

tion returned to Venezuela in the company of three “observers,” who were sent by the State Department in their capacity as “technical advisers” to the ANC. They are Robert Baker, Robert Whirter, and Peter Messite. In his first comments as an observer, Messite described an ANC document on human rights as “admirable.”

Chávez’s ‘revolution’

So far this year, national food consumption in Venezuela has fallen by 10.6%—according to the most recent study of the firm Datanálisis—the result of unemployment which grew from 11.6% in December 1998 to 17.4% at the end of August 1999. The informal economy already encompasses some 54% of the labor force, while industrial employment has fallen 14% during the first half of this year, according to the National Industrial Council (Conindustria). This means that 39,514 workers have lost their jobs. In 1996, the industrial labor force was 450,511 workers; today, it is 243,539 workers.

During all of 1998, which was a bad year, the decline in family income was 3.85%, while in the first eight months of the “revolutionary” year of 1999, the decline is already 5.5%. The concentration of income has reached proportions that make so-called “savage capitalism” look pale by comparison: Dividing the families by income into five levels, from A to E, Datanálisis finds that family income for the wealthiest sector, representing less than 10% of the population, is concentrated 33 times in comparison to the income level of sector E. In sector E, income barely covers 40% of the basic market basket, and 58% of the food basket. In sum, poverty now encompasses 79% of the population.

This reflects the brutal contraction of public spending under Chávez, despite the fact that the price of oil—Venezuelan’s main export product—has doubled during the first eight months of 1999, guaranteeing that international reserves remain above \$14 billion.

Obviously, with such shock treatment, inflation has fallen, simply because “no one is buying.”

Chávez’s Finance Ministry, meanwhile, has put an iron clamp on public spending, worse even than if Venezuela were under a strict IMF program. There is no payment going to vendors, nor contracts with the private sector, nor are allocations going to the state governments to pay vendors and employees. Things are so bad, that when the Association of Governors informed the Venezuelan Bishops Conference (CEV) of this, Msgr. Baltazar Porras said that, under these circumstances, “We cannot and must not play with hunger, and with the needs of the people.” The president of the CEV indicated that this situation has no explanation, in view of the increase in oil revenues: “Every day, we read in the newspapers about the increase in unemployment, the fall in buying power; given these [oil] resources, there should be a normal flow to the [state] governments, to enable them to meet their obligations with their workers.”

What more guarantees will the globalizers demand?

WHO reports dramatic rise in world diseases

by Jutta Dinkermann

The World Health Organization has issued a report showing that the world has dangerously underestimated the threat of bacteria and viruses to national security and economic growth, and may soon miss the opportunity to protect people from this risk. The report, “Removing Obstacles to Healthy Development,” was covered in the *Weekly Epidemiological Record* on Aug. 20, and is available on the Internet at <http://www.who.int/infectious-disease-report>.

As the report shows, infectious diseases are now the world’s leading killer of children and young adults, accounting for some 13 million deaths each year. Each hour, 1,500 people will die from infectious diseases—over half of them children under five. In 1998, only six diseases—AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, measles, diarrheal diseases, and acute respiratory infections—accounted for nearly 90% of these deaths.

The report warns explicitly against being fatalistic about the situation, because this would make things only worse. There is also no reason for pessimism, since most of these illnesses can be treated. Effective medicines and control strategies are available to reduce dramatically the deaths and suffering caused by infectious diseases. *Most of the 13 million deaths a year from infectious diseases can be prevented*; low-cost health interventions already exist to either prevent or cure the infectious diseases which take the greatest toll of human lives. Indeed, most of the interventions have been widely available for years. The report says that most of the deaths from infectious diseases in developing countries could be prevented for \$5 a person and argues, “In an age of vaccines, antibiotics, and dramatic scientific progress, these diseases should have been brought under control.”

What is lacking, is the money, in a world seized by a lunatic binge of financial speculation, which is sucking the lifeblood out of the physical economy—although the WHO does not say so.

The report does say: “In 1990, bilateral, multilateral, foundation and NGO partners provided just over \$800 million to help developing countries control infectious diseases. This represents less than 2% of total donor funds. . . . With these disparities, it is not surprising, that a child born in a developing country today runs a 1,000-fold greater chance of dying from

measles than a child born in an industrialized country. Or that children born in Singapore are likely to live 40 years longer than children born in Sierra Leone.”

