

Editorial

Will we have water to drink?

During recent visits to several Pennsylvania cities, John Grauerholz, M.D. observed that there is no such thing as “controlled disintegration” of the world economy. The health adviser to Lyndon LaRouche’s presidential campaign was referring to the policy, flaunted by Paul Volcker of the U.S. Federal Reserve and his cronies at the New York Council on Foreign Relations, of allowing industry and infrastructure to collapse in order to maintain usurious debt payments and the political power of the creditors.

Disintegration has indeed gone out of control in Pennsylvania, with frightening implications for the rest of the world. After all, this was the state that led the nation in “American System” industrialization, and became world-famous for its standards in agriculture.

In Scranton, Pennsylvania, the topic on everybody’s lips is water—water they can’t drink because it is contaminated by dysentery-causing parasites. Right now, and for the next 60 days, 157,000 residents must boil their water. The parasite is in the pipes, which will take 60 days to clean out.

On March 19, what was described by a National Guard Captain as “almost a war” occurred in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, when the Army was supposed to pull out its two water-purification units because a formal state of emergency has not been declared. The city government surrounded the Army’s trucks with several layers of parked city dump trucks, backhoes, and other heavy equipment—since if the Army pulled out its purification units, there would be no other source of water great enough to meet city residents’ needs. At the last moment, the Army announced it would keep the equipment in place for a few more days.

There are front-page scare stories even in cities where no diseases have yet broken out, all over the state. In Harrisburg, the former mayor is calling for the construction of a \$28 million plant to filter river water, since the present system is totally vulnerable to devastating conditions of drought or a major water main break. The present mayor has been stymied by the city council in his effort to set up a Water Authority to make

improvements in the current system.

The cause of the furor is a small, single-cell organism *Giardia lamblia*, which is carried in the intestinal tracts of animals and man and excreted in the feces. In Third World countries and in institutions for the retarded, the parasite is endemic, due to poor sanitation and resultant fecal-oral contamination, resulting in widespread transmission of the parasite. Infection produces abdominal cramping, nausea, and diarrhea. The Scranton contamination was only discovered by the Department of Health after 350 cases of giardiasis were reported.

While not a life-threatening disease in most cases, and not considered an indication that water is unsafe according to local health department standards, the presence of this organism indicates that the water supply is being contaminated by feces, sewage, or both. This indicates a significant potential for outbreaks of other fecally transmitted diseases, such as typhoid and cholera, which plague countries with inadequate sewage disposal and water treatment.

Some water-supply systems in Pennsylvania are so old they still use pipes made more than a century ago from hollowed-out logs. Other water companies lose as much as 50% of their water because of system leaks. Still others, when they attempt to make repairs, are unable to locate their water pipes, and some small companies are too poor to make any but the most basic purity tests.

This is not a local problem—it has national implications. In New York City, for example, 60% of the water mains are over 60 years old, yet the city is currently on a 300-year replacement cycle. According to one estimate, \$110 billion would have to be spent by the year 2000 just to maintain existing urban water systems. But budgets are being *cut*.

A continuation of these policies will bring on a biological holocaust. Unless the policies of deindustrialization of the past decades are reversed, we can look forward to much more devastating diseases than simple dysentery.