

Health Officials Hide Behind Professionalism

NEW YORK, April 15 (IPS) — A top health professional in the New York City Department of Health told a U.S. Labor Party spokesman today that "if the budget cuts go beyond a certain level, we will not work; we will not compromise our personal and professional integrity."

Deputy Commissioner of Health Jean Cropper made the statement in a meeting today that included John Marr, the head of the city's Infectious Disease Monitoring unit, Randy Dupree, head of the city's Rat Control division, and two of Cropper's aides. Cropper had set up the meeting after a telephone briefing from the U.S. Labor Party's Ned Rosinsky, M.D., on the world emergency and the immediate danger of the plague spreading. In addition to the health officials, Cropper brought a recording secretary who took stenographic notes on Rosinsky's remarks.

During the course of the meeting, Rosinsky appealed to their professional integrity to stop the health emergency by backing the USLP proposed debt moratorium. After Rosinsky's detailed report on the plague outbreak and the potential holocaust here in the United States, the officials chorused: "What does this have to do with New York City? We can't do anything about these other things."

As soon as Rosinsky began to describe the rat problem in New York, there was immediate agreement among the health officials: "Things are worse here than in the rest of the country." With some pride, Rat Control official Dupree described how his unit had managed to survive the first rounds of the budget cuts without reducing the critical 1,900 square block slum area in their target program: "I've been able to get one man to do the work of four in rat control."

But with the next round of federal and city cuts in July, 30 per cent of the rat control budget will go. Dupree acknowledged that no more speedup was possible and that at least 300 square blocks (and possibly up to 700) would have to be dropped.

The disastrous consequences of these cuts, the horror of a rat explosion in the worst slum areas, was discussed for several minutes. Then Marr, the head of the Infectious Disease Monitoring unit told Rosinsky, "So what. There's no

danger of plague here in New York. We have the wrong kind of fleas." To back up this ridiculously unscientific assertion, Dupree then produced an article written by plague expert Dr. Poland in 1968 which said that the likelihood of plague spreading from parts of Vietnam to the U.S. were small because of rat eradication programs, mass vaccinations, and thorough checking of ships in the ports here and in Vietnam.

Rosinsky patiently outlined how at this point none of these necessary precautions were being taken, and how if they called Dr. Poland right then he would warn them as he had told the Labor Party that there is real danger of importing plague from Burma via Indonesia, India, etc. As for the fleas, if plague-stricken rats arrive in the port of New York, their fleas are the ones that will spread plague and infect New York's indigenous "Norwegicus" rat population.

There was a long silence. Rosinsky told the health officials that the cuts were going to get worse and worse, but that they as professionals could fight back by backing a debt moratorium. Immediately after the mention of debt moratorium, Marr got up and left saying, "This really isn't my area . . . I have other things to do." The two assistants to the Deputy Commissioner shuffled papers and mumbled, "We don't have to hear this."

The Deputy Commissioner himself, walked around the room agitatedly telling Rosinsky: "This is beyond by area of expertise. We can't deal with financial matters . . . That's political, and the Hatch Act says we can't do it . . . We'll all lose our jobs."

After Rosinsky told Cropper that the Labor Party could take the health officials' statements on the existing health emergency to the press and to the population, the Deputy Commissioner became hysterical. "We can't possibly do that in the middle of the budget discussions . . . The existence of our 'rock bottom' service list is secret . . ."

Later that afternoon when reporters from Associated Press and WNEW radio station called Cropper's office to ask about the health emergency, they were told: "The Labor Party says plague will come to New York but it won't happen; we have the wrong kinds of rats and fleas."