the demonstration. The morning of January 15 dawned bitter and forlorn. It was a pitiful looking little group of perhaps 10 Wandu Gente, with an equal number of PRSU's, joined by Croghan and the five Progressive Laborites, who shiveringly circled the entrance to Mott Haven carrying their picket signs protesting the closing.

The demonstration was an obvious failure, and because of it Croghan earned the permanent enmity of the Progressive Laborites who blamed him for not turning out the Mott Haven staff for the demonstration (indeed, both Croghan and the other union activists privately made it clear that they had no interest in this particular demonstration). Curiously, neither the Wandu Gente nor the PRSU blamed either Croghan or Cupril for the failure of the demonstration, seeing it as a painful but necessary lesson for their future activity, and looked to them both more readily for leadership during the remainder of the controversy.

### **The Destruction of the Cards**

On January 19, at a retirement party for Doris Flagley, the Director of the Melrose SSC, Jack Stackhouse, a Field Manager from the Central Office of the Department of Social Services, who was responsible for the clerical operations of Mott Haven and three other SSC's, let drop to Jim Mckeeon the fact that the clerical staff at Mott Haven had almost finished filling out the IBM cards that were necessary in order to effect the transfer of individual cases at Mott Haven to the centers to which they had been assigned. Some feel that Stackhouse, who had been the original Office Manager for the Mott Haven Center and supposedly had a sentimental attachment to it, had deliberately given Mckeeon information that would be useful in delaying Sugarman's plans. Mckeeon was one of the third level supervisors at the Mott Haven Center, the ex-treasurer of the SSEU, and the current SSEU delegate for the supervisors of Mott Haven. While he officially took a neutral stance toward the whole closing issue, Mckeeon could not resist passing on

this bit of information to his union colleague, and called Croghan to give him his news as soon as he could break away from the retirement party (at 12 AM as it turned out).

Ever the opportunist, Croghan or one of the local union activists approached each of the clerks working on the IBM cards, discreetly asking them to leave the cards out on their desks when they went home that night. By this time, the clerical staff had become even more upset about the closing than the social service staff, although for differently articulated reasons: the social service staff protested the closings on the basis of the social inequity that it visited on the Mott Haven clientele, while the clerical staff grumbled about the inconveniences of working in a different neighborhood. Approximately 50% of the clerical staff complied with the requests, and that evening, after work, all the cards that had been left out were picked up, put into a shopping bag and removed from the building, never to be seen again.

Upon learning of the deed on the following morning, Rolf Mayer, the Director of the Mott Haven Center, called a staff meeting at which, as was the custom at Mott Haven, the full complement of staff did not appear until ten minutes after Mayer had concluded his remarks, which consisted of a hysterical denunciation of the saboteurs and a blanket withdrawal of approval for overtime in the future. Later that day, when Croghan went to interview Mayer concerning his strange behavior at the staff meeting, Mayer winked at Croghan in a conspiratorial manner chortling that “they” had “got over half the cards.” Mayer’s ambivalence deserves greater scrutiny because, allowing for his personal idiosyncrasies, which colored all the internal events at Mott Haven during this period, his attitudes help us to understand the city-wide attitudes of local administrators to the Sugarman regime, and the attitude of the top level Central Office civil service staff toward that same regime.

### **The Local Administration**

Rolf Mayer was a professionally trained social worker and a career civil servant with 25 years experience in the Department of Social Services. He had been appointed as the Director of the Mott

Haven Center after serving as the center’s supervisor in charge of training since it had opened in 1966. He was quite happy with his assignment at Mott Haven which proved to be a serene little backwater untroubled by the turbulent waves of violent confrontation that broke over many of the other SSC’s throughout the 1960’s. The peacefulness of the Mott Haven Center has been attributed to its small size (it was the third smallest of the SSC’s in the City), the population mix of its clientele (predominantly Spanish speaking), the large percentage of the clientele lodged in public housing (a sure indicator of caseload stability), and, the personality of the Center stamped on it from its beginnings as a multi-service community institution.

The announcement of the Mott Haven closing unsettled Mayer more than any other staff member since it left his own position up in the air. Would he replace the Director of another Center? What Center? Would he lose his appointed title of Director (the bottom level of management) and revert to his permanent civil service rank of Senior Case Supervisor (the top level of supervision)?

