

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

State Department writes off Africa

A State Department spokesman presented a grim scenario of how the United States has destroyed the continent of Africa at an African Roundtable Forum of the Society for International Development here April 14. William Robertson, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, described how applying "Reaganomics" to Africa has destroyed whatever modest ability governments there had to protect their backward economies.

Robertson said that the main U.S. objective for Africa was to turn the more than 50 nations there away from "statism" and toward pure "free market" economic policies. This, he said, involved forcing them to accept "structural reforms," which are supposed to make these countries "attractive" to private investors.

These reforms include the following: currency devaluations, "liberalized" (i.e., inflated) prices, elimination of food and other subsidies, ending of tariffs on imported goods, deregulation of industries and banking, and the selling off of state-owned entities.

Robertson did not bother to mention the cost in terms of human lives: the precipitous drop in living standards and rampant disease and famine they have unleashed there.

When this reporter asked Robertson what the State Department think-

ing is about the AIDS epidemic sweeping Africa, infecting upwards of 30 million people trapped in economic squalor, Robertson squirmed: "AIDS is a global problem, and is not unique to Africa," he said. "Therefore, it can only be dealt with globally."

I also asked him how he expects the "small and medium" businesses the State Department is encouraging to locate into this new African environment to grow, unless there is some large-scale development there too, to provide the transportation, energy, water, and other infrastructure that goes with growth.

"Well," he mumbled, "We're not saying to large entities to stay out of Africa. It's just more difficult to attract them, and it's easier to attract small and medium size business. That's all."

The "small and medium-size" businesses Robertson was talking about are slave-labor cottage industries that will put nothing back into the African economy for future growth. It will export the blight that "Reaganomics" has created in the U.S. inner cities.

The only honest statement that Robertson made was his closing one: "If we do not get into Africa, then the Europeans, especially the French, and the East Asians will come in and lock the door of opportunity."

Indeed. The Japanese already have the blueprints for taming the giant rivers of Africa, generating the electricity, irrigating the croplands, and crisscrossing the slumbering giant with highways and railroads. Once Japan gets sick of propping up the hopeless U.S. economy by buying U.S. dollars and Treasury notes, and dumps them to invest that capital in such large-scale projects, they will have a lock on the greatest untapped natural resource pool in the world.

Africa could play role in U.S. recovery

In contrast to the State Department insanity, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations heard a U.S. economic recovery proposal on April 10 designed by Democratic presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche that includes an enhanced role for the Export-Import Bank. A spokesman for the National Democratic Policy Committee (NDPC) presented it.

Combined with a rescheduling of foreign debt, and funded with \$500 billion in long-term, low-interest credit earmarked for development projects, the Ex-Im Bank could be a mechanism for putting millions of Americans to work producing the steel, concrete, pumps, and nuclear plant components for a large-scale African development scheme.

The NDPC spokesman startled Committee chairman Rep. David Obey (D-Wis.) by going to a large map of Africa on the hearing room wall, where he used a pointer to show how the huge Zaire River (which contains 19% of all the world's hydroelectric potential) could be diverted at its northwestern-most point, and its waters then channeled into the huge geological formation where the present-day Lake Chad sits to the north.

That basin can contain about 15 times the volume of water it now holds, he said, and could be the center of an irrigation grid that could put water in the 800,000 square miles of prime agricultural soil in the sub-Saharan Sahel region, which extends east-to-west almost 3,000 miles.

Putting vegetation in this area would create natural rainfall, which would swiftly begin to roll back the Sahara, he said, and turn the region into the breadbasket of the world.