

'Germany must finally apply the Communicable Diseases Law'

by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, chairman of the German Civil Rights Movement-Solidarity

The AIDS scandal which has now broken out into public view around contaminated blood and blood-derived coagulants reflects only one part of the German federal government authorities' gross negligence, bungling, and conscious acceptance of the prospect of new HIV infections. Citizens, the media, and politicians should not just gawk at this one part of the scandal. The dangerously shoddy behavior has not been confined to blood and coagulants; unfortunately, such behavior has been the norm for the entire AIDS policy of the federal government and the Federal Health Office (Bundesgesundheitsamt, BGA). Whoever now refuses to apply the Federal Communicable Diseases Law in the face of a dangerous infectious disease such as AIDS, is committing extreme criminal negligence.

During the earliest days after the HIV virus was identified, the government was already yielding to pressure from a self-appointed AIDS lobby which misinterpreted the interests of their own clientele in the worst conceivable way. Those BGA officials who pressed for the application of proven methods of combatting epidemic diseases, were frozen out. All those who at the time claimed that the application of the Communicable Diseases Law would be discriminatory against AIDS victims, were doing so exclusively in response to political agitation. On the other hand, we, along with all those who demanded the obvious—namely, that the law should also be applied to AIDS—and who also demanded targeted screening and an obligatory reporting of the names of all those infected, were branded as “fascists.”

But worse than that: Any references to possible modes of transmission other than through homosexual or heterosexual sexual contact, blood products, or intravenous injection, were dismissed as panic mongering. That policy continued even long after scientists had demonstrated the danger of infection via saliva and mucous membrane contact.

Up to now, the only ones who have brought legal complaints against the government and the BGA, have been hemophiliacs and other patients who had been treated with contaminated coagulants or blood transfusions. When will all the other victims who have also been infected because they took the false official notices at face value, step forward as well? For, even at an early stage, there did exist accurate information which could have been heeded.

Recall the countless leaflets and television spots which monotonously chanted that “condoms can protect you against AIDS.” Citizens were lulled into feeling secure, even though it was already known then, that condoms are inadequate protection even against the transmission of standard sexually transmitted diseases. It should be obvious that considerably more stringent safety precautions are required for protection against the deadly HIV retrovirus, than are required to ward off common venereal diseases. But up to the present day, the federal government, the BGA, and AIDS clinics cling to their claim that “condoms protect you against AIDS”!

From the very beginning, I, in my erstwhile capacity as national chairman of the Patriots for Germany party, and my associates were not alone in warning about this. At numerous conferences, we provided a forum for independent experts from around the world to report on the latest developments in AIDS research. We published these findings and made them available to all relevant authorities. We confronted Rita Süßmuth, who was then the health minister, Prof. Manfred Steinbach, who was just fired, and many responsables in the BGA with our analyses. My associates held hundreds of interviews, addressed seminars, and conducted a far-reaching publicity campaign. They also conducted petition drives which were widely greeted by the professional medical community.

Who represented the AIDS victims, really?

If any advocates existed to represent the interests of those infected by AIDS, then we were those advocates. We laid out the scientific criteria for an AIDS research mobilization that would have to assume the magnitude of the U.S. moon landing program. It was we who, even back then, were demanding targeted screening as being also in the interest of those already infected. Today it is known that the infection must be detected at the earliest possible stage in order for life-extending treatment to be administered in time.

We emphatically demanded that those ill with AIDS be provided the best possible medical care, and that they not be shunted into low-cost hospices or become the victims of euthanasia. Through our contacts with AIDS researchers around the world, we publicized promising new treatments for AIDS, such as the method developed by the Kemri medi-

cal research institute in Kenya.

