
AIDS Debate in Britain

Support grows in U.K. for measures rejected by California voters

by Mark Burdman

Hardly had the results of California's Nov. 4 Proposition 64 referendum on AIDS been announced, than dailies in Great Britain were reporting that a newly formed British cabinet committee to combat AIDS would be considering a proposal for doing in Britain, exactly what the voters in California rejected: treating AIDS as a communicable, or in British terms of reference, a "notifiable" disease.

According to a front-page item dispatched by the *Daily Telegraph's* political correspondent Nov. 5, "the top-level cabinet committee considering the government's strategy for combating AIDS is to consider making the disease notifiable. This would give doctors and the authorities power to impose additional restrictions on people diagnosed to be suffering from the disease. Existing notifiable diseases include smallpox, yellow fever, and lassa fever."

Similarly, that day's *Daily Mail* reported, "A dramatic new move to combat the spread of AIDS is to be considered by a special cabinet committee next week. Ministers will discuss making the disease notifiable, giving medical authorities greater control over victims of the killer virus." The *Mail* reported that the results of the California Proposition 64 referendum "on whether to make the disease notifiable," could "influence medical opinion here."

As news of Proposition 64's defeat reached London, the reaction, according to the Nov. 6 *Telegraph*, was "mixed." One AIDS specialist, Prof. Michael Adler of Middlesex Hospital, "warmly welcomed" the defeat, labeling the proposition "counterproductive." But, noted the *Telegraph*, Harley Street consultant Dr. John Seale, believes that the "no" vote was achieved by a "well-orchestrated series of half-truths and lies by scientists, doctors, and public health officials." Identifying Seale as a proponent of "quarantine measures in Britain," the paper quoted him saying that AIDS was communicable by "children playing, adults kissing, mothers caring for children, Good Samaritans looking after sick neighbors, and dentists drilling teeth."

Ironically, on the same day that Proposition 64 was voted down, an early-morning London radio program, the Brian Hayes Show, on the London Broadcasting Corporation, con-

ducted a listeners' poll on AIDS, with the result that 78% of those polled favored screening measures for AIDS, and only 22% voted against. This poll confirmed results of a late-October telephone call taken by Thames Television's "This Week" show, which resulted in upwards of 70% of those polled favoring screening. These results are consistent with a European-wide pattern, evident from polls taken in several countries, showing overwhelming popular support for AIDS screening measures.

Perhaps reflecting this mood, the *Daily Mail* editorialized Nov. 5 that the aim of the new British Cabinet Committee on AIDS "should be to make mass screening for AIDS routine," starting with the "millions of public servants in Britain." Although quarantine and isolation would be "impractical" and "inhumane," the *Mail* argued, screening would mean that AIDS sufferers "can receive all the medical help available and carriers can be left in no doubt of the lethal consequence to others of their own promiscuity."

Also, the *Times* of London's Letters to the Editor page on Nov. 5, had three letters, under the heading, "AIDS screening for high-risk groups." The first of these was written by Michael B. Bracken of the Yale University School of Medicine, Connecticut, who called for "a massive, voluntary, and confidential AIDS screening program" to be adopted in AIDS-stricken countries. Bracken warned, "The AIDS epidemic has the potential for becoming the greatest threat to civilization since the bubonic plague and only draconian public health measures are likely to bring about its control."

The day before, the *Times* had become the first British paper to dare to publicize the fact that the well-known Dr. Seale had been cooperating with Proposition 64. In the context of a general feature on Lyndon LaRouche, the *Times* noted, "Seale will be attending an international conference on AIDS organized by *Executive Intelligence Review*" on the Nov. 8-9 weekend.

California as 'negative example'

Among certain British experts since Nov. 4, the evaluation is circulating that the radio-poll results could reflect the

"negative example" of California, that is, that the decision by California voters to reject public health measures to deal with the AIDS epidemic is an indication to Britons, and other Europeans as well, of what not to do in response to the AIDS pandemic. On the eve of Proposition 64, Scottish television ran a several-day feature on AIDS, one segment of which documented how, in New York City, 1 of every 16 of the city's 7.5 million people is infected with AIDS!

As the *Daily Telegraph* wrote in a lead editorial Nov. 4, were the British public to become more aware of the AIDS situation in the United States, "support for much tougher measures by the government might become overwhelming."

