

Soviets ready AIDS policy shift

by Luba George

Will the Soviet Union, with already the severest anti-AIDS measures in the world, become the first industrial country to institute quarantine for AIDS virus carriers? During June and July the Soviet media mooted the possibility of using panic to stir up popular support for quarantine and other measures, in order “to minimize the extent of the catastrophe.”

“The AIDS pandemic,” writes *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, a popular weekly, “has created a situation which is unprecedented in the history of mankind. . . . In the year 1991, the number of virus carriers is going to reach millions. We are led to make the unavoidable comparison with the ‘Black Death’—the plague which raged in Europe in the 14th century.”

Author Valentin Ostrovsky, citing a West German source, presents a horrifying picture of New York City. “Every week there are funerals. . . . Thousands of New Yorkers have already died. Tens of thousands are in their last phase of the disease. 500,000 AIDS carriers live in New York. . . . You can see AIDS everywhere. In many, it’s written all over their faces. . . . You can’t get it out of your mind. In every family or circle of friends, there is at least one person infected with AIDS, one AIDS carrier, one doomed to die.”

The article focuses on the “main risk groups”—homosexuals, prostitutes, drug addicts—linked to what is termed a huge problem of sexual promiscuity inside the East bloc, especially in East Germany. Then, in an interview with a leading East German AIDS expert, a Dr. Brinkmann. *Literaturnaya Gazeta* posed the questions: “Don’t you think that the employment of a panic would not be such a bad idea? . . . In your country and in our country, the frequent change of sexual partners has become almost the norm for a large number of the population. . . . Wouldn’t panic limit promiscuity to a certain degree?

“Isn’t it humane, for the sake of the healthy population, to isolate AIDS carriers? . . . Take the leper hospitals. They existed and exist today. And no one thinks anything bad of it. . . . So why, in that connection, when mankind is faced with a deadly dangerous disease, should we tolerate liberalism?”

The article concludes on this angry note: “To pretend that things are not what they are is criminal irresponsibility. One has to look facts in the face and not turn one’s face or close one’s eyes. The sirens are sounding: Misfortune has befallen

mankind. We must still live side by side with AIDS for many years. And, for many, this co-habitation will turn to tragedy. We must do everything we can within our means to minimize the extent of the catastrophe.”

AIDS and the ‘enemy image’

The No. 28 issue of a second mass-circulation weekly, *Ogonyok*, in a rare admission, reported that risk groups in the Soviet Union are much larger than officially admitted: “Between 2% and 5% of all Soviet males are homosexual.” A Russian sociologist and member of the International Academy of Sexological Research, Igor S. Konozh, is quoted: “Let’s be frank. . . . The danger of getting AIDS has long broken out of the ‘preserves’ of the risk groups. . . . This epidemic is spreading fast here. . . . The homosexuals were the first to be hit with the epidemic. But today, we have evidence that shows that heterosexual relations are about to reach the level of homosexuals in terms of the danger of contracting the disease. . . . AIDS has already been registered not only in Moscow and other cities, but even in the hinterland.”

Konozh debunks the myth of Soviet “moral integrity and sexual non-promiscuity,” saying that “state officials” don’t seem to care that “we’ve reached first place in abortions . . . and that our people are being infected with AIDS and we are faced with a frightening epidemic.” Konozh remarks that in Bulgaria last fall, he and other sociologists doing a poll on attitudes about AIDS were shocked that “a high percentage of the answers showed support for isolation of AIDS carriers.” Some had even called for measures just “short of extermination” of AIDS carriers. “And this was the voice of the youth!”

“AIDS,” he continued, “in a certain way is a test for mankind concerning humanity and healthy thinking.” AIDS, for the Soviet people, has taken on an “enemy image.” “Although the number of infected is still small, we have already found enemies: the prostitutes, homosexuals, and drug addicts. . . . The hatred that the population feels for these groups . . . brings out horror in me.”

Ogonyok reports a case in a small town where a couple discovered to have AIDS were barely rescued from a lynch mob who demanded their “isolation.” “They were locked up by doctors in an *isolator* . . . like animals in a cage.” The doctors allowed journalists to examine and photograph them behind glass. When word of this reached Moscow, they were transferred to a quarantine station in a Moscow clinic. When it comes to AIDS, there is no such thing as “medical confidentiality” in the U.S.S.R., the article explained.

The official lies

On Oct. 6, 1985, deputy Soviet Health Minister Pyotr Bargasov, interviewed by the trade union paper *Trud* said, “AIDS is a Western problem. . . . It is largely a social one, since it is connected with sexual promiscuity and homosexuality. . . . This, alas, is tolerated in certain circles in the

West, but it is unnatural in our society." At the International Conference on AIDS in London last February, Health Minister Yevgeni Chazov shocked journalists when he said that the Soviet people have "no need to panic," implying strongly that they were *genetically superior* to their Western counterparts.

