

Plague Coverup Continues

USLP Declares World Health Emergency

April 11 (IPS) — All international agencies responsible for monitoring and controlling the spread of the bubonic plague epidemic now raging in Burma have not only failed to act, but are covering up the danger to humanity that now exists. No newspaper in North America or Western Europe has carried competent coverage of the plague or its threatened spread since the several language editions of *New Solidarity* exposed the fact one week ago.

The International Caucus of Labor Committees can now only estimate the speed with which the Burmese plague, which at last reports had struck nearly a thousand people in the city of Mandalay, is spreading. The United Nations' World Health Organization (WHO), the globe's chief disease-monitoring agency, has still not made a public statement on the existence of the Burmese epidemic, although plague experts at WHO's Geneva, Switzerland office have briefed the ICLC fully on their reports. The U.S. Public Health Service's Plague Center in Colorado claimed not to have heard of the outbreak which has reportedly killed 14 in Mandalay.

A plague specialist for the U.S. Public Health Service has said that "an epidemic of this size undoubtedly means progression from the bubonic to the pneumonic form." Pneumonic plague is even more deadly than bubonic and it is highly contagious since it can be spread directly from human to human by coughing. The specialist added that an outbreak like the Burmese epidemic has probably killed many more than the reported 14, and "could easily spread to Rangoon (Burma's chief city — Ed.) Bangladesh, India and beyond."

We have also confirmed that the world's population of rats — which are primarily responsible for the spread of the bubonic form of plague — has now expanded to 20 billion, five for every human being, and is growing beyond control as municipal services collapse.

Ships from Rangoon, where one rat in ten may now have the plague, dock at Oakland, California eight times a month. In San Francisco, a city adjacent to Oakland, cuts in funding have reduced the municipal Rat Control Department to a mere surveillance

agency which has stopped keeping records.

Under these circumstances, the ICLC and the U.S. Labor Party have declared a world health emergency, and have called upon the United Nations to undertake all appropriate measures to meet this emergency. The methods for containing and reversing the plague are known, and must be taken before this situation turns into a catastrophic global repetition of the Black Death which wiped out half of Europe in the 14th century. Unless Burma is declared a plague area by the WHO, the ships now on their way to the world's ports including Oakland will be permitted to land without any control for plague-infested rats.

Launch All-Out War

We must immediately launch an all-out war on the plague, a war against the advancing ecological holocaust. We cannot suicidally wait behind some Maginot line that protects the United States or the advanced sector while epidemics build up unstoppable momentum abroad. We must stop the advance of the enemy, and simultaneously build up our defenses in concentric circles around the weakest points against the spread of diseases — adequate food supplies to increase resistance, pest control, sanitation and medical services. The establishment of the minimum standard of living necessary to restart economic development is now also the absolute precondition for stopping the holocaust — it is a matter of life and death.

At this moment the first priority, the point of maximum danger, is Burma. The World Health Organization must at once dispatch a competent team of experts to accurately assess the situation and report back within days. But even before that, on the basis of present inadequate information the following urgent steps must be now undertaken through WHO and with the cooperation of the Burma government.

An international emergency coordinating body, an Emergency Health Commission, must be set up at once to control the dispatch of aid to Burma and other threatened areas, with expert representatives from WHO and other concerned international organizations such as the United Nations, plus the key

countries which will supply the bulk of aid. The United States government must take the leading role in supplying the financial and material basis for this aid, as the country most able to do so. The Commission must be supplied with initial funding of at least \$10 billion for its first year of work.

Such a Commission must organize the following aid:

A thousand tons of food a day must be rushed to Burma, to raise nutritional levels there to a minimum of 2,400 to 2,500 calories per day.

Several thousand tons of insecticide must be dispatched to supply a systematic campaign of flea eradication, to break the transmission of bubonic plague from rats to human beings via the insects. With the cooperation of local authorities, tens of thousands of Burmese must be organized to spread the insecticides through every block of Mandalay, Rangoon, and other potential areas of disease spread.

