

# Soviets mobilize to combat AIDS

by Luba George

While Western governments sleep, the Soviet Union has launched a war to contain the spread of the deadly AIDS virus in the U.S.S.R. The Aug. 13 weekly meeting of the Soviet Politburo adopted "additional measures" to stop the spread of AIDS, including "deepening international actions to combat the disease." This was reported front-page by all Soviet newspapers on Aug. 14.

The Politburo statement was followed on Aug. 14 by the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers' announcement of a crash program outlining the "Basic Course in the Development of Defense of the Health of the Population and Restructuring [*Perestroika*] of the Public Health Services of the U.S.S.R. in the 12th Five-Year Plan for the Period up to the Year 2000." The program is directly linked to the military *perestroika* sweeping the Soviet Union. Besides the obvious national security question of containing AIDS and stressing the need to accelerate "basic research" in the areas of "immunology, biotechnology, genetic engineering," etc., the program demands a vast upgrading of sports and physical fitness activities among Soviet youth. The document contains numerous other health-related directives referring to wartime contingencies, making sure that the Soviet health system can "act quickly" to handle any foreseeable situation.

Anti-AIDS measures to be adopted include mandating that every Soviet citizen must have a compulsory annual medical examination, including blood tests. Through the obligatory blood tests, each and every Soviet citizen will be "quietly" tested for AIDS. This will enable the Soviet authorities to take effective quarantine actions for those found to have AIDS.

The announced new health program involves nothing less than instituting over the next 15 years, a complete *perestroika*, or overhaul, of the public health system. It calls for vastly "expanding scientific-research facilities and public health services" for the masses. During this timeframe, investments for hospital construction will double, and 1,500,000 new hospital beds will be added. The Central Committee measures stress the need to "improve measures" against "infectious diseases," and to drastically "improve the quality of domestically produced medical equipment."

Moreover, concludes the document: "The *perestroika* of the public health services and large-scale government measures . . . will enlarge the role of public health services in the development of socialist society and its economy, as well as *strengthening the defense capabilities of the country*. [Emphasis added.]"

That something "big" was in store on the AIDS front in the Soviet Union, was signaled by an article in the Soviet party's youth newspaper, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, July 30. The *Komsomolskaya Pravda* article broke the Soviet media censorship which has ludicrously understated the number of AIDS cases in the U.S.S.R. (The official Soviet press line had been that "only a handful" of Soviet citizens have AIDS, and several dozen foreigners, mainly Third World students residing in the U.S.S.R.; for this latter category, even privately leaked Soviet estimates spoke of some 200 foreign students with AIDS.)

*Komsomolskaya Pravda* inaugurated a new media policy by reporting that 1,000 foreign students living in the U.S.S.R. are infected with AIDS. With about 100,000 foreigners studying in the Soviet Union, that represents a 1% rate of AIDS-infected. Such an article is unthinkable in the Soviet Union without Politburo-level clearance. The article called on Soviet officials to deport all AIDS-infected foreigners, and urged all Soviet youths, and for that matter older citizens, to avoid any sexual contact with foreigners, students or otherwise, to avoid becoming infected with AIDS, what *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and other Soviet media call, "the imported disease." The tens of millions of young readers of *Komsomolskaya Pravda* were warned to especially stay away from "intimate contact" with Africans and Americans.

## Registering addicts

The Soviet Union is not waiting for the first of the annual medical examinations to begin instituting quarantine measures. One of the AIDS high-risk groups is drug addicts. Beginning last year, the Soviet Interior Ministry has been ordered to locate and register drug addicts. The effects of this operation can be seen through monitoring Soviet newspapers for articles which periodically state the number of registered drug addicts in the Soviet Union. The number of registered drug addicts has risen from about 20,000 to 46,000.

The most recent illustration of this campaign was reported by TASS on Aug. 17, in a long article announcing the end of a successful three-month drug crackdown on illegal poppy fields and opium production in the Soviet Central Asian Republic of Uzbekistan. TASS revealed that the operation, in which "hundreds" were arrested, involved "thousands of police," equipped with "light planes and helicopters." Over 2,000 illegal poppy fields were destroyed, and half a ton of opium was confiscated. In the Soviet war on AIDS, finding the addicts is as important as locating the suppliers. The TASS release illustrated this by noting prominently that "hundreds of addicts" were "identified and registered."