

## Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

### Casual contact can cause AIDS

"Casual Contact With a Russian Bear Can Cause AIDS," was the sign worn by one of the demonstrators in front of the annual convention of the American Public Health Association (APHA) here last week.

There was more than a little contact going on with the Soviets in the conference itself, as APHA President Victor Sidel signed a "peace agreement" with his Russian counterpart, the head of the Medical Workers Union there, Dr. Lydia Novak.

This was not, however, before pandemonium broke out when this reporter demanded that Novak respond to charges that her government is responsible for synthesizing the AIDS virus for biological warfare purposes.

That question referred to the allegations published twice in the KGB-run Soviet *Literaturnaya Gazeta* paper about AIDS as a weapon developed by the CIA. Naturally, the Soviets attribute its cause to the United States (and Lyndon LaRouche) in the article, but heretofore, no one had ever indicated the possibility that AIDS was biological warfare by anyone. Since it is known that the Soviets are running the cover-up of the nature and extent of AIDS through the World Health Organization, the Soviet biological warfare charge amounts to a self-admission.

This revelation upset the planned love-in with the Russians at the APHA

conference, which was why both the APHA executive director and president hit the roof with one of the more colorful displays of public hysteria seen in Washington in the recent period. Their shouting at this reporter for asking the question had to be amplified to be heard over the rapid-fire exchanges going on in the Russian tongue by the Soviet delegation, which was trying to figure out how to respond.

Finally, the Novak took the hastily-conceived advice of APHA President Sidel and tried to explain that she knew nothing about it.

Meanwhile, at both the State Department and the Pentagon, official press spokesmen claimed to know nothing either.

The Pentagon claimed total ignorance, and the State Department said, "Well, I haven't heard about it, but since you say the Soviets are accusing the Pentagon of manufacturing AIDS, then I guess the easy copout would be to direct you to the Pentagon for a response!"

When it was learned that, in fact, the subject came up between Reagan and Gorbachov at the summit, the State Department continued to refuse to supply any official comment.

By then, this reporter had to remind State Department press spokesman Charles Redman that not only had Gorbachov mentioned this to Reagan, but it had been in the Soviets' *Lit Gaz* magazine twice, had been reproduced in the State Department's own Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), and also reprinted in full in a Peruvian leftist newspaper, *Marka*.

Redman could only turn red, and profess to know nothing.

A follow-up question to mine asked—not irrelevantly—whether there were any statistics on how many State Department personnel, in the hierarchy, foreign or general service,

have been known to have contracted AIDS.

This drew a loud howl from the press corps, and an embarrassed denial by Redman that he had seen such statistics. "I doubt if such statistics exist," he said.

The reporter who asked the question told me afterwards, "You know, if what LaRouche is saying about Soviet admission of creating AIDS is true, my question was right on the mark. Forget this dusting at the embassy. Hell, they could be giving our people AIDS. This is serious!"

### 'Lucky if we get \$3 billion'

Tom Donnelly, head of the National Water Resources Association, which represents Western states' water interests—especially irrigation of cropland—said bitterly that the \$19 billion pricetag on the Omnibus Water Bill that just passed the House is a joke, in a conversation with this reporter.

"Reagan has already said that he will never sign a water bill with even half that much money involved," he said, adding that a Senate version of the bill will leave out about \$10 billion in projects from the House version.

"Even if the President does sign a water authorization bill," Donnelly added, "I figure we will be lucky if \$3 billion ever actually gets appropriated."

The great irony is, of course, that even the \$19 billion House bill is a travesty, not beginning to touch the drastic conditions that actually face the nation's water future. Over 300 projects which had been approved by earlier congressional votes were axed in this bill. And, such will undoubtedly be the fate of many of the programs in the present bill.