

Report from Rio by Silvia Palacios

Number-one in AIDS?

Brazil soon will be the official leader, and cases of infection by a second AIDS virus are already being reported.

Brazil, for the moment, has the unfortunate distinction of occupying second place in the world in numbers of official AIDS cases, but in view of the dramatic acceleration of such cases in the recent period, it is highly likely that in the near future, Brazil will be surpassing the United States, officially in top place.

The World Health Organization and other reporting agencies, of course, carefully overlook the tens of millions of cases otherwise known to exist in Africa.

Even more frightening are reports of the first cases of infection by HIV-2, a second type of AIDS virus as virulent as the first.

According to the official statistics of the Health Ministry, released here in January, at least 4,000 have fallen victim to AIDS in Brazil since 1982. While officially reported cases are 2,458, the AIDS control division acknowledges underreporting by at least 40%. Exemplary are the reports from São Paulo's funeral parlors, that in 1987 alone, 501 individuals died from AIDS, 60% more than the ministry itself reported.

But that is far from the extent of the growth of the disease. For the first time, the Health Ministry has acknowledged that in addition to the 4,000 ill with AIDS, there exist another 12-16,000 now in the first stages of the disease, classified as patients "with symptoms associated with HIV." The ministry also admits that there exist an estimated 200-400,000 "asymptomatic" carriers, infected with the virus, but not yet sick with the disease.

This last figure was calculated on the basis of the 4,000 recognized AIDS cases, but left aside the other 12-16,000 who should be receiving treatment.

Medical sources consulted by *EIR* have estimated that the actual number of AIDS carriers in Brazil ranges from 800,000 to 1 million persons; according to the little-understood epidemiological map of the disease inside Brazil, at least 30% of these carriers will develop the disease, and not 10% as was still being asserted at the end of 1987. Others would argue that 100% of those infected will eventually die of the infection or related opportunistic infections.

Clearly, even the most educated estimates reflect only a part of the problem, since no measurement has yet taken into account the catalytic role of environmental co-factors. Now that the government is again disposed to apply the austerity policies of the International Monetary Fund, the growth of AIDS cases will find no parallel with any other epidemic that has hit Brazil.

That the situation is truly out of control is made evident in the new epidemiological manifestations of the disease. Dr. Ricardo Veronesi of the University of São Paulo has alerted authorities to the presence in Brazil of HIV-2, a form of AIDS virus first revealed by the discoverer of the original AIDS virus, Prof. Luc Montagnier of France's Pasteur Institute.

The investigation which led to discovering HIV-2 was carried out by Dr. Veronesi's team, which proved that

4% of a group of São Paulo transvestites tested were carrying the HIV-2 virus. Laboratory tests were conducted by Prof. Maria Odete Santos of the University of Lisbon and a colleague of Montagnier. Dr. Veronesi declared, "I believe the HIV-2 to be as virulent as HIV-1, and that it can also spread uncontrollably among us."

The response of the Health Ministry has been the same as in 1986, when doctors and researchers demanded that all blood banks be immediately subject to AIDS tests. "There is no possibility that AIDS cases caused by HIV-2 exist in the country," said Pedro Cherquer, one of those responsible for the official AIDS program in Brazil.

Today, the absolute refusal to assume responsibility for controlling the quality of blood has resulted in at least 10% of Brazilian AIDS cases being directly due to contaminated blood transfusions. But the Health Ministry persists in following the genocidal recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO). For example, in a recent seminar on AIDS held in Las Carceles—one of the most sites in Brazil—it was reported that of the 86 AIDS victims treated at Brazil's only prison hospital, 22 had died and the rest had been sent home to "die in freedom and dignity," as the WHO recommended.

The only reason the country has taken no competent measures in regard to the AIDS disease, is that all AIDS policy is concentrated in the hands of a group of liberals who are more than willing to accommodate to the genocidal dictates of the WHO and the IMF. This group controls key health institutions in the country, thanks to former Health Minister Carlos Sant'Anna, a ruling party leader in Congress and the same minister who, in 1986, refused to impose any controls on Brazilian blood banks.