

Cholera will infect millions this year

by Valerie Rush

Brazilian health officials have reported that nation's first five cases of cholera, and are predicting that more than 3 million Brazilians will become infected before the year is out. According to Wayton Alves de Oliveira, head of Brazil's National Commission for the Prevention of Cholera, the World Health Organization estimates that 2% of the Brazilian population—3 million people—will contract the disease. However, based on conservative estimates of the rate of Peruvian infection thus far, the percentage is likely to be closer to 5%, which could mean as many as 7.5 million Brazilian cholera victims in 1991.

So far, the foci of contagion is concentrated in the Brazilian Amazon city of Tabatinga, only meters downstream from the Colombian city of Leticia, which also sits on the border with Peru. The Solimoes River, which extends from Peru through Leticia and Tabatinga, and is a tributary of the mighty Amazon River which cuts across Brazil all the way to the Atlantic Coast, is already believed to be a potential source of contagion. Brazilian Health Minister Alcení Guerra noted that the Solimoes and its tributaries bathe dozens of Brazilian cities and towns, and predicted that should it prove to be contaminated, there would be an "immediate" 60,000 cases of cholera to contend with. Further, as many as 200,000 indigenous Amazon tribesmen with little or no immunity to the common cold, would be utterly wiped out by the cholera bacillus.

If the international lobby of eco-anthropologists, who are demanding a Yanomami "enclave" inside Brazilian national territory, are truly interested in protecting the human rights of these indigenous tribes, they will target such creditor institutions as the International Monetary Fund, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), and the World Bank for denying funds for proper water, health, and sanitation infrastructure facilities to the nations of Ibero-America, rather than the Brazilian government which has been "charged" with bringing civilization to these so-called "noble savages."

It is no accident, for example, that the IADB has just withheld \$350 million in funding for sewage infrastructure in Brazil, but has earmarked \$600 million for Venezuela to underwrite a "banking reform" that would open up that country's banking sector to wholesale takeover by foreign financial institutions. Nor is it surprising that Peru is the epicenter of what is proving to be a continent-wide pandemic.

That impoverished, disease-ravaged nation is paying \$50 million in debt service to its foreign creditors *each month*, while of seven major water supply and treatment projects on the agenda, only one is receiving any financing at all. The majority of Ibero-American nations have a similar story to tell.

Points south . . . and north

The first case of cholera in Chile has just been announced, and Argentina is bracing for outbreaks. The Medical Federation of Ecuador has denounced that country's government for a vast cover-up of the extent of the cholera epidemic in that country, and for claiming that the "outbreaks" are under control. Said Federation president Francisco Plaza, "At the present time there are 5,000 cases of cholera in Ecuador, with approximately 100 deaths." Doctors are demanding that "urgent and unpostponable emergency measures" be taken immediately, to try to contain the disease's spread.

In Bolivia, where not a single case of cholera has been reported despite the fact that the country shares borders with five Ibero-American countries, health authorities have just acknowledged the possibility of the contamination by cholera of Lake Titicaca, a vast body of water which straddles both Peru and Bolivia.

Most frightening is the evident northward trend of the disease, which is rapidly making its way up Colombia's Pacific Coast toward Central America. Although Panama's government has yet to admit to any cholera outbreaks, it has officially reported one case of cholera—from a woman who had been living in the United States!

The fear of a cholera pandemic ravaging impoverished Central America is behind the decision to turn a presidential summit on agriculture, scheduled to be held April 26-27 in Panama, into a conference on cholera. According to the Mexican daily *Excelsior* of April 17, presidents from across Central America will consider global measures for containing the cholera threat. The presidents of Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras have already met bilaterally to discuss what preventive measures can be immediately launched. *Excelsior* notes that of 27 million Central Americans, more than half lack access to basic medical services, while two-thirds live under conditions of extreme poverty. With the exception of Costa Rica, access to potable water is limited in both urban and rural areas.

Miami, Florida health authorities have just reported two cases of cholera in individuals just returned from disease-infected lands in South America. And speaking from Peru, the executive secretary of the Andean Pact's health service Nazario Román declared, "If, as is feared, cholera becomes endemic in Peru and the bacillus remains indefinitely in the country, it is inevitable that the disease will spread across the continent. It would not be strange to see it arrive in Mexico and in the United States, given the huge migration of illegals."