

EDITORIAL

## WHAT DOES GAYNOR SAY?

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**HE New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, of which Mr. Robert Fulton Cutting is president, is heading a move for a sanitarium at Rockaway Beach, with a special eye to tuberculosis patients. The Association announces that it holds the sum of \$250,000, contributed towards that purpose, and that the money will be invested in the necessary buildings, pavilions, etc., provided the city will purchase the site, about 356 acres at Far Rockaway. The cost of the site, apart from condemnation proceedings, is estimated at \$1,500,000. In order to obtain this sum, favorable action by the Board of Estimate and Apportionment is required; in order obtain such favorable action the Association is marshalling the puffs of a large number of papers, together with the names of “many and distinguished philanthropic citizens,” all of whom are expressing their heartiest approval.

The ravages of tuberculosis need not be enlarged upon: they are too well known. Its dangers to the people of all ranks are appalling. Any move in the direction of checking the evil; of bringing relief; if possible, of cure, must naturally enlist sympathy—warm, active, widespread sympathy. For this very reason moves of this nature require close scrutiny. Moves on behalf of something that is not obviously necessary are not likely to be prompted by impure motives: the dupes are not ready at hand. Moves, however, on behalf of something universally felt to be needed, offer prime temptations to fraud: public sympathy may be readily played upon in the interest of private purposes. The Rockaway Beach move justifies the opinion of its being of this nature.

The expenditure of \$1,500,000 by the city would be none too much to check the ravages of tuberculosis and afford opportunities for health. The expenditure of this amount at distant Rockaway Beach, however, has fifty-seven different varieties of

fishy smells about it.

In the first place the city already owns at Pelham Bay Park about six miles of water front. That site easily accessible. Why not spend upon that site the \$250,000 that Mr. Cutting's Association now holds for buildings, pavilions, etc., instead of causing the city to expend a million and a half in securing the inaccessible property at Far Rockaway?

In the second place, if proximity to the ocean is what is wanted, why not purchase some site of the many available in the Lower Bay, and the cost of which would be but a bagatelle?

In the third place, if the city's purse-strings are to be loosened to the extent of \$1,500,000 in the praiseworthy behalf of popular health, why not invest the money in a four-mile waterfront walk with pavilions and all other appliances and means to boot on Coney Island? Atlantic City has made such an investment to the improvement and for the benefit of all concerned. Why not put Coney Island to the same uses? To-day half a million people crowd thither. With the exception of the relatively few who take a plunge, the majority who rush to Coney Island are planked and boarded and boothed from the seashore, where, crowded into a narrow space, the streams of visitors inhale an atmosphere worse than which they left behind them in the city. Sanitariums for those already seized by the white plague may, accordingly, be set up either at Pelham or the Lower Bay at a small fraction of the expense that the Far Rockaway scheme would cost, while a broad and several mile long plank walk along the Ocean at Coney Island would, even if it cost full \$1,500,000, go far towards preventing the disease.

In view of these facts, why the insistence in the Far Rockaway scheme?

Socialists tire not in reiterating that all Sanitarium schemes are like drops in a bucket: much faster than the disease can be cured in all the sanitariums put together, it is fomented in the unwholesome factories, sweatshops and homes of the poor. Socialists justly look with pity upon those who, really moved by philanthropy, contribute pennies towards cure, but invest pounds in the capitalist concerns that promote tuberculosis and other diseases. While making these charges Socialists know that it would be a vain appeal against the class interests of the Robert Fulton Cutting class to induce them to give up their tuberculosis hotbeds: they cannot do

that: that is what they live on. In the instance of the Far Rockaway scheme the matter lies otherwise.

Who are the contributors to that \$250,000 fund? If an ex-ray flash could be cast upon the tracks of that fund it would be discovered that it proceeds from Pennsylvania Railroad Interests. The ex-ray would illumine the case. The reason why Far Rockaway is chosen is that the Pennsylvania Railroad Interests in that locality would be gigantically promoted by the purchase of the Far Rockaway site by the city. Accordingly, the \$1,500,000 purchase demanded from the city “in behalf of tuberculosis patients” is, in fact, an attempt on the part of Pennsylvania Railroad Interests and their dependents to speculate upon the disease and the public anxiety that the disease promotes. The principle a penny of prevention is worth a pound of cure is here turned inside out. Pounds are to be spent under the pretext of curing, while pennies are to be withheld from prevention.

In the meantime, what does Gaynor say? When not yet even nominated for Mayor, he thundered against what might be called the infection to the reputation of the lad Duffy. That was well done, as far as it went. Now that Gaynor is Mayor-elect, and within four weeks of his inauguration, press, pulpit and politicians, most of them with what Gaynor has justly ridiculed as men “with very pretty names” are pressing upon the Board of Estimate and Apportionment to do what is nothing else than turn \$1,500,000, which should be applied to practical public health ends, into the channels of more lucre for those whose pockets already burst with plunder—and to do so under the pretext of fighting tuberculosis, whereas the truth is they are really promoting the disease by allowing Coney Island to remain what it is instead of turning it into what it should be. While this is going on within four weeks of the Mayor-elect’s inauguration, what is he saying on this subject? Why is he silent?

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
Uploaded January 2011

[slpns@slp.org](mailto:slpns@slp.org)