

## Africa Report by Mary Lalevée

### Anti-IMF, anti-AIDS fight the same

*President Kaunda's announcement about his son's death puts a spotlight on the economic cofactors of AIDS in Africa.*

Just how far the disease AIDS is devastating Africa's population was made tragically clear when Zambia's President Kaunda told a press conference on Oct. 5, 1987 that one of his own sons, Masuzyo, aged 32, had died of AIDS last December. At the press conference, Kaunda issued an urgent plea for more funds to fight the disease, saying, "It does not need my son's death to appeal to the international community to treat the question of AIDS as a world problem. It is something that is so serious, that once again I plead with the World Health Organization and those in a position to help fund the campaign against AIDS. We want to fight this together, regardless of who dies from it."

President Kaunda had already called on the WHO in October 1985 to declare "war" on AIDS, in a similar fashion to the war it had waged on smallpox over the previous 15 years, apparently successfully eliminating that killer disease.

The death of Kaunda's son seems to have shaken some circles in the advanced sector who have been previously complacent about the threat of AIDS in Africa: The British *Daily Telegraph* published a strongly worded article entitled "AIDS wiping out Africa's urban middle classes," quoting, the awful reality of AIDS in Africa as described in an article in the January issue of the German publication *AIDS-Forschung* (extensively reported in *EIR*, March 13, and May 8, 1987).

In a revealing statement, the *Daily Telegraph* writes, "When AIDS first appeared in Africa, some aid workers guiltily whispered about it counterbal-

ancing billowing overpopulation. But it is not the myriad children in the rural areas who have caught the disease, nor the unemployed youths in the shanty towns. It is the young men and women who should be bearing the hope of Africa. That they are targets, says *AIDS-Forschung*, 'will have crippling effects on the already unsteady economies of African states.'"

The *Daily Telegraph* writes, "AIDS in Africa is hitting the urban middle class—the teachers, administrators, doctors, engineers, traders, mechanics, and military officers whose skills and education are so vital for the development and future of African countries. . . . In Zambia, it is believed that *more than half of the Zambian army is already infected with the virus*, and a doctor in London says there is evidence to show that the percentage of those infected increases with rank. At the main hospital in Lusaka, Zambia's capital, *more than a third of the young men who were tested last year were infected with the virus*. . . . In Kitwe, in the industrial copper belt, 44.4% of female patients at the hospital tested positive for AIDS [emphasis added]."

The rapid spread of AIDS in Africa shows that low living standards, poverty, malnutrition, the presence of many endemic diseases, and infestations of insects must play an important role in the transmission of the virus. Insect transmission may well play a larger role than admitted in most scientific circles at present, given the dense insect population of the area of Central Africa that is worst affected, the fact that the spread of the disease

in the population is similar to the spread of malaria, which is transmitted by insect, and that the AIDS virus has been found in insects such as bedbugs and mosquitoes. Clearly, the routes of transmission of the disease so far most common in the advanced sector (homosexual relations, infected drug addicts sharing needles, and blood transfusions) cannot account for the incredible spread of AIDS in Africa.

Heterosexual transmission apparently plays a much larger role in Africa, perhaps due to generally lower resistance to infection caused by poorer living conditions.

It is no coincidence that President Kaunda has been the one African President to actually break with the International Monetary Fund, and to implement the "Peru solution," deciding that no more than 10% of export revenue should be used for debt repayment. IMF policies have significantly—and deliberately—lowered living standards in Africa. Speaking at the U.N. General Assembly, President Kaunda announced that he was calling an "emergency meeting" of African heads of state on the world economy next month, earlier than originally planned. Commenting on this call, an official of a U.N. relief agency active in Africa commented in a radio interview, "The world is not aware of how immediate the crisis is in Africa, and how much suffering there is."

Now, Sudan is once again being subjected to the very same austerity policies that Kaunda has rejected, and that actually led to the overthrow of the previous government of Numeiri. The government has agreed to price increases of 26% on gasoline and 66.6% on sugar. The Sudanese pound was devalued by 44%. The announcement of these measures led to immediate riots in the capital, in which 25 people were injured.