
AIDS

German physicians fed up with 'condom education,' seek public health steps

by Jutta Dinkermann

In a minority special report issued by Christian Social Union representative Deis, some West German medical experts have issued a broadside attack on the AIDS policy of German Health Minister Rita Süßmuth and called for serious public health measures to curb the spread of the fatal disease. The recommendations of this special report show that the parliamentary AIDS commission is slipping out of the control of the World Health Organization, whose see-no-evil, spend-no-money policies are behind the Süßmuth line.

Prof. H.-U. Gallway, Doctor of Law, and Wolfgang Spann and Prof. Nepomuk Zöllner, Doctors of Medicine, were the experts who drafted the special report picked up by Mr. Deis of the Bundestag, the lower house of the West German federal parliament.

The minority report dissents strongly from the interim report, "Dangers of AIDS and Effective Means for Their Control," of the Bundestag's AIDS Inquiry Commission, which was passed by a majority of the Christian Democratic Union, Free Democratic Party, and Social Democratic Party deputies. That majority document not only fully supports the present Süßmuth line, but also gives directions for the future, such as allowing the addictive heroin substitute methadone to be distributed in "justified individual cases" as a "preventive means" against AIDS (supposedly because methadone is not injected); and abolishing Paragraph 175 of the penal code, which makes homosexual activities with youths under 18 years old a crime, in order to eliminate the alleged ideological discrimination against homosexuals.

Needless to say, the majority document got all the press coverage. Yet, it is precisely the minority report that deserves attention, first because all three professors played a key role in shaping the public health policy on AIDS of the state of Bavaria, and, second, and not least, because one of the three Munich professors, Professor Zöllner of the University of Munich's Medical Polyclinic, treats AIDS victims on a daily basis and is therefore a clinician who knows what he is talking about.

The most important statements of the special report are quoted here verbatim under the relevant heading:

Federal Epidemic Law. "A venereal disease in the sense of the law for control of venereal diseases, but also an epi-

dem in the sense of the federal epidemic law. . . . The Federal Epidemic Law enjoins public health offices, when there is a suspicion of infection, to carry out the necessary inquiries, especially as to the type, cause, source of infection, and propagation of the disease . . . protective measures such as observation, prohibition of occupational activities, and isolation can be put into effect so long as is necessary for prevention of the spread of the disease."

Obligatory reporting. "Since there is, in accordance with the law presently in effect, no obligatory reporting for HIV infection, health officials are presently dependent on accidental discovery. This makes systematic tracing of contacts impossible. In order to use the potential for prevention through contact tracing, the obligatory reporting of names should be introduced for all cases of HIV infection. To that extent, Paragraph 3 of the Federal Epidemic Law should be supplemented. That would simultaneously solve the problem of gaining necessary epidemiological data."

Propagation. "In the Federal Republic of Germany, 74% of the known cases have occurred with homosexuals, 10% with dope addicts, and 8% with individuals who received medically indicated blood or blood derivatives. These numbers obtained from AIDS patients must not be viewed as a measure of the infection, because they say nothing of the number of those who are infected with HIV but are still without symptoms. . . . In Central Africa, where there is the longest history of AIDS, the disease is a matter of infection of the heterosexual population. Whether this will be also true in our country within the foreseeable future remains to be seen, since sufficient epidemiological data does not exist. For the sake of a comprehensive prevention campaign, it should be assumed that AIDS has already passed over into the heterosexual population."

Education. "To the same extent that it is useful to impress upon certain target groups, for example, those who live promiscuously on a habitual basis, that proper use of condoms has a risk-reducing effect, it is that misleading to give such information to the general population. The impression must not be created that AIDS would not be a problem if only condoms and sterile needles were used."