An extremely intelligent and ambitious man, Mayer was always cautious in terms of his career, handling problems strictly according to the book. Moreover, when it came to a problem involving employee discipline, it was Mayer’s habit to ignore the problem, refusing to acknowledge its existence unless it was formally, specifically and persistently brought to his attention. In this he was not unlike the majority of Center Directors who, despite the fact that they are the only management level of the SSC’s, have a very narrow area of discretion in regard to employee discipline. In a recent letter to Abe Levine, Commissioner of the State Department of Social Services, Commissioner Sugarman, in outlining the steps he was taking to improve the performance of the City’s DSS, touched upon the problem of an “awkward and unresponsive system of employee discipline.” Sugarman said the problem deserved serious attention because, “the City’s disciplinary mechanisms are so glacial that absolutely flagrant violations of administrative regulations can be perpetrated with the appearance of impunity. The result is that Center Managers tend to withdraw from the discipline process and develop

wide tolerance for the most bizarre behavior.” What Sugarman failed to mention is that a Director who does not withdraw from the discipline process, more often than not, ends up being the scapegoat in the settlement finally negotiated between the union and the City in regard to a specific disciplinary problem. In Mayer’s case, a noticeable distaste for personal confrontation reinforced the already compelling reasons for avoiding involvement in the employee discipline process.

Another factor influencing Mayer’s behavior was the terror inspired in him by the proximity of the fist-clenching, slogan-shouting PRSU and Wandu Gente, despite the fact that the relations between these groups and the entire Mott Haven staff was eminently cordial. From the first moment that the community became involved in the controversy over the closing, Mayer was convinced that his continued health, if not his life, was in deadly peril. Recognizing Mayer’s fear, some cruel pranksters on the Mott Haven staff circulated a rumor to the effect that one of the protests being contemplated by the community was the kidnaping of Mayer. When this unfounded canard inevitably reached Mayer it galvanized him into an apoplectic frenzy, sending him wild-eyed and trembling into frantic shuffling circles around his desk muttering disjointedly that he would have to get a gun to protect himself and that he would demand police protection. Each day the strain on Mayer became increasingly evident, in the pallor of his skin, the trembling of his hands, the tic in his face, the haunted look in his eye, until at the very end, he was unable to bring himself to be present at the climactic moment of the whole controversy – Sugarman’s meeting with the community right on the premises of the Mott Haven SSC.

The final element contributing to Mayer’s mind set throughout the controversy was his antipathy to Sugarman, an antipathy shared by the bulk of the old line civil service. When Sugarman was appointed he had a mandate to shake up and reorganize the Department of Social Services, a mandate that he did not hesitate to publicize. As one of his first official acts, Sugarman called together the old line civil service staff (extending to the rank of Center Director) and explained his plan of reorganization whereby the income maintenance and social services

functions would be split and the income maintenance function taken over by the clerical staff. The social service staff (which included all of the Center Directors) would be dispersed into ghetto communities as teams with a team leader selected by the group.

“Do you mean that a caseworker could give orders to a Director?” asked an outraged old line civil servant (none other than Rolf Mayer himself). “If he has better leadership qualities, and a greater degree of rapport with the community – yes,” replied Sugarman.

The whole tone of Sugarman’s meeting was that he had taken over a mess, a mess that was the fault of the bumbling civil servants, an attitude that was bitterly resented by the civil servants who agreed that things were a mess, but only because of the policies established by a hopelessly inept City administration.

When all these ingredients are added together and combined in the psyche of Rolf Mayer, it does not become hard to understand why Mayer feigned ignorance about Croghan’s role in organizing the community (certainly, from a managerial point of view, a highly inappropriate role for Croghan to play; had he known about it, one which Sugarman could have conceivably taken steps to prevent). Of course, the extent to which Sugarman could have influenced events had he known of Croghan’s activities is problematical, and it certainly seems evident that, once the community had become involved, Sugarman’s range of options was severely limited. Nevertheless, knowledge of the union’s role in the protest movement would have at least enabled Sugarman to make his decision (or recommendation to the Mayor) regarding the matter on a more rational basis.