Other British papers pointed to the future for Britain becoming more and more like that in the United States. The *Sunday Times* of London, Nov. 2, stated, "Britain is now where the United States was four years ago." The paper noted that, in the United States, "the failure of a widespread 'Safer Sex' campaign to check the spread of the disease, and a growing feeling that the authorities have lost control, has triggered much more drastic and socially-divisive policy suggestions than any proposed in Britain." The paper reported, in negative terms, on Proposition 64, but was obliged to admit, that even if Proposition 64 were to lose on Nov. 4, this "would in no way calm the sense of panic which brought it into public view."

Other articles in the *Sunday Times* reported some alarming figures. One piece revealed that a growing number of AIDS cases are being called "unknowns," because no one has discovered any mode of virus transmission along the so-called high-risk routes. The *Sunday Times* admitted that saliva "has certainly been found to contain the virus, though in far smaller quantities than in blood or semen, the normal vehicles of transmission." Further: "Even tears and breast-milk have not been cleared entirely. So there is at least a remote chance of infection through such activities as kissing, mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, dentistry, drinking from the communion chalice, or, even it has been suggested, trying out an unsterilized contact lens."

Another *Sunday Times* piece, under the title, "Explosion of AIDS deaths is forecast," began: "Deaths from AIDS in Britain could reach 20,000 to 40,000 in 10-20 years." This forecast came from a new computerized analysis on likely AIDS spread, done by Birmingham University Professor of Social Medicine George Knox, who told the paper that AIDS-casualty figures "are of the same order as lung cancer now, or tuberculosis in the 1920s."

The *Sunday Times* also emphasized that the latest evidence shows that AIDS is spreading out of the so-called high-risk categories, into the general population, with a growing rate of AIDS cases reported among heterosexuals.

In addition, some local AIDS flashpoints in the U.K. are displaying conditions not unlike the worst of cases in the United States. In the city of Edinburgh, Scotland, for example, the rate of AIDS infection among intravenous drug users

is reportedly as high as in New York City. Cases of babies being born from AIDS-diseased, drug-using mothers, who themselves have the infection, are being reported. An Edinburgh obstetrician, Dr. John Loudon, has made the controversial proposal that AIDS screening-tests for pregnant mothers be made compulsory, and be carried out over the mother's objections, should there be any.

'Desperately late, tragically late'

The Thatcher government has appointed a cabinet-level committee whose purpose will be, in the words of the *Sunday Telegraph* Nov. 2, "to work out a national strategy to halt the lightning spread of AIDS," and "to bring the whole range of government expertise to bear on the problem for the first time."

Many observers in Britain express the fear that the committee would lack the will to actually deal with AIDS decisively. For "economic reasons," *EIR* has been told by sources in a position to know, the Thatcher government will likely shy away from taking radical public health measures on AIDS, although that might change under enough pressure and under conditions where the terror of inaction overrides the fiscal-austerity, "privatization" mentality prevalent in government advisory circles.

The committee is to be headed by Viscount Whitelaw, and will also include Social Services Secretary Norman Baker, Foreign Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe, Education Secretary Kenneth Baker, and Home Secretary Douglas Hurd.

Several British editorials beginning Nov. 2, demanded that the Thatcher government do something, quickly and decisively, to respond to the AIDS crisis. Under the heading, "Dangerous Delay," the *Sunday Mail* Nov. 2 exclaimed, "It is really extraordinary that the government is still dithering over what to do about AIDS." The paper stressed: "AIDS is not just another disease. For as this newspaper has consistently sought to point out, if it is allowed to run unchecked, it will very soon represent a public health hazard greater than tuberculosis ever was, and perhaps even approaching the dimensions of the Black Death in the Middle Ages. That is not alarmist talk—that is a coldly calculated fact which can be quite easily extrapolated from the course which the disease has run so far.

"Priority should now be given to putting men and materials behind a bid firstly to educate the public properly as to the part they can play, and secondly to finance the scientific community to find a cure.

"If this generation continues to procrastinate, it will not lightly be forgiven."

On Nov. 5, the *Daily Mail*, in the same editorial cited above calling for routine screening for AIDS, warned: "There is no cure for AIDS. Those who contract it die. The number of victims is doubling every ten months. As for the number of carriers, estimates vary from 30,000 to 100,000. Only now, desperately late, tragically late, is the government nerv-

ing itself to lead the counter-offensive. . . . The war to contain the spread of AIDS must, if it is to have any hope of success, be waged all-out. . . . What we fear is that even now Lord Whitelaw and the others may not realize it is going to take more, far more than a public relations exercise to combat this insidious and fast spreading plague.”