A window of opportunity

Having underscored both the feasibility of action and its many benefits, the report argues in an unheard-of tone of urgency for this UN-related bureaucracy, that the world “has a window of opportunity” to make dramatic progress in controlling these six leading killers and protecting people against new diseases. As the report stresses, “*the cost of failure will be high*: Increased drug resistance and the emergence of new bacteria and viruses could make the control of infectious diseases *both scientifically and economically unlikely* in the future.

“It is in the best interest of all countries to support global initiatives to control infectious diseases. Any segment of society that ignores the spread of infections among its neighbours, does so at its own peril. When a country becomes a weak link in the chain of global surveillance and disease control, everyone is affected. . . . Smallpox provides a very striking example. If smallpox had not been eradicated in a few remaining countries in 1977, the world might still be paying a heavy price today. Unforeseen was the imminent emergence of HIV/AIDS. Immunization with the smallpox vaccine—made from a live weakened virus—would now be *fatal* for many people whose immune system is impaired by HIV.

“Just a few years’ delay and global eradication of smallpox may have become impossible without the discovery of a new vaccine. Had smallpox not been eradicated—at a cost then totalling \$300 million—it could be among the top six infectious killers in the world today. Without past concerted efforts to fight the disease, smallpox would still be causing at least a million deaths a year and costing governments billions of dollars in health-care costs. These lessons have been overlooked. *The progress that the world can make today against infectious diseases may not be possible a decade from now. Increased drug resistance and the unforeseen emergence of new microbes could close the window of opportunity for controlling infectious diseases.*”

A shift in emphasis

In its concluding chapter, the report outlines priority steps for combatting infectious diseases and issues a call for action to reduce their impact—as obstacles to healthy development as well as leading causes of death and suffering. The attached call for action, issued by Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, is far from what is needed, being infected by the “green” tendencies for which the former Norwegian Prime Minister is famous. But, some interesting changes have occurred. For example, Brundtland (as well as the report itself) make none of the usual obligatory obeisances to the alleged “danger of overpopulation,” the need for “family planning” as a solution, and

similar hogwash usually brought up when health policy is being discussed by international agencies. Reality has had its impact.

Brundtland writes:

“Two futures are equally conceivable as we enter the 21st century. The rapid economic and scientific advances of the past decade can be built upon, and the impact of infectious diseases can be cut dramatically. Or, infectious diseases can continue to burden human development, new diseases can emerge, and drug resistance can reverse the scientific progress of the past century. Unlike our ancestors of a thousand years ago, we know both the causes and the solutions for most of the epidemics that plague us. How will history refer to us if we fail to control infectious diseases at the beginning of the new millennium?”

While this is fairly accurate, the most important problem of Brundtland’s call for action is she is essentially begging for more crumbs from the international community, rather confronting the magnitude of the problem by calling for an emergency program of the magnitude and seriousness of an Apollo program, and in the context of a global financial reorganization.

The problem of HIV/AIDS

The magnitude of the World Health Organization’s shortcomings becomes clearer, when it comes to the fight against the AIDS epidemic. Although the report presents very clear ideas about what has to be done about almost every other devastating disease in the world, it fails miserably when it comes to AIDS. It states that “expensive anti-retroviral drug therapy for HIV/AIDS is still way beyond the means of most developing countries,” so all that is left is condoms, sex education, and prayer for the emergence of an AIDS vaccine.

In fact, the magnitude of the AIDS problem is so enormous that world leaders must make an agreement to tackle this challenge with the necessary resources for doing so, at the same time declaring it one of mankind’s noblest enterprises. According to the latest UN figures, life expectancy in the most HIV/AIDS-affected regions in Africa has, in the recent period, dived from 60 years to 43 years.

The material provided by WHO clearly shows:

1. The economic strangulation of the Third World has caused the re-emergence of old diseases and the evolution of new diseases.
2. The fight against most of the diseases plaguing mankind is exclusively a question of political will.
3. Mankind—including the financial oligarchy—must now either act or sign its own death sentence. To wage this fight is no longer a question of whether or not one chooses to act morally or feels compassion for the victims. It is an objective life-and-death matter for *all* of mankind, which, according to WHO—must be answered, at the latest, in the next ten years.