### **The Bureau of Public Assistance**

At the time of the Mott Haven incident, the Bureau of Public Assistance was the operating bureau responsible for the 43 SSC’s. It was staffed by old line civil servants headed up by Larry Meyer, the Director, to whom five Deputy Directors reported. There were ten Field Directors each of whom reported to one of three Deputy Directors, and who in turn supervised the operations in ap-

proximately four local SSC's. All of these individuals were social service staff, most of whom had a Master's Degree in Social Work. Vincent Porteus was in charge of the clerical end of the operation (Office Management Operations) and reported directly to Meyer, although his civil service grade was only equivalent to that of a Field Director. Jack Stackhouse, the Field Office Manager who gave the information concerning the IBM cards to Mckeeon, reported to Porteus. The Field Office Managers, who were the clerical equivalent of the Field Directors, supervised the Office Managers in approximately four local SSC's. Social Service staff outranked clerical staff all along the line, so that, for instance, the Office Manager of a local SSC reported to the Director of the SSC.

Significantly, during the whole period of the Mott Haven controversy, Gwen Jones, the Field Director to whom Rolf reported, was out ill. Field Directors were assigned to Mott Haven on a weekly rotating basis during this time, but not one thought that a visit to Mott Haven might be in order, despite the fact that Field Directors routinely visited the SSC's for which they were responsible on a weekly basis. There are relatively valid reasons for this apparent negligence, since, as we have already mentioned, Mott Haven was considered a "country club," and since Field Directors assigned to SSC's other than their own because of the illness of another Field Director, normally limited themselves to handling emergency situations. But surely, we can ask ourselves why, after the publicity given the first demonstration, BPA made no inquiries or requested no reports concerning the situation?

The almost studied indifference of BPA can be explained in terms of the animosity of the civil service staff to the Sugarman regime, which was even more intensely felt by those at the top of the hierarchy who were individually held responsible for the "welfare mess" and who were implicitly being pressured to retire by various unsubtle harassment tactics (e.g., demands by whiz kids from the Mayor's staff for information that could not be provided by the existing system). Moreover, despite the fact that BPA was never notified in a formal sense of the true situation at Mott Haven, it is straining credulity to believe that the Bureau,

through the informal communications network (Stackhouse and Ackerman are obvious examples of a possible conduit of information) did not have a pretty good idea of what was going on, and it is obvious that they necessarily had to be aware of the destruction of the IBM cards. In fact, when one considers Waldgeir's choice of the offices to be closed, the roles played by Ackerman, Stackhouse and Mckeeon, the lack of response to the mailing of leaflets to the clients and the destruction of the IBM cards, and of course the passivity of Rolf Mayer during the whole controversy, one gets the feeling that the old line civil service staff served as a silent partner to Croghan in his efforts to keep Mott Haven open.

### **The Demonstration at the Central Office**

After the first demonstration blocking the traffic on Third Avenue, Cupril and Croghan decided that the next demonstration should take place in Sugarman's office. To assure that the demonstration included enough people to have impact, they felt that three busloads of people should descend on Sugarman en masse. Croghan managed to get Hill to agree to put up the money to hire one bus from union funds, but how could the money for the other two buses be raised? Once again, Croghan demonstrated his bargaining skills by canvassing the Mott Haven staff to obtain signatures on pledges to finance the renting of the remaining buses. When presented with this evidence of staff dedication to keeping Mott Haven open, Hill embarrassedly agreed to pay for all three buses from union funds.

On January 21, after a brief demonstration outside the Mott Haven Center, the three busloads of protestors arrived at the central office of DSS. To preserve the illusion of union support of what was essentially a community organized uprising, the delegation was overwhelmingly comprised of Cupril's people, the PRSU, and the Wandu Gente, with only Hill, Croghan and a few activists to represent the union. After demonstrating for a few minutes in front of the headquarters building, the group was allowed entry into a conference room on the top floor.

