

Triage in Latin America

At the annual meeting of the Inter-American Development Bank May 20, U.S. Treasury Secretary William Simon told Latin American finance ministers that the United States would provide funds for the Bank this year on **condition that no new loans go to Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, or Peru.** Mexico's foreign debt, estimated at \$17.5 billion at the end of 1974, is projected to reach \$23 billion by the end of 1975. Brazil's first-quarter 1975 foreign debt of \$18 billion—highest in the world—is projected to rise to \$24 billion by year's end.

Brazil: Sixty per cent of the population is now infected with some disease; 60 per cent are malnourished; 60 per cent cannot read. Half the population carries tuberculosis. Every year at least 330,000 children die before the age of one (recent reports indicate this figure has risen to about 650,000). One-fifth the population—20 million—are considered mentally disturbed. And the rat population is steadily growing: now 400 million rats, or four rats to every person. This uncontrolled rat population is the breeding ground for bubonic plague.

After 100 years of Schachtian looting, Brazil's population of 100 million cannot resist the epidemics of bacterial meningitis, diphtheria, viral encephalitis, and bubonic plague raging out of control in the country. The meningitis epidemic, which will not peak until August-September, is already affecting more than five times the number of people it attacked in 1974. Last year there were 30,000 cases of meningitis in Sao Paulo alone. In late May the legislative chambers of the state of Parana were closed to the public in the midst of a diphtheria outbreak.

As of May 1 a new strain of usually fatal mosquito-borne encephalitis had begun to spread into Sao Paulo and cities around it. Government squadrons of planes now regularly spray toxic DDT into densely populated working-class slums. All drinking water is being contaminated with pesticides; the city is shrouded in a toxic cloud.

With the abandonment of the Rio de la Plata project, masses of peasants are besieging Brazil's cities and the favela populations are growing at a rate of one rural migrant every eight minutes in Sao Paulo.

Seventy-two per cent of the population die by the age of 50; non-skilled workers are officially recognized as burnt out by the age of 35. The minimum wage is \$47-64 a month; 41 per cent of the workforce makes that wage or less a month. Out of that minimum wage are deducted three Schachtian forced-savings programs, which form one-third of government gross fixed investments and form the principal source of funds for the Brazilian National Development Bank. In 1974 government income looted from workers' salaries was \$5.4 billion. Just to feed his family (not taking into account any expenses other than food) a worker making this wage level must work at least 60 hours a week. Workers' exhaustion and the terrible work conditions in plants contribute to Brazil's two million industrial accidents a year—highest in the world. In Sao Paulo 10 die every day in accidents at work.

Ten years of Rockefeller's looting of Brazil has turned the population into a disease focus. As living standards collapse across the continent, killer epidemics are spreading outward to the rest of Latin America.

Mexico: Mexico's import bill was twice its export income in 1974. This year's debt service on its enormous foreign debt will be close to \$1 billion. To match previously announced import restrictions, in late May the Ministry of Industry

and Commerce announced a 30 per cent price hike on tortillas and bread, among the few staples of the peasant diet. Half of Mexico's population—30 million people—already barely exists on the edge of starvation.

In early May the World Bank announced it was cutting off disbursement of \$90 million in credits to maintain Mexico City's water supply. Water was shut off to working-class districts of the city; for several weeks thousands of working-class families were without water. Also in May the World Bank dictated increases in electric rates as the pre-condition for any further credits for electrical supplies.

According to a report June 8 by Dr. Efraim Shor, head of the Mexican Government Medical Services, 500,000 children suffer from chronic hunger in Mexico City alone. Shor estimated two-thirds of the 3000 children treated every day suffer from diarrhea caused by malnutrition and hunger. He added that in Mexico City there exists a "permanent atmosphere of feces"; almost 100 per cent of the infant mortality (8000 a year in the city) originates from hunger-derived diseases.

Haiti: A drought threatens one million peasants out of a population of five and one-half million with immediate starvation. The government is refusing to send water trucks, and desperate peasants are rioting and digging holes along roadsides looking for water. With the crops burned up by the drought, people have begun eating dogs and rats. On June 7, the first starvation deaths were reported.

Columbia: Hundreds of children die daily from starvation in Colombia. Annually 36,000 children under the age of five starve to death. In the fall of 1974 the government conducted a massive sterilization campaign in northern Colombia; the UN gave \$15 million this January for so-called "family planning."

Total Colombian debt is about \$2.5 billion. Foreign exchange reserves in one year dropped \$200 million to \$382 million by this April. Coffee sales, crucial to the economy, are down 50 per cent; the textile industry, which used to export heavily to the U.S., is bankrupt. By May total exports were down 21 per cent from a year ago.

In January-February it was estimated that cotton planting would be one-third the normal planting. In February the National Association of Rice Growers suggested cutting rice production because they cannot export it at a price which covers production costs. Only 5 per cent of the country's land area is now used for agriculture. Food grows more and more scarce. In March a Colombian newspaper reported "People are only buying what they absolutely need to live."

In February "civic actions" around lack of water began in Barrancabermeja. People forced to bathe in contaminated water were contracting cholera-like gastroenteritis—highly contagious and highly fatal to children, old people, and the malnourished. By February 70 children had died in Villavicencio from gastroenteritis.

By April gastroenteritis had affected 500 children in Barranquilla because of filthy water. In Santa Marta 36 children died; a gastroenteritis epidemic in the city of Velez was tentatively characterized as of the cholera group, never before seen in Colombia.

In late May "civic actions" in Barranquilla erupted over lack of water. With no money allocated for repair the water system collapsed and water had become precious over the

preceeding months, with gallon rations of filthy water selling for 5 pesos. The city's poorer working-class districts got no rations at all.

In the Tumaco region of Colombia 95 per cent of children born suffer from either diseases of the digestive tract or dehydration. Most die in their first year.

The World Bank has loaned Colombia \$160 million this year, funneled through the country's National Food and Health Programs, to drive unemployed thousands out of the cities and into rural areas specifically to increase production of high-calorie low-protein foods.

Chile: Since the CIA overthrow of Salvador Allende's socialist government in September 1973 the cost of living had increased about 22-fold as of September 1974. The annual rate of inflation for the first half of 1975 is officially estimated at 377 per cent. Estimates by Latin American left groups place the annual inflation rate at 1000-2000 per cent. Official unemployment rates as of May are 15 per cent. Seventy per cent of the workforce earns \$45 a month or less; their purchasing power declines at least 1 per cent a day.

Total foreign debt this year is \$4.5 billion, on which debt service will be \$715 million, or 84 per cent of copper earnings. Chile depends entirely on copper exports. Copper earnings are estimated to take on \$800 million loss this year.

Of all children born since 1973, 33 per cent are classified as brain-damaged from malnutrition. Infant deaths from malnutrition in the past year and a half are reported as 13,000. The total population is 10.5 million.

Total wheat imports, according to the ruling Pinochet junta, will be 400,000 tons this year—a 56 per cent decrease from last year. The junta estimates that a total of 1.5 million tons of wheat will be available in Chile in 1975, 25 per cent less than the junta's estimate of national requirements. The discrepancy will almost certainly be much larger.

As of this January industrial outputs had declined 17.8 per cent from year-earlier levels. The Pinochet regime has just announced a slave-labor campaign—a "war on machinery"—to "replace machinery with muscle power."