

## Africa Report by Mary Lalevée

### Toward an African debt club?

*As famine and disease spread, Zambian President Kaunda put it simply: "We cannot aim our guns at our population."*

The Organization of African Unity is to hold an extraordinary summit meeting on the question of African debt in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia at the beginning of December. This year's chairman of the OAU, Zambia's President Kenneth Kaunda, has called on African heads of state to work out a "common strategy on the debt, in order to present a common front to the creditors," according to the French newsletter *La Lettre du Continent*.

It is very likely that Africa will follow the path of Peru, and decide on imposing a limit to debt repayments at a certain percentage of export revenue—possibly 20%. Burkina Faso is reported to have called on other African governments to declare a total moratorium, but this was rejected in favor of the idea of a "temporary" moratorium on debt repayments, and the long term rescheduling of debts. The West African finance ministers meeting in July had called for rescheduling over 30 or 40 years, and talks this month between Ivory Coast and the International Monetary Fund have focused on Ivory Coast's demand for a 50-year rescheduling of its debt.

In an interview to the Ivory Coast newspaper *Fraternité Matin* on Aug. 19, OAU secretary general Ide Oumarou called for action on the debt crisis, stressing Africa's willingness to pay, but pointing out that the low prices paid for Africa's exports were preventing the repayment of debts. "African states feel an increasing need to be united, and to go to their creditors for discussion and not for confrontation. We are determined to pay

our debts, but we lack the means to do so. Unfortunately, the means still belong to our creditors, who buy our products at low prices, and prevent us from securing the means to repay our debts." He called for a longer payback period and lower interest rates, and added, "We want the creditors to have faith in our states and in Africa, because Africa has not given up. Africa's resources are considerable, provided we are given the means to invest in our countries so as not only to meet our domestic needs, but also the requirements of the debt burden. . . . We are, in principle, determined to pay our debts, but the conditions of repayment should not strangle our economies."

Zambia's economy was indeed being "strangled" by its debt and policies imposed by the IMF. In an interview with the Italian newspaper *Il Giornale* on Aug. 23, President Kaunda described the "economic catastrophe" facing Zambia, and said that IMF policies were rejected by his government. "We cannot shoot our own people." In an appeal to Western nations, Kaunda talked about "life or death" for Zambia. In addition to chronic shortages of basic goods, like bread and maize, shortages of medicine, and problems with public transport, Zambia is now facing epidemic diseases which are hitting animals (epizootic apthra) and grain crops (carbuncle), as well as a devastating epidemic of AIDS. Kaunda said that Zambia's economic situation was typical of many African countries, which are being forced into "autarchy" because

of low revenues from exports of commodities like coffee and cotton.

Asked why Zambia had rejected IMF demands for cuts in food subsidies, he answered, "We cannot aim our guns at our population. . . . In November, our police had to fire on crowds and 15 people were killed. It is not possible to continue that." He described how Zambia had devalued its currency by 900%, on IMF orders, and this led directly to "people dying of hunger."

Indeed, in a report due for release this month, the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) documents how governments' cutbacks on health services according to IMF prescriptions has led to increased deaths, especially among children. Francis Stewart, a co-author of the report, said that Unicef found that the worst-hit are the poor, with malnutrition on the increase for most of the countries scrutinized in the report: "Infant mortality has been rising in some areas after decades of decline, while the trend toward improvement has been halted in at least