Through his aides, Sugarman indicated his willingness to meet with the community people, but

refused to meet with any union representatives, claiming that any grievances they might have could be more properly dealt with through the normal labor relations channels. The community leaders vociferously objected to the exclusion of the union to the meeting and Croghan once again exhibited his masterful negotiating skills by securing from Father McGinley, the pastor of Saint Rita's Church (situated two blocks from Mott Haven) a blanket recognition of all of the union people present as representatives of Saint Rita's. Reluctantly, Sugarman agreed to meet with the whole group, including the union people. As reported in the January 22 issue of the *Unionist*, the meeting "... which was laced with heavy doses of sensitivity" left Sugarman "visibly shaken":

Maria Cupril of the South Bronx Community Corporation set the tone for the gathering at the outset: "This is the first time we've gotten to you – but it won't be the last." (Until then Sugarman had refused to meet.)

For two hours, Mott Haven residents opened up with a barrage of fact and opinion, sprinkled with warnings of "a long, hot winter" if the closing wasn't rescinded. Expected hardship and suffering were movingly detailed by clients. All of the City's rationalizations for the closing were refuted; Sugarman was made aware that he had been operating in a sea of misinformation.

As a community based, multi-service Center, Mott Haven has engendered strong relationships between clients and staff, which were crystalized by the threatening closing. Union President Stan Hill wryly thanked Sugarman for "organizing workers and clients together in the South Bronx."

The meeting ended with a commitment from Sugarman to come to an open community meeting at Mott Haven the following week, to answer questions from a wider audience.

The first hopeful break developed the next day, when Mott Haven's Director was notified that the center was to be kept open on a day-to-day basis; also a previous order to stop accepting new cases was rescinded.

The agreement by Sugarman to journey to Mott Haven was engineered by Cupril who, in a passionate denunciation of community rule by

distant bureaucrats, raged that Sugarman had never even been seen in the South Bronx community which was going to be affected by the Mott Haven closing. This challenge immediately rang all the right liberal bells in Sugarman's head, and also provided him with an opportunity to both end the present demonstration in which he was involved, and to discuss with his staff and the Mayor the proper course of action to be taken.

### **Sugarman at Mott Haven**

On January 27, as promised, Sugarman journeyed to the South Bronx to attend the meeting at the Mott Haven SSC where the pattern of angry confrontation immediately began again. The same questions concerning the closing were asked as were asked at the January 21 meeting, and the same answers were jeered at by the assembled group of community spokesmen and the Mott Haven staff members. Sugarman's defense of the DSS position became feebler and feebler in the face of the implacable opposition to which he was exposed. Finally, Sugarman agreed to a thirty-day reprieve and said that his staff would vigorously check out all possible alternatives. This information was greeted with skepticism and notification that nothing less than permanent extension was acceptable. The meeting ended on an ominous note when Cupril warned: "We don't have thirty days Mr. Sugarman – you do!"

Two days later, on January 28, a succinct statement from Sugarman's office said that in view of a cost benefit analysis performed by his staff showing that in terms of the small amount of dollar savings that the City could realize by closing the five SSC's, weighed against the benefits to the community that must necessarily be terminated by the closing, the Mayor had given approval for him to rescind the closing order.

### **Aftermath**

In contrasting the days of the mass protests to today's situation, and in describing the outcome of the Sugarman reorganization, the October 22 *Times* article which we have already quoted states:

Unquestionably, those permissive days are over. The pressure is on to pare the rolls, and the word is out on center directors to call the Tactical Police Force at any sign of disorder. Mass protest has been superseded by random and individual acts of violence by angry clients frustrated by their encounters with a staff working under stringent and complicated new guidelines. Despite the recently announced decrease in the welfare case load for the month of July, the City may find it much harder to restrict the rolls than it was to let them grow, especially when the growth in staff has lagged far behind the increase in the case load. The City's budget crises, and the Mayor's freeze on new hiring, have hit the centers particularly hard.

The quantitative increase in the case load was further complicated a year ago by the adoption of a whole new concept of welfare casework. Under the old system, each caseworker (who tended to be a college graduate and in some cases a professionally trained social worker) had a stable case load of recipients to whom he was responsible for almost all of the welfare functions: checking eligibility, determining payment levels, and making referrals for employment. Under the new system, installed from the top by a team of management experts, the income maintenance functions have been separated from the social services. The former clerks of the system (usually women with high school diplomas) have been upgraded to "Income-Maintenance Specialists"; they take care of all the Department dealings with the clients involving money. The former caseworkers, in theory, are now supposed to do pure social work. The new system was calculated to streamline operations at the centers along functional lines, and thus bring some relief from the back-breaking caseloads.

