

USLP Vice-Presidential Candidate Evans Calls For "State of National Health Emergency"

April 17 (IPS) — As a hepatitis epidemic claiming 45 victims so far broke out in Oakland, Calif. this week, the Environment Protection Agency reported that at least half of the U.S. population is drinking contaminated water resulting from current waste disposal practices. Vice Presidential candidate Wayne Evans called here today for the immediate declaration of a "State of National Health Emergency." The Oakland epidemic and the EPA report are a grave signal to the population of the United States: the barriers to the spread of disease, controls of contamination of food and water, which separate the United States from the conditions of disease and holocaust now sweeping the Third World, are broken down.

"Banker-enforced municipal, state and federal budget cuts and the gutting of living standards have eliminated all barriers to the global spread of epidemic diseases," Evans said, "barriers which have previously separated the U.S. from a Brazilian holocaust. Unless immediate steps are taken to restore the nation's health system to 1971 levels, and matched with concomitant increases in the standard of living, America, the most advanced industrial nation in the world, will be plunged into a Dark Age of pestilence, disease and death. The world's most productive working class will be destroyed, and with it the possibility of implementing any program to solve the world economic crisis. Such a development would lead directly to the end of human existence as we know it."

In a statement released today with his emergency call, Evans outlined the parameters of the U.S. health emergency.

North American workers are now being subjected to conditions of intensified industrial speedup and living standards cuts which have drastically reduced the resistance of the population to disease. Tuberculosis, a disease which has historically spread only under the worst circumstances of malnutrition and filth, has risen 10 per cent in the U.S. over the last year. Meningococcal meningitis and typhoid fever, which are ravaging in Brazil, have increased by 27 and 32 per cent respectively in the U.S. over the same period of time.

Water and Sanitation Collapse

Moreover, the disintegration and impending collapse of the sanitation and water systems of North America's urban centers brings this continent's population face to face with Third World conditions of disease spread by contaminated water sources. In Brazil, the incidence of the dreaded poliomyelitis, spread through fecal contamination of human drinking water, has jumped an alarming 400 per cent over the past year. Typhoid fever has become a common problem in the crowded slums of Northeastern Brazil, and the recent Brazilian cholera epidemic marks the first appearance of this water-borne killer disease in the Western hemisphere in 50 years.

According to a recently released Environmental Protection Agency report localities in every part of the U.S. have suffered contamination of their ground water as a result of waste disposal practices. Ground water is the source of drinking water for at least half of the U.S. population. The report named New York and New Jersey among the states in which contamination is most significant and stated that "monitoring of potential sources of ground water contamination is almost non-existent." In major cities, less than 40 per cent of children have been inoculated against polio and

other diseases which will soon be spreading through contaminated water.

This month's breakdown of the municipal sanitation system in St. Gabriel, Quebec, which led to a contamination of the town's water supply and the outbreak of over 200 cases of typhoid fever is a sign of near future conditions for the entire continent. St. Gabriel health officials themselves noted that such an epidemic could occur from a breakdown of the decrepit water and sewage systems anywhere in Canada.

Barriers Down

Bankrupt municipalities are destroying the last remaining barriers to the spread of epidemic diseases from the Third World. Rat and pest control programs are going by the boards in budget-slashing sprees in city after city. Hospital and ambulance services are being cut to the bone. Port and ship inspection to prevent the spread of diseased animals and contagious human beings into the U.S. have been virtually suspended.

The rat population of Brazil, a rapidly developing focus for the international spread of bubonic plague, has already exploded out of control. In Sao Paulo, a major industrial city at the nation's crossroads, and in the port of Recife, the rat population outnumbers the human 10-15 times. The spread of plague-carrying rats from this area of Latin America into major U.S. cities can proceed virtually unimpeded by inspection efforts. Once in American ports, plague carrying rats will infect U.S. rat populations which are themselves running wild.

Up to 1971, all ships incoming to the U.S. were inspected for human contagious diseases and pests such as rats. Now, because of drastic cuts in manpower and funding, only 2 per cent of the ships are inspected. The U.S. Labor Party learned this week from domestic plague experts that the main bulwark against plague infestation of the nation's port cities has been the refusal of longshoremen to handle rat-infested ships.

Plague will be carried into the U.S. on uninspected aircraft as well. According to a Portland airline stewardess, Pan American airlines has issued a memo to all employees and flight crews coming from the Orient warning them not to rest on the floors of the planes, as is the usual practice on long flights, because of the danger of plague-carrying fleas.

Should infectious diseases spread from the Third World into North America under present conditions disaster will result. The food monitoring and health services designed to check them have been collapsed by budget cuts. A growing hepatitis epidemic in Oakland, already entailing 45 cases, originated from a visibly jaundiced bakery worker and spread through a dozen food shops supplied by the bakery. If there remained a semblance of a food inspection system in the region, this worker would have been spotted and the outbreak averted. In Detroit half the food inspectors have been laid off through budget cuts leaving the city open to similar outbreaks of hepatitis, typhoid, salmonella and other diseases.

Proposals to close all of New York's public hospitals will bring public health services to the collapsed state where as in Brazil, the over-crowded system spreads rather than fights disease. Hospital related services such as ambulance transport are in complete disarray. Waiting time for the transfer of critically ill patients to the hospitals in New York frequently runs up to eight hours.