The same Chazov, writing for the Foreign Ministry publication *International Affairs*, stated, "Luckily, we are far better off than the capitalist states. . . . The virus has hit the population of North America the hardest (over 10,000 AIDS cases have been registered in New York alone), and that of Western Europe . . . an impressive number of victims, and their number is growing not in arithmetical, but in geometrical progression. . . . We have only one person ill with AIDS."

In an Aug. 23, 1987 Soviet TV interview, the son of the president of the Academy of Medical Sciences, Vadim Valentinovich Pokrovsky, who runs the laboratory for prevention and treatment of AIDS, claimed that only four people, three foreigners and one Soviet, had contracted AIDS in the U.S.S.R., while some 100 foreign citizens had tested positive. But on Aug. 27, 1987, only four days later, *Trud* reported that 102 people in the U.S.S.R. have AIDS, 80 of whom are foreigners, i.e., 22 were Soviets.

An Aug. 27, 1987 Soviet TV program, *90 Minutes*, quoted Pokrovsky, "About 130 people are infected with the AIDS virus." Now, official Soviet AIDS statistics for 1988 depicted an increase of 115% over only four months.

AIDS transmission is a crime

On March 24, 1987 the organ of the Moscow Communist Party Youth, *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, reported a growing problem of homosexuality in the Soviet Union, and demanded that homosexuality be treated as a crime. It said that the "increasing frequency" of divorce and single parenthood had "disturbed the process of sexual role identification."

It denounced talk of repealing laws that defined homosexuality as "criminal behavior," because that "would be the same as advertising for it." Law enforcement agencies, it said, should be more diligent in patrolling areas where homosexuals are known to gather.

The Soviet Union has already taken unprecedented measures to stop the spread of the disease. Last autumn, the Supreme Soviet decreed that the transmission of the AIDS disease be made a "criminal offense," retroactive to Aug. 25, 1987. The decree also provided for mandatory testing of everyone living in the U.S.S.R., and mandatory hospitalization of any citizen and expulsion of any foreigner refusing to be tested.

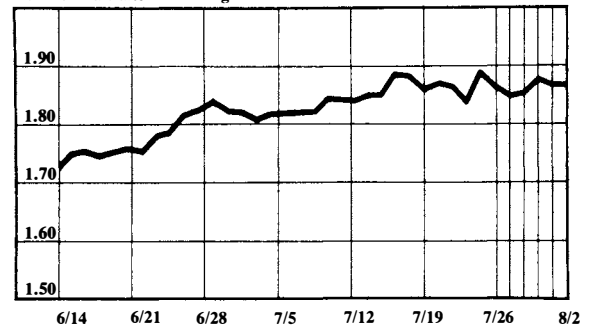
The next step could be quarantine, Soviet-style.

On June 10, Health Ministry official Mikhail Narkevich announced that 380 centers to test for AIDS had been established, and were performing more than 1.5 million tests a month. By the end of 1988, more than 1,000 such centers will have been established, he said.

Currency Rates

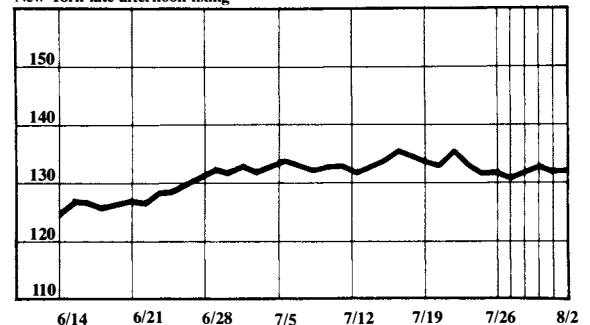
The dollar in deutschmarks

New York late afternoon fixing



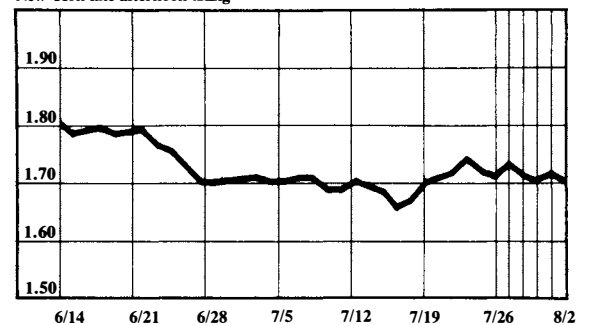
The dollar in yen

New York late afternoon fixing



The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing



The dollar in Swiss francs

New York late afternoon fixing

