

Editorial

Where Is the AIDS Battle Leading?

The virtually unchecked spread of the AIDS pandemic through 50 million human beings so far, is the deadliest of all the deadly products of the era of “economic globalization and privatization.” So it would appear that there was good news reported in connection with the World AIDS Conference in New York. The Bush Administration took the opportunity to concede, that it was abandoning its complaint over Brazil’s production of generic (un-patented) and cheap anti-retroviral drugs, which the Brazilian government distributes universally to AIDS victims there, regardless of income or insurance. In reality, this victory for Brazil’s program was won against the multinational pharmaceutical companies, for whose “intellectual property rights” the Bush White House had sued Brazil. The drug multinationals want all AIDS treatment worldwide to serve their globalized “shareholders’ values.” This victory came only two months after the same multinationals dropped their legal suit against South Africa’s government, on the same issue.

Not only did UNAIDS Director Dr. Peter Piot report that generic drug production, by nations like Brazil and India, is the main reason the cost of anti-AIDS drugs marketed by the likes of Merck and Glaxo-Wellcome has been forced down. More important, Brazil’s national anti-AIDS program has shown, that widespread public health administration of the anti-retroviral drugs to the HIV-infected doesn’t only prolong their lives, *it reduces the rate of new infections dramatically. Universally available public-health treatment is crucial to prevention of the further spread of the pandemic.*

This is directly discrediting the policy line of USAID chief Andrew Natsios — still echoed by Secretary of State Colin Powell at the New York conference — that Third World nations, not being wealthy or worthy enough to merit widespread treatment of AIDS by drugs, have to pursue only the prevention of AIDS, by changing the behavior of their citizens. This line, and the pharmaceutical giants’ enforcement of it by pricing the treatments above \$10,000 per person per year, are both being rejected; Dr. Piot told the UN conference “We must go on . . . until anti-retroviral therapy

is seen as essential for anyone with HIV.”

But in fact, there is no end to the spreading carnage of AIDS in sight, unless the globalized *economic* order, now collapsing, is swiftly replaced by governments, acting on new economic axioms.

Two-thirds of the human race lives at incomes of \$2 per day or less, a worse situation, in real terms, than a decade ago. They cannot purchase, as “individuals on the free market,” even the cheap generic anti-retrovirals. The G7 countries, in their current sinking economic conditions, will not pledge the \$10 billion per year fund needed even to provide the cheapest anti-AIDS drugs to only half the Third World’s AIDS victims. The U.S. pledge — only \$200 million — makes that clear. And the African countries are now in another epidemic — being forced to privatize (sell off to foreign companies) their public water and sanitation companies, as a condition for a pittance of “debt relief.” The conditions in those countries, which caused AIDS to become pandemic there, are getting rapidly worse. AIDS is now spreading rapidly in India and Southeast Asia; even, perhaps, in China; it is officially causing one of every 15 deaths in the world, and more by increasing the deaths rates from TB and malaria. Most nations in which it is raging, have been robbed of the power to stop it.

At the UN AIDS conference only one voice — that of Nigeria’s President Olusegun Obasanjo — named even the first step: “total cancellation of Africa’s debt, in favor of investment in the social sector [of the African nations].” That step would do more for anti-retroviral drug treatment of AIDS victims, than a \$10 billion per year fund. But to stop the pandemic — which, even now, is not unstoppable — this would have to be matched by new credits for reconstruction of public-health infrastructure, which has been destroyed all over the world in the International Monetary Fund “globalization” era. AIDS can be stopped under a new international monetary order — a New Bretton Woods, as proposed by Lyndon LaRouche. Otherwise, Brazil has won a victory for the nation-state, but one the world’s nations do not have the means to realize.