Transmission. "Transmission by means of other bodily

fluids that contain the virus, such as tears or saliva, is conceivable when these come into contact with mucous membranes or open wounds. What is not clear is the question of whether transmission can result from coughing. . . . It must always be borne in mind that, in view of the insufficient information on HIV infection, most statements are still subject to new scientific findings. Above all, it should be not be forgotten that no positive conclusions can be drawn from negative discoveries. A contact by means of which, according to all that is presently known, a risk cannot be excluded does not become risk-free through the fact that, up to this point, no case of a transmission is documented. The formula 'No case proven' creates a possibly tragic, deceptive security."

HIV testing. "Testing has a preventive potential, on the one hand, as a result of the fact that those who know that they are a source of danger will, as shown by experience, behave differently from those who know only that they could be a source of danger. On the other hand, the knowledge that an individual is infected leads obviously to the question of where he became infected. Here is an important beginning for contact tracing. . . . If the pros and cons are considered, the point of view advocating testing prevails, especially if we follow the maxim that each additional infection is one infection too many. The concerns of those who oppose testing can be addressed through appropriate education and counseling of those tested, when there is no alternative of equal value for avoiding further infections in individual cases."

Legal obligations. "The general civil and penal obligation exists for those in risk groups or for infected individuals not to harm anyone's health. Additionally, supplementation of the Federal Epidemic Law or the mandate to a specific AIDS law seems unavoidable. . . . What needs to be investigated is, among other things, whether behavioral standards are created by force of law, for example, the legal obligation to use condoms for those who frequent prostitutes and those who are infected, the legal obligation for those who are infected to inform their partner when behavior involving a risk contact is involved. Individuals with sufficient reason to believe that they represent a concrete risk of infection for others are obligated, as a result: to make clear what their infectious condition is; to do the utmost to avoid what can lead to a transmission of the infection; to appropriately inform the contact partner in contacts involving risk. They are obligated to give information as far as possible on the relevant source of their infection as well as obligated to tolerate having the data concerning their infection passed on, insofar as this seems indicated for the avoidance of further infection."

Protection for medical personnel. "Even with the use of the utmost in hygienic care, medical aid personnel cannot sufficiently eliminate the risk of an infection; all precautions must be made to keep this risk as low as possible. For that, sufficient information of the risk in individual cases is necessary, and, consequently, information on whether a patient is infected."

Argentina

Alfonsín booed over IMF shock plan

by Cynthia Rush

Each August, the cream of Argentina's agricultural oligarchy joins other producers, government officials, and political leaders in the fashionable Palermo section of Buenos Aires to attend the annual agricultural exposition sponsored by the Rural Society. The exposition is one of the year's major social events, in which producers show off their prize cattle and livestock. As he has done each year for the past five years, President Raúl Alfonsín arrived on Aug. 13 to personally inaugurate the exposition, and use his speech to expound on his government's policies.

But this year, things were a little different. The ceremony which normally surrounds the President's appearance and inaugural speech was broken up by shouts of protest and waving of banners in the viewing stands which read "Alfonsín Liar." Protesters whistled and booed at Alfonsín's entourage, and interrupted his speech, as well as that of Agriculture Minister Ernesto Figueras. As one observer put it, "everything short of throwing tomatoes" was done. Members of the ruling Radical Civic Union (UCR), placed in the stands to support the President, then proceeded to interrupt the speech of Rural Society president Guillermo Alchouron.

The incident was unprecedented in the exposition's history, and scandalized the nation. Things turned particularly ugly when hecklers in the stands called Alfonsín a liar, and shouted that the country had been better off under the previous military dictatorship. Red-faced, the President called the protesters "fascists." Why the insults to the President and other public figures at such a prestigious event?

In its efforts to prove itself worthy of a \$1.3 billion standby agreement with the International Monetary Fund, Alfonsín's government has declared war against the agricultural sector and against the nation's entire productive apparatus and working population. The misnamed *Plan Primavera* or Spring Plan, the anti-inflationary shock program announced on Aug. 1, raised public utility rates by 30%, guarantees further contraction of domestic consumption by gouging