At any rate, that was the way it looked on the organization charts. Instead, it is the almost unanimous opinion of workers and supervisors that the chaos and paperwork have gotten worse. The new income maintenance workers haven't been properly trained. Case files are passed around from one functional unit to the other and are often lost. Frustrated clients can't turn to the single responsible caseworker who used to

answer their problems.

The unhappiest people of all are the veteran caseworkers. Through their union and professional organizations, they had always lobbied to be allowed to do more social work and less paper pushing. That was what the City promised would happen when the new system became fully operational. But because of the budget freeze, and the shortage in clerical staff, many of them have been left behind in units doing pure income maintenance. Others are in specialized units working on things like employment. Almost no one is out in the field doing pure social work.

In May of 1971, Sugarman, in defending the hiring of his new management team, blamed the social workers in the DSS for the enormous problems in the City's public welfare system and stated that replacing social workers with management experts would eliminate millions of dollars of waste. A statement issued by the National Association of Social Workers best summarizes the reaction of the social work profession to Sugarman's message:

We are dismayed at the direction the Lindsay administration is providing for public welfare in New York City. Serious questions must be asked by responsible citizens about the recent turn of events.

1. To what extent are the present chaotic problems in welfare in New York City due to City Hall decisions which demanded instant reorganization, to be completed between August and October of this past year, of a department dispensing millions of public dollars for the alleviation of a major social problem?
2. To what extent has the instant organization to separate welfare payments from social services turned the department into an inefficient check-dispensing organization and virtually wiped out the provision of service to people in need of help? Has separation of services had a fair trial?
3. Mr. Sugarman is both HRA Administrator in charge of five major City agencies and Commissioner of Social Services. Can a

part-time commissioner effectively administer the Department of Social Services?

4. Is the Department of Social Services really being run by its commissioner, who has been approved by the State Department of Social Services, or by others who have not been so approved and who do not possess the administrative experience to lead a staff of 30,000 employees?
5. To what extent are the various functions of the Department of Social Services undermanned?
6. How much turnover of staff exists, both resignations and involuntary internal transfers made to accommodate reorganization and continual changes in procedures? What is the effect on staff morale and efficiency?
7. What is the cost of salaries being paid to the new top echelon of management experts which has been superimposed on the Department's experienced administrative staff?

Pending answers to these questions, we can only surmise that the plans for reorganizing the welfare system, which had been carefully developed by previous Commissioners, are not being implemented. Instead the Department's leadership seems to be making panicky judgments in response to short range, shortsighted political pressures. Department reorganization under these pressures can only yield increased waste of public dollars and poor service to people in need.

Not only is Sugarman the target of such blasts from the social workers, but his attempts at reducing the relief rolls have met with no applause from the right, as the running battle between himself and George Berlinger, the man who, in response to insistent pressure from the right, was chosen in January 1972 to assume the responsibilities of the newly created post of Welfare Inspector General.

The fears of the old line civil servants turned out to be justified, with many of them opting (including the Director of BPA, Larry Meyer) for the choice of retirement, so that today only four of the ten Field Directors, and two of the five Deputy Directors, who

were in power at the time of the Mott Haven incident are still currently employed by the Department of Social Services. All of them retain the same salaries, but none has any authority in the Bureau of Income Maintenance Programs now headed up by Charles Morris, a political appointee from the Bureau of Budget. The lower echelons of the old BPA suffered an even crueler fate when, in the spring of this year, 18 Center Directors (not including Rolf Mayer) were removed from their former positions because of "inadequate performance" and given meaningless paper shuffling jobs in the Central Office. They were replaced by clerical personnel.

The displeasure of the social service staff of the DSS over the Sugarman reorganization was expressed by Stan Hill when he was overwhelmingly voted out of office in the SSEU April elections. He now holds down an appointed executive position with Victor Gotbaum's District Council 37, of which the SSEU is an affiliate. Croghan continues in his office as President of the Caseworkers Chapter of the SSEU, and is still the Mott Haven delegate to the SSEU. As for Maria Cupril, in May 1971 she announced her retirement from public life in order to spend more time with her family.