From a different political standpoint, the liberal *Guardian*, on Nov. 4, under the title, “Only a Start in AIDS Fight,” welcomed the new Cabinet committee, as a possible “important step towards a more serious public approach to the disease,” but stated that there must still be “real concern that it has come unnecessarily late. . . . If a more serious approach had been taken two years ago, lives could have been prolonged. High-level attention to AIDS is important. But it is vital that Lord Whitelaw and his team do more than just strike attitudes. . . . Lord Whitelaw and his colleagues must be prepared to follow through the logic of the setting-up of their committee. We know there is a crisis and a growing threat. That crisis has to be addressed as a matter of priority, and much more than a matter of public relations.”

Although expressing skepticism about screening, the *Guardian* called for “an international agreement about controls over [the spread of AIDS] through travel,” combined with large-scale assistance programs to AIDS-flashpoint areas in Africa and elsewhere in the developing sector.

‘Awesome political retribution’

Ninety members of the British Parliament, almost all from Mrs. Thatcher’s Conservative Party, put forward a special motion Nov. 3, calling on the BBC and the Independent Broadcasting Authority to provide free broadcasting time to inform the public about the dangers of AIDS.

Also, with national elections likely in 1987, the first shots may have been fired in an “AIDS war” between the political parties. Commentator Paul Johnson, writing in the *Daily Mail* under the heading, “AIDS: The Danger Labour Ignores at Britain’s Peril,” exposed how the opposition Labour Party’s alliance with the “homosexual lobby,” and attempts to sabotage the Thatcher government’s war on drug-traffickers, have expedited the spread of AIDS. Johnson also attacked the hypocrisy of Labour’s anti-nuclear campaign, following the Soviet Chernobyl nuclear disaster, while Labour actions, at the same time, “entail real risks of hastening the spread of an undoubted large-scale killer—AIDS. . . . In Britain, AIDS has already killed over 250 people—many, many more than have so far died in the Soviet Union as a result of Chernobyl. A report to the cabinet warns that a further 3,000 will die in the next three years and that 300,000 more will be infected. In short, unlike nuclear power, AIDS is a genuine mass-threat to British lives.”

Johnson concluded: “On the issue of AIDS and the homosexual connection, Labour is playing with human lives. As the public grasps this fact, there could be an awesome political retribution.”

Liberal press fears Prop 64’s impact

From hundreds of news reports and feature articles on California’s Proposition 64 around the world, we have selected the following as indicative of the international impact of the initiative.

U.S.A.

Newsweek, major liberal U.S. weekly magazine, Nov. 10

Noting that President Reagan has made few comments on the epidemic, *Newsweek* says: “He may yet be forced into it. Even at its present level, the AIDS epidemic threatens to swamp the nation’s health-care system. . . . AIDS poses profound ethical and legal questions . . . and it has become an issue in electoral politics as well. This week, for example, California voters will decide on Proposition 64, a cunningly-crafted referendum item that could force state officials to isolate and quarantine AIDS victims. Sponsored by the disciples of political extremist Lyndon LaRouche, Proposition 64 seems destined for defeat. But it may still be a harbinger of a national debate on AIDS—a debate that could require Reagan, that most cheerful of Middle Americans, to commit his office to controlling this ghastly epidemic.”

Germany

Die Zeit, West German liberal daily associated with the Trilateral Commission, a full-page feature article, written as a position paper for a Nov. 6-7 West Berlin meeting on social and political implications of AIDS, by Erwin Haeberle, of the California-based Institute for the Advanced Study of Human Sexuality.

“LaRouche, at least, will be very satisfied, even if he has a defeat, because he argues there will be further spread of AIDS, and intends to campaign on the spread of AIDS, and the growing general fear. . . . He will attack all those who went against the referendum. He will make political capital out of this.

”[LaRouche is] a political paranoiac [who heads] a right-wing political sect, the National Democratic Policy Committee.

”[California authorities] are rightfully trembling with fear that PANIC could be successful. . . . As polls show, the voters do not know enough to guarantee a clear defeat for the referendum. Many [California influentials] regret having played around with the proposal for quarantine, because now, the matter is to be decided upon by popular vote. It is now