

cians because of the jobs that would be lost if the Reserve plant closed. Senators Hubert Humphrey and Walter Mondale are keeping a low profile on the issue; Representative John Blatnik,

who represents Duluth and the Lake Superior region, maintains a position of consistent ambiguity. The United Steel Workers, which represents the workers at Reserve, is siding with the company,

and the AFL-CIO central labor body has never challenged the company's position. "Labor has sold out for jobs, no matter what," Lehto says.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, supported by Governor Wendell R. Anderson and (to judge from a Minneapolis *Tribune* poll) by the people of the state at large, is vigorously pressing its case against Reserve and its parents, ARMCO and Republic. In a recent action, the MPCA asked Judge Lord to levy \$73 million in penalties against Reserve for violations of its discharge permit.

The full Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals seems unlikely to reverse its three-judge panel and lift the stay of Judge Lord's order to close the plant. Three of the court's eight judges are not participating in the case. Two own stock in either ARMCO or Republic Steel, and the third is ill. Thus, of the five other judges, three already have decided, at least provisionally, that no compelling health hazard is present.

With proceedings in the case continuing to drag on, it is conceivable that the Supreme Court will now decide to intervene, despite its earlier eight to one decision (Justice Douglas dissenting) not to do so. A prudent man would not bet on it, however.

In sum, there is a very real prospect that the discharge of tailings into Lake Superior will not cease until late in this decade, with the citizens of Duluth and other communities having to ingest asbestiform fibers along with their drinking water for another several years. Senators Philip A. Hart (D-Mich.) and Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis.) have found this prospect disturbing enough that they are seeking a legislative remedy. At their urging, the Commerce Committee has reported legislation that would make clear that, in this and other similar situations, the failure to prove that a demonstrable health hazard exists shall not be a bar to relief. As stated in the committee report, a court would, in the absence of proof, consider "the likelihood and magnitude of the risk of harm. . . ."

In his testimony before Judge Lord, Selikoff compared the continuing pollution of Lake Superior with asbestiform fibers to a game of Russian roulette. "I don't know where the bullet is located," he said. "But if we are wrong, then the consequences of that error are disastrous. Moreover, the consequences are particularly bad because, while we play the game, others will pay the penalty."

—LUTHER J. CARTER

Blood Strategy Approved by HEW

Pushed along by 2 years of stern and unrelenting pressure from the federal government, a group of seven private health-related organizations, including the nation's three major blood-banking groups, has come up with a strategy for giving the country a unified system of blood collection and distribution.

The goal of the plan is to ensure adequate supplies of top quality blood at consistent costs throughout the country, with all-volunteer donors.

The parties involved have agreed to give responsibility for implementing the policy to a newly created body called the American Blood Commission. The commission is to have built-in consumer representation as well as representatives from numerous health, medical, and blood organizations.

The key to the plan is regionalization of blood services into what are called integrated regional programs (IRP's). The optimal size of these regions is yet to be worked out, but to qualify as an IRP, the blood banks and transfusion services in a given area will have to get together and show the commission that they can provide a full range of blood collection, processing, and distribution services. The regional systems will be self-supporting (that is, most income will come from insurance payments) in line with the desire on the part of all parties to keep blood services the responsibility of the private sector. Each IRP will be designed, at least theoretically, to fill all the blood needs of its area. Participation in the system by individual organizations will be voluntary.

When the commission gets going, the country can probably expect to be subjected to a heavy public education campaign to stimulate voluntary blood donation. If this is successful, two aspects of the present system will gradually fade out: one is commercial blood banks, the other is the complicated system of blood credits and nonreplacement fees which involve a lot of fancy paperwork and put an added financial burden on patients who can't round up donors to replace the blood they have received.

The federal government got moving on the blood issue in 1972, spurred by widespread publicity given to the seedy operations of some commercial blood banks and the evidence that there was a high incidence of hepatitis contracted from the blood of paid donors. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare conducted a study and came up with a proposed National Blood Policy which espoused a number of goals relating to efficiency, cooperation, a uniform system of data collection, and conversion to an all-volunteer system. HEW ordered the private sector to come up with an acceptable strategy and warned that if it didn't the government would have to step in. The federal threat now seems to have effectively bludgeoned private blood organizations into agreeing on a plan.

With the plan approved in its broad outlines, the next step will be for the American Blood Commission to convene an "inaugural convention" probably within the next 6 months to work out some details.

The existence of the commission means that there will be, at long last, one central body to coordinate private activities and act as a focus for policy-making in a field that until now has been dominated by two organizations—the Red Cross and the American Association of Blood Banks—whose relationship has been characterized by at least as much competition as cooperation (see *Science*, 24 and 31 March 1972).—C.H.