### Endnotes

1) Joseph Tepedino was the President of SSEU in 1965 and he led that strike. Judy Mage was a member of the SSEU Executive Board during the 1965 strike. She was the President of the union during the 1967 strike by that union.

2-3) Neither name is accurate. I believe Joe Knock was the Vice President of the Caseworker chapter of the merged SSEU-Local 371 and Bob Knox was the opponent favored by the Hill Administration. The title I won was Vice President for the Caseworker Chapter, later Chapter Chairperson.

4) I am not sure that is true. I would have to check the *Unionist* files. I also am dubious that Stan would have noticed.

5) The timing here is off. The demonstration was at noon on an overcast winter day. The march occurred at the end of the demonstration, long after noon. The rest of the report is accurate.

6) No. We went directly to the elevators and upstairs to the Commissioner's office. His secretary

refused us entry. He would not come out. I asked Stan Hill for authority to go downstairs and buy food at the candy stand. He agreed and the candy stand owner was so pleased she obtained a flatbed dolly from the building and we transported cartons of juice, cartons of cakes and candies to the Commissioner's office. On arrival I heard the secretary calling to Sugarman to let him know we had brought in food for the weekend. He then agreed to meet with us.

### Afterword

I was very pleased when George Cronin came to me about his intent to write up the story of the Mott Haven Crisis. It was then very fresh in my mind and I thought the affair had at least a degree of historical significance. I am now, 45 years later, even more pleased that George wrote his paper. I did not know all of the factors involved at the time. Through his interviews with management I learned a lot when I finally was given a copy of his paper.

As you can see, I did add a few endnotes to correct errors but there were very few errors I could find in the long essay. His paper now enables me to remember names from that time that I would certainly have forgotten and I am grateful.

George had asked me to tell the story as I experienced it and I did so. If I had known it would become a lasting piece of history I would probably have insisted on the inclusion of more names of local union officers, all of whom were of help during the event.

Of these local folks not mentioned, Morris Biderman must take pride of place. Morris knew everybody and brought to my attention many of the persons who later played a role. My alternate delegates Margie Wallace and Shirley Adams, plus Ted Kessler and the former delegate Jim Silvers were invaluable as were many others not mentioned in the report.

Eventually, the separation of income maintenance from services transformed the Department (for the worse in many ways) and there was no subsequent defense of Mott Haven when it was closed down many years later. The fight to save

Mott Haven was very much a unique event.

It was, however, glorious. The Mayor tried to do something wrong and the littlest of his constituents gathered together to force him to stop. Through organization and co-operation, they convinced him that he should not proceed and he backed off.

The paper mentions the 1965 and 1967 strikes of the SSEU. One key element to those strikes was a repudiation of "management prerogative" when management was clearly wrong. The '65 strike ended in victory, but the '67 strike was an extreme defeat. Thus, officially, the right of management to manage, or even to mismanage had been reaffirmed. Mott Haven showed the limits of that management victory. If enough subordinate workers disagreed vehemently with a policy or a decision, it would not stand.

And last ... the prelude ... as was normal, SSEU had sought a meeting with the Office of Labor Relations of HRA/DSS on the topic of closing Mott Haven once it had been announced.

As the leader of the local delegation, I presented, to management, all the points raised in the white paper.

John Coffey, head of Labor Relations, was blunt. No union member was being hurt and we had no right to advocate for the clients. We had just lost a strike proving that point. If the community did not want Mott Haven to be closed, it was up to the community to let the Mayor know.

Stanley Hill and I went to a water fountain in the hall and Stan was very angry. He said "They want the clients to riot." I felt he was correct and responded, "Yes. Do you want me to arrange it?" He looked at me for a second and said, "You're kidding."

I was not. I didn't know if I could arrange it, but I set out to try. I wanted to give the impression that bad things would happen if the Center was closed. All I needed was to find enough people to agree with me. As it turned out, the strategy outlined by John Coffey and formulated by Stan Hill was able to be arranged by me. It was entirely effective.