If pneumonic plague, which travels directly from human to human, has already broken out, the only means of stopping its spread is massive antibiotic treatment of the entire population of the affected cities; 10 to 15 tons of tetracycline would be immediately required. Such action would risk the development of drug-resistant strains of plague, but would nonetheless be the only means of turning back the immediate global danger of worldwide pneumonic plague.

Medical teams and mobile hospitals equipped with the necessary antibiotics and other supplies must be dispatched to treat all existing cases of plague, to deal with other epidemic diseases now raging in the area such as cholera and malaria and to supervise monitoring and control of the plague.

Strict inspection of all ships leaving Rangoon and de-ratting of all contaminated ships must be begun. Sufficient numbers of patrol boats must be supplied to Burma to totally cutoff the booming smuggling traffic which will otherwise become the main route for the spread of plague beyond Burma's borders.

Only after the fleas have been wiped out and the disease brought under immediate control will it be possible — and necessary — to institute sweeping

rat-elimination programs. If we act before that, plague-carrying fleas will leave dead rats for human hosts in droves.

These steps, if implemented at once, will turn back the immediate threat of a global plague pandemic and gain time for broader actions.

Simultaneous with the Burma program, similar crash efforts must be opened in the regions that most directly threaten to become focal points for plague and other epidemics: the rest of Southeast Asia, Bangladesh, the African Sahel, Brazil, Central America, and southern Italy. In each case, the emergency program will be similar to that of Burma — food, medicine, pest control — but will be modified to deal with the diseases determined to be the most dangerous in each locale. But in all areas, the major avenues of global dissemination of disease must be wiped out, above all, the rats and fleas which spread plague. And in all areas, food supplies sufficient to maintain a minimum diet of 2,400 to 2,500 calories a day must be provided. Total supplies of seven to ten million tons of grain, especially wheat, a month are required.

Spreading out behind the leading edge of such emergency measures, large-scale preventive programs must be organized to eliminate the conditions which cause ecological breakdown and the spread of epidemics. The pitifully inadequate WHO monitoring system

must be expanded to make it capable of detecting and responding to any epidemic outbreak anywhere in the world within days.

A global program of rat clearance and pest control must be established, generally administered by the individual countries, but with financial aid and cooperation from the Emergency Health Commission, with the aim not of merely controlling rat populations, but of eliminating them from every city. Such international aid must also be given for the establishment of adequate garbage collection systems and the supply of necessary equipment to eliminate the waste supplies on which rats feed. Sewerage systems must be repaired where they exist and emergency systems set up where none exist. Monthly or even more frequent inspection and de-ratting of all registered ships must be vigorously enforced.

Global vaccination against the expected influenza epidemic and against other preventable diseases such as polio, diphtheria, measles, etc., must be initiated with the goal of total immunization of threatened populations in the next year to 18 months.

Debt Moratoria Crucial

Such programs in both the advanced and underdeveloped countries require immediate financial and productive prerequisites. A debt moratorium on all municipal, regional, and international

government debt must be agreed to at once. Second, the productive resources necessary to support this program and the longer-term requirements of housing construction, urban renovation, sanitation construction, etc. must be mobilized. In particular, the absolute necessity for maintaining a minimal global consumption of 2,400 to 2,500 calories per day can be met out of existing grain reserves for only a period of four to five months. Within the next month urgent measures must be taken to increase fertilizer supplies to enlarge the grain crops in the advanced countries for food supplies in the fall. Similarly, tractor production and auto-tractor conversion must be undertaken immediately to prepare for the expansion of the Argentine southern hemisphere grain crop to be planted this fall, to ensure continued food supplies in the winter and spring. Without such a policy of expanded production, necessitating the preliminary implementation of the programs proposed in the International Development Bank plan, all immediate measures against the spread of disease will be futile.

Action must be taken at once — each day's delay increases the chance that present epidemics will become uncontrollable. This threat is already present in Burma, with the possibility of rapid spread of plague in pneumonic form and evolution of drug-resistant disease varieties. Delay means death.