Moreover, we take credit for having forecast the outbreak of AIDS, on the basis of our comprehensive analyses of the connection between economic collapse and the spread of infectious diseases. Already in 1973-74, a research group consisting of associates of my husband Lyndon LaRouche concluded that without a fundamental change in the direction of world economic policy during the 1980s, we would experience an explosion of deadly epidemics, and that in most parts of the world this development would reach a critical point around the year 1987. Their study also warned that under those circumstances, the emergence of entirely new species of deadly diseases was probable.

We warned that the economic collapse, with its consequent mass impoverishment, hunger, and plagues, was in no way an inevitable "act of God," but rather was the direct result of the merciless austerity policies of the International Monetary Fund, an agency which already by the early 1970s had written off whole regions of the developing sector as the "Fourth World."

Regardless of how the HIV virus may have come to infect human beings, the actual circumstances at hand corresponded precisely with the conditions for the emergence of new deadly epidemics, which my husband and his associates investigated back in 1973-74.

AIDS has now become only one of an entire phalanx of deadly old and new contagious diseases currently spreading around the world. Diseases thought to have been brought under control are now spreading massively, and new resistances have developed against medicines which had been effective heretofore.

The decisive application of the instrumentarium provided for by the Federal Communicable Diseases Law is, of course, the order of the day. Half-hearted measures, such as anonymous obligatory reporting or so-called "unlinked testing," have proven entirely inadequate to the task of supplying useful statistics. In view of the huge number of unknown cases, we must finally achieve clarity about the actual extent of the spread of the AIDS infection among the population. This can only be done by means of obligatory, by-name reporting of all cases. Only then can the health authorities obtain a reliable overview, impart appropriate information, and also intervene in those cases where HIV-infected persons behave in a way which could endanger others.

The highest priority, however, must be put on changing the economic policies which are responsible for creating the conditions under which not only AIDS, but also other epidemics are now raging.

If we do this, and if we take up the tasks before us with cultural and scientific optimism, then we have a chance to survive. Humanity has conquered deadly pandemics in the past, and with a sufficiently strong political will, assisted by the most advanced fields of science, we will succeed this time as well.

Interview: Dr. Hans-Philipp Pöhn

'Let's bury the myth about condoms'

During his tenure at the German Federal Health Office (BGA), Professor and then-Director Dr. Pöhn urged the inclusion of AIDS among those diseases covered by Germany's Federal Communicable Diseases Law. But his and others' efforts were blocked. He was interviewed on Oct. 19 by Gabriele Liebig and Dr. Wolfgang Lillge. It was translated from the German by John Sigerson, and has been slightly abridged.

EIR: Through April 1987 you were head of the Communicable Diseases Division within the Federal Health Office in Berlin. Where in your opinion was the federal government and/or the BGA negligent in regard to HIV-contaminated blood products?

Pöhn: It's difficult to say whether there was actual negligence in dealing with contaminated blood products. The HIV virus was first isolated in 1983, but up until 1985 no one knew if this virus could be deactivated, and if so, how that could be accomplished. Prominent virologists had feared that they were dealing with a scrapie agent, i.e., a prion (e.g., Jakob-Creutzfeldt disease or bovine spongiform encephalitis)—a disease instigator which can be deactivated at temperatures above 200°C wet heat, and hence only at pressures above one atmosphere.

We therefore first had to wait until we finally knew that it was a retrovirus, which is relatively vulnerable, and that the degree of heat applied to hepatitis-B viruses would be sufficient to render this retrovirus harmless. But before we could go out and treat the plasma derivatives accordingly, we, of course, had to be sure whether the clotting agents which had been thus deactivated, retained their clinical effectiveness. What use would an HIV-free preparation be, if it no longer did what it was supposed to do?

After these questions were cleared up, the heat treatment of plasma derivatives became required in all cases. Whether this treatment was correctly applied, is a question of local oversight, and depended on the individual manufacturer's diligence.

EIR: So by 1985 we could already estimate how many people had been infected with contaminated blood products?

Pöhn: At the time, people were saying that about 1,500 of approximately 3,000 hemophiliacs had become infected,