

Business Briefs

Economic Policy

Swiss coalition attacks IMF, World Bank

"The IMF and World Bank policy starves, impoverishes, increases injustice in international trade, is anti-woman and anti-democratic," states a campaign launched by Third World activists, ecologists, feminists, and human rights organizations in Switzerland, who are preparing a referendum against that country's joining these institutions. The referendum against the International Monetary Fund is officially sponsored by an umbrella organization called the "Berne Declaration."

The referendum seeks to abrogate two pieces of legislation recently voted up by the Swiss Parliament, which approve and regulate Swiss entry into the IMF and World Bank. The Swiss Parliament acknowledged anti-IMF pressures by including in the legislation some suggestions to the IMF to "soften" its "conditionalities" policies toward the Third World, but such actions are considered inadequate by promoters of the referendum.

Reportedly, IMF officials are upset by the referendum, which could be held as early as next May. Until then, according to the Swiss Constitution, the pro-IMF legislation cannot be enacted. Christian political forces disassociated themselves from the referendum initiative, arguing that it is a "rearguard initiative" and that the policy of the IMF and the World Bank must be changed from the inside.

In another attack on the current world monetary system, Seychelles President Albert Rene accused industrialized nations of forcing unsuitable political and economic concepts on the Third World. "Third World nations must be very careful in handling foreign concepts including political pluralism, because they may end up plunging into serious economic and political problems," he said during a brief visit to the Indian Ocean island of Zanzibar, on his way home from the British Commonwealth summit in Harare, Zimbabwe.

He accused developed countries of hypocrisy and cited as an example what he called the unfair balance of trade between rich and poor countries.

Epidemics

A half-million French infected by transfusion

More than 460,000 French citizens received transfusions of blood infected with the AIDS virus (HIV) or hepatitis B and C viruses up through 1989, according to sensational French press reports. Judge Foulon of Paris has accused three former high officials of the French health system of being responsible.

In early October, it became public that former French minister Laurent Fabius had vetoed the systematic testing of blood supplies for HIV and hepatitis viruses, out of budget considerations. As a result, according to French officials, half of French transfusion recipients are now infected with HIV.

The daily *Le Monde* reported that up through 1989, about 460,000 people were infected with the hepatitis viruses B and C, and another 3,600 people with HIV. Most do not yet know of their infection.

French Social Minister Bianco has accused the press of sensationalism for reporting that state-owned laboratories and certain officials are guilty of playing with lives. Bianco said that the number of cases is probably much lower than the reported figure.

But if officials are proven culpable, the benefit claims of the victims could cost the French government millions of dollars, not to mention the political fallout.

Disease

TB is world's leading killer, says study

A special study by the World Health Organization in 1989-90 showed that tuberculosis, which has infected or currently infects one-third of the world's population, is the world's leading killer. Its findings included:

- About 1.7 billion people, or one-third of the world's population are, or have been, infected with mycobacterium tuberculosis.

The overall proportion of infected people is similar in the industrialized and developing nations. However, 80% of infected individuals in industrialized countries are over 50 years old, while 75% of those in developing countries are under 50 years old.

- It is estimated that in 1990 there were 8 million new cases of tuberculosis in developing and industrialized countries: 7.6 million in the former and 400,000 in the latter. The largest numbers were in the WHO's western Pacific region (2.6 million), the Southeast Asian region (2.5 million) and the African region (1.4 million). The highest incidence was in the African region (272 cases per 100,000).

- It is estimated that tuberculosis caused 2.9 million deaths in 1990, making this disease the largest cause of death from a single pathogen in the world. While the largest number of deaths occurred in the Southeast Asian region (940,000), the Western Pacific region (890,000), and the African region (660,000), it is estimated that more than 40,000 deaths still occur annually in the industrialized nations.

WHO showed that in many industrialized countries, the declining trend of the recent past has slowed down and, in some countries (U.S.A. and Japan) it has reversed. In the majority of low-income developing countries, there has been almost no observable decline and the absolute number of cases is probably increasing.

Britain

Major government forgives African debts

The government of John Major unilaterally decided to forgive two-thirds of the government-to-government debts of the sub-Saharan countries, in a move directly opposed by the Bush administration. Knowledgeable City of London observers say the move is part of a broader strategic policy shift, under way since the resignation of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher this past spring.

"The Foreign Office establishment has determined to be less reliant on a bilateral relation

with the United States because of the staggering internal problems America is mired in; rather they calculate that Britain is well-positioned if it can reconsolidate the dormant political and economic ties with the old Commonwealth countries, together with its full entry into the European Monetary System and the role within Europe. John Major is a mere facade for the real policymakers of the permanent Civil Service who are behind this. It is often their view which is reflected in places such as the *Economist*.

"In this regard, Britain is making moves to draw Canada closer to it in cooperation, something which Washington is none too happy about, as they fear Canadian banks are far stronger than American banks at present and could try major moves into the U.S. market in the future," said this observer.

Ibero-America

New cholera strain kills in two hours

A new strain of cholera found in Lima, Peru kills in two hours, according to officials at the Children's Hospital in Lima. They were the first to detect the new, more deadly strain, which appears to be the result of mutations that took place during the Peruvian winter. With summernow coming on, the country's cholera epidemic is beginning to break out anew, and if the new strain becomes common, this time it could be far more deadly.

Total cases are now reported to be at 231,113.

Meanwhile, in Mexico, Dr. Alberto Vargas, an employee of the health ministry of Chiapas state, said in an interview, "People are dying, but results of the autopsies are being kept quiet. Information is being hidden by the state government and its health officials . . . apparently on orders from the President."

He and other doctors said the state government fears it would hurt the lucrative tourist industry to permit these things to be reported. Dr. Vargas was just demoted, presumably for

speaking out. Government health officials claim only 54 cases of cholera and one death in Chiapas, but independent calculations put the true number of cases at around 500 and at least 10 deaths. If the same 10:1 ratio holds nationwide, then Mexico's 1,747 admitted cases would actually be 17,470.

Another doctor in Chiapas reported that the government clinic in her town is "filled with sick people, but they're denying it is cholera and are calling it gastroenteritis instead."

A rural doctor was quoted saying about NAFTA, "They don't want the Americans and Canadians to think they're forming a partnership with people who can't even control a simple thing like cholera."

Eastern Europe

IMF can't help the East, says German

If the West really wants to help the former Soviet bloc nations, it must drop the approach of the International Monetary Fund, declared Dieter Machowski, an expert on eastern economies at Berlin's DIW Institute. He spoke on a panel in Frankfurt-on-Oder Oct. 25.

The western approach of "lending help for self-help" was insufficient, Machowski said, especially since there is chaos in the East, and the former governments there had no clearly defined programs yet. Machowski said the West should have a policy of active co-responsibility for the development of the eastern economies.

Machowski recommended that the German government's Hermes export credit insurance be extended to a period of five years for the republics of the former U.S.S.R., and said it was a "scandal" that a similar program doesn't yet exist for eastern European nations.

He also asserted flatly that the economic systems in the East would not be pure market economies for a long time. Rather, they would feature a "much larger role of the state" and represent a "peculiar mix of various approaches."

● **AMERICAN WOMEN** suffer one of the widest gaps between their earnings and those of men of equivalent age and experience in the developed world, London's *Financial Times* reported Oct. 26. This was attributed to the U.S. being the only "advanced" country in the world with no statutory maternity benefits.

● **THE DUTCH** Patient Association is distributing *real* "living wills" among the Dutch population. They call upon doctors to do everything possible to save the life of a patient, and state that the patient is strictly opposed to euthanasia—precisely what the typical living will mandates. The group is placing warnings in newspapers that no one should enter a hospital without this document.

● **NEW YORK** hospitals are the place you go if you want to die, according to a series of articles in Germany's *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. "He Who Gets Sick in New York, Can Make Out His Will," one headline reads. It cites an American Heart Association study showing that a New York citizen who gets a heart attack has a 1% chance of survival, while in Germany the figure is 50%.

● **THE SOVIET** grain harvest after the threshing stage was 164 million tons, reported *Pravda*. But a senior analyst at the International Wheat Council has urged western governments to treat the Soviet calculations cautiously, since the Soviets "have changed their usual method of calculating."

● **BRITISH INDUSTRY** is now demanding an end to the "Thatcherite" *laissez faire* industrial policy of the government. In a scathing attack, Confederation of British Industry head John Banham called for reorganizing the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and adopting an active government role in helping reshape British industry. He also attacked the Bank of England for "insufficient depth of understanding" of industrial issues and problems.