

Africa Report by Mary Lalevée

The drug mafia moves in

The same IMF policies that had this effect in Ibero-America are behind the spread of the drug traffic here.

At the 9th Regional Conference of Interpol on March 11 and 12 in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, the head of Interpol warned that Africa was becoming a major source of cannabis for Europe and the United States. Large sums of money were being offered to farmers to abandon their traditional crops and substitute cannabis.

In addition, hard drugs like cocaine and heroin are being transshipped through Africa, especially West Africa, to the United States and Europe. The cocaine is coming from Latin America, the heroin from Pakistan. 3,000 Africans, he pointed out, were arrested in Europe and the United States in 1983 for drug trafficking.

Amphetamines and barbiturates, he reported, had become a major social problem in Africa, while hard drugs are not as yet—although due to the transit of hard drugs through the continent, there was “inevitable leakage” to the local population. He added that African governments are not unwilling, but simply unable to deal with the problem due to the lack of trained personnel: Customs officers in most African countries are unable to recognize cocaine, for example.

Recent events in southern Africa show the extent of this new problem:

In Swaziland, a joint operation by South African and Swazi law enforcement officers began on March 13, aimed at destroying vast quantities of “Swazi Green” marijuana. In the first week of the raids, 65 million rand worth of the drug (about \$32 million)

was burned. The police announced that they expected to destroy another at least 60 million rand worth in the following week of raids, in which they used helicopters to locate the fields of marijuana in remote areas of the country.

“Swazi Green” is smuggled into South Africa for consumption there.

In South Africa, the Minister of Law and Order announced on March 12 that police had confiscated two million kilograms of marijuana last year with a street value of R2 billion (about \$1 billion). Large quantities of other drugs had also been seized, such as cocaine, LSD, and amphetamines.

The South African press recently reported, “South Africa has become a dumping ground for large quantities of cocaine, because of the ready market for it among affluent drug addicts.”

Not surprisingly, the same circles pushing legalization of drugs elsewhere are also now pushing it in Africa. During my recent stay in southern Africa, I heard a British Broadcasting Corporation broadcast in which several journalists were interviewed. They frankly proposed the legalization of marijuana.

A BBC correspondent criticized the burning of the marijuana crop in Swaziland, saying, “There’s no evidence that marijuana is any worse than tobacco. The problem is that tobacco is profitable for multinational corporations, whereas marijuana is not, so the multinationals encourage the government to crack down on marijuana

production. Since the production of tobacco is legal, the government should let them grow another drug.”

A Nigerian journalist on the same program said that marijuana use would fall once it was made legal, in the same way alcohol consumption had fallen. “Soft drugs should be legalized.”

The *Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 1984* warned that “drug abuse and smuggling [were] gaining ground” throughout Africa. It reported that in certain countries of West Africa, cannabis which had hitherto grown wild was now being increasingly cultivated, and is fast becoming a cash crop.

In East Africa, the drug *khat* is produced mainly in Kenya and Ethiopia, but is now more widely consumed. *Khat* has been banned in Somalia, but quantities are smuggled in from neighboring Kenya. There are reports that Kenya is also the site of increased cocaine production.

The *Report* noted that nationals of some West African countries were serving as couriers for trafficking in heroin destined for Western Europe and North America. Eastern and southern Africa were being used as a transit zone for the trafficking of opiates from the Middle East or South Asia.

It is not hard to discern why drug production and export is on the rise in Africa. Widespread and increasing use and traffic in drugs became a major problem in Ibero-America and the Caribbean in step with the crisis of foreign debt. Africa has come under the same pressures from the International Monetary Fund to maximize foreign exchange earnings to pay debt service. High-profit “cash crops,” as proposed by such respectable financial institutions as the IMF and the World Bank, in today’s world economy mean drugs.