

my. It is expected to involve the work force of the vital oil and gas industry, and the cities—such as Magnitogorsk, Chelyabinsk, and Sverdlovsk—of the steel and heavy industry belt of the Urals.

Also on April 26, a one-day general strike protest was called in Ukraine and Belorussia to mark the fifth anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear plant catastrophe. This action comes on top of a strike of 15 major industrial enterprises in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev, which has been under way since April 16, and the renewal of a political strike affecting most of the large industrial plants in Belorussia, starting in the capital of Minsk.

Economy nears total collapse

The strike-ridden Soviet economy, already faltering before the miners' strike had begun in March, has reached a precipice. The picture of the economy from the statistics given by Pavlov to the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet during his presentation of the "anti-crisis program" on April 22, was grim enough, even before the coal strike had reached its full intensity. Pavlov reported that in the first quarter of this year, U.S.S.R.-wide industrial production had been 10.5% below plan target, and agriculture 13% below target. As the Soviet news agency TASS reported the same day, in March alone, 1,169,000 working days had been lost due to strikes, and the toll for April would be far higher. As Pavlov stressed, catastrophe was looming, within a few weeks at most, unless dramatic action was taken immediately.

By April 24-25, Soviet media were beginning to detail, location by location, the horrendous effects of the coal strike on the rest of the economy, as the protest moved into its eighth week. Already on April 16, TASS was sounding the alarm, citing the growing threat of shutdown of steel plants by the strike, with a sharp drop in steel production having created a "disastrous effect" on the country's machine-building sector and other heavy industry: "This will affect every branch of the economy, including agricre. Spare parts for agriculture machinery are particularly scarce now, at the height of the spring planting season." Steel production was threatened with extinction, as stocks of coking coal were fast disappearing. The first blast furnace closures were being reported in the Urals steel and industrial centers of Magnitogorsk and Nizhni Tagil.

This news is extremely important, because unless the closure pattern in the Urals were to be stopped, it will soon begin to have an impact on military industry. Nizhni Tagil, for example, houses the world's largest plant engaged in the production of main battle tanks.

As TASS commented on April 16, "If strikes continue . . . we shall face complete economic collapse." Will the figure of Boris Yeltsin, the only national figure who still enjoys popularity, who joined the call for all strikes to immediately end, stave off, at least for now, that cataclysm? The answer is not clear, but will not be long in coming.

International usury is breeding cholera

by Valerie Rush

A cholera pandemic of "monstrous proportions" will sweep Ibero-America, unless and until those nations "restore their international financial acceptability," according to the London *Times*, the Anglo-American establishment's premier mouthpiece, of April 23. In an editorial entitled "The Spectre of Cholera," the *Times* observes that the countries of South and Central America "cannot afford sanitation" because they have not kept the international credit institutions happy.

Focusing in on Peru, the epicenter of the cholera epidemic that has now spread to at least four other countries and claimed over 1,200 lives, the *Times* insists that "Peru's poor economic performance lies at the root of its trouble. . . . The country has asked for a foreign loan to build sewage treatment plants. Such money is unlikely to be forthcoming until Peru restores its international financial acceptability. Ex-President Alan García's refusal to pay Peru's rescheduled debts means that public health projects, financed by such agencies as the World Bank, ceased." Now, the *Times* concludes sadistically, Peru is paying the price for its short-lived bid for sovereignty. "The government can do little more than exhort citizens to boil drinking water (if they can afford the kerosene)."

No more credit

This criminal "Shylock mentality" is by no means addressed only to Peru. According to a letter just sent by the head of the International Finance Institute (IFI), a grouping of 170 private banks worldwide, to the 152 member nations of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, any nation slow to sign an agreement on payment of its arrears should face an immediate loan cutoff. IFI director Horst Schulmann labeled Brazil a "typical bad debtor," and insisted that Brazil has sufficient reserves to pay all its banking debt at once, but is holding onto them as leverage for wresting concessions from its creditors. "I have no sympathy for countries which intentionally accumulate arrears as a negotiating tactic," wrote Schulmann, who went on to conclude that the decade of the nineties would be one of severe capital shortage, and that Ibero-America in particular should get used to the idea of surviving without credit.

The IFI “proposal” is, in fact, already policy among international lending circles. The Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), a wholly-owned subsidiary of the U.S. State Department, voted in March to suspend an *already approved* \$350 million loan for sewage construction in Brazil’s shantytowns, as a pressure tactic to force that country’s government to sign an agreement with its creditors to catch up on \$8 billion in interest arrears owed on its foreign debt.

The IADB loan suspension not accidentally coincided with the spread of cholera, a disease that is spread by human waste-contaminated water, into Brazil.

The Collor de Mello government yielded to the U.S.-sponsored bank pressure and signed the agreement, and made a downpayment of \$900 million and a promise to pay \$2.3 billion more in 1991. Just weeks later, however, IFI is still calling Brazil a bad boy, and the IADB loan for urgent sewage construction has yet to be released. So much for giving up a pound of flesh.

‘Good boys’ don’t always win out

The same letter by IFI director Schulmann called Mexico an exemplary “good debtor.”

And indeed, Mexican Health Secretary Jesús Kumate Rodríguez insisted April 18 that all talk of a cholera epidemic ultimately reaching Mexico was sheer “sensationalism,” since adequate health and sanitation measures had been taken in his country “long ago.” Said Kumate, “There is nothing more to be said in this regard.”

And yet one can’t help but ask if the official doth perhaps protest too much. That same day a lower-echelon official of Kumate’s department expressed concern over the 55,000 deaths per year in Mexico of children under the age of five due to “diarrheal diseases,” of which cholera is but one variation. Neither official acknowledged the 40-50% collapse in living standards in Mexico since “good boy” Salinas and his predecessor, Miguel de la Madrid, made debt repayment a priority over their own nation’s economic and social needs.

Neither did these Mexican officials make any reference to the so-called *maquiladora* belt in northern Mexico, where 500,000 workers work under appalling sweat-shop conditions for slave wages, with their families crammed into chemical-contaminated cardboard boxes and forced to bathe and drink from ditch water contaminated with industrial and human waste. Hepatitis, dysentery, tuberculosis, and other diseases of poverty are dramatically higher than the national norm in this U.S.-Mexico border region, where only one asymptomatic cholera carrier would suffice to trigger an epidemic that would rapidly traverse the border.

U.S. ripe for cholera outbreak

While Americans are congratulating themselves that cholera could never break out in the United States, *EIR* investigators have already discovered that in towns that straddle the U.S.-Mexico border, such as El Paso, Matamoros-

Brownsville, Tijuana, and Ciudad Juárez, hundreds of thousands of people live with no running water, sewage, or electricity. Since spring 1990, an 18-mile canal that parallels a stretch of the Rio Grande River frequently overflows with raw sewage. In Matamoros-Brownsville, conditions were so bad that it took threat of legal action to force one “developer” to install one water spigot to serve 40 “homes.” There is no water treatment on either side of the Tijuana border.

The impoverished and violence-ravaged nations of Central America, a natural pathway for cholera’s entrance into Mexico, and points north, had more realistically planned a presidential summit on cholera for April 26 in Panama, to try to plot out an emergency containment strategy against the spreading disease. The earthquake that hit portions of Costa Rica and Panama on April 22, killing more than 70 people, injuring over 800, and causing vast damage on both sides of the border, led to a cancellation of the summit meeting by the Endara government in Panama. It has also led to widespread speculation that the cholera bacillus will gain an easy foothold in those countries’ quake-damaged areas, where poor and largely black agricultural workers live.

The delusions persist

During the weekend of April 20-22, health ministers from the five Andean nations of Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Peru, as well as from Argentina, Cuba, and Chile, gathered in Sucre, Bolivia to try to address the cholera pandemic. Apparently oblivious to the stated policy of the IADB and International Finance Institute, the health ministers came out of their meeting calling in vain on the international credit institutions to invest in improving water purification and sanitation projects throughout the cholera-afflicted regions, to prevent the disease from becoming endemic—that is, recurring yearly, as it does in India and Bangladesh.

The ministers also called on the United Nations-linked Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) to create a special fund to assist in the battle against cholera, an appeal which was rejected by PAHO head Carlyle Guerra de Macedo who argued that the resources “did not exist” for such a fund. Laboring under similar delusions, Nazario Román, executive secretary of the Andean Pact’s health department, declared April 23 that Ibero-Americans were considering asking the U.S. to forgive 10% of its debt to free up resources for the fight against cholera. Said Román, “I think based on the ‘Bush Doctrine,’ the United States could perhaps consider forgiving 10% of our debt.”

So far, not a single Ibero-American official from any country has had the courage to call for the obvious: a diversion of funds from servicing the unpayable foreign debt to the emergency construction of water treatment plants, sanitation and medical facilities, and other critical infrastructure required to keep the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse from eradicating an entire continent.