

The AIDS tragedy is on the Mexican agenda

by Hugo López Ochoa

Between Dec. 13 and 17, Mexican press and radio intermittently reported on statements of the assistant medical director of Mexico's Social Security Institute (IMSS), Adalia F. Lee Ramos, who insisted that the possibility that AIDS could be transmitted by mosquito bite or French kissing was merely a "personal opinion" of Dr. Ricardo Veronesi, president of the Brazilian Society of Infectious Disease Studies, and Dr. Mark Whiteside, co-director of the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Miami, Florida.

Dr. Ramos's statements, however, could not hold back the avalanche of favorable nationwide coverage of Veronesi and Whiteside's warnings, issued at several international seminars held in Mexico between Dec. 4 and 11, on "The True Dimensions of the AIDS Epidemic" (see *EIR*, Dec. 21, 1990). For example, the semi-official news agency Notimex, usually published in all of Mexico's regional press, issued a feature headlined "New Forms of AIDS Contagion Discovered." The Dec. 13 story stressed that unsanitary conditions and mosquitoes are a major source of contagion, and drew the obvious conclusion that "Mexico has the necessary conditions" for this mode of transmission, in the not-too-distant future." The Notimex wire provoked responses by prominent national radio commentators, including Pedro Ferríz de Cohn and Guillermo Ochoa. It also merited cartoons and epigrams in several of the regional newspapers which delighted in illustrating the inefficacy of condoms for so-called "safe sex."

The government's impotence in attempting to block the truth on the means by which AIDS is spread and the widespread threat of the epidemic, is a direct consequence of the generalized indignation of Mexicans against the "educational" campaigns' depiction of Catholicism's moral principles as being obstacles to the "sex education" curricula. The government is also attempting to cover up the truth is also because there is no way to hide the fact that its expensive propaganda has failed to slow the disease's rate of spread.

An *EIR* special task force on the biological holocaust studied the latest statistics on AIDS in Mexico. Berta Farfán, a medical doctor, presented the results at the international seminars. She showed that the number of AIDS victims detected by Mexican health facilities—which currently stands at 5,400—is doubling every year. The government itself admits that the figure is actually 20% higher. The epidemio-

logical authorities have conveyed the idea that the epidemic's rate of increase has diminished, because the proportion of new cases coming from transmission by homosexual and bisexual intercourse has diminished in respect to the total number of new cases.

However, the absolute number of cases attributed to sexual transmission continues its exponential climb, especially the heterosexual component.

- While only 1 woman had the disease for every 13 men in 1985, in 1990 there is 1 woman for every 5 men with the disease.

- In 1987, *undocumented* cases were only 1.9% of the total; in August of this year, the presumed causes of 12.9% of the total cases were not reported.

- The same is the case with transmission by blood transfusion. These cases were 2.9% in 1985, but 17.8% of total cases as of August 1990.

The percentage of cases attributable to sexual transmission fell in respect to the total only because of the accelerated increase in the absolute numbers and the proportion of cases caused by other means of transmission. But the absolute number of cases continues increasing exponentially, as it has from the beginning.

Sex ed or public health

Dr. Veronesi insisted that "sex ed" is the way governments delegate their responsibility for slowing the rate of contagion to the isolated individual. Were they to admit that environmental factors such as malnutrition and filthy living conditions contributed to the spread of the disease, stopping it would require the government to implement traditional public health policies. It would have to improve infrastructure, spray with insecticides, improve living standards and human living environments, provide adequate health facilities, etc. All these things mean *expenditures*. This is the point over which the real battle broke out over Veronesi and Whiteside's revelations.

Mexico will spend 25.6% of the federal budget on debt service. The budget for health, labor, and social services is 12%—28.6 billion pesos. Of that, 5.1 billion pesos will go to the National Solidarity Program (Pronasol), subsidies to poor areas basically to buy votes for the ruling party. One-fifth of this electoral budget would finance testing the entire Mexican population for AIDS.

In the state of Sonora, a group of deputies will ask the state legislature during the 1991 budget debate to raise health expenditures, which are now only 4% of all budget allocations. The group is headed by Adalberto Rosas López of the National Action Party (PAN) and Cecilia Soto de Estévez of the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM), both members of the Sonora State Committee against AIDS, which co-sponsored the seminars in Sonora. Their success would set a precedent for federal Senate debates on a new national AIDS policy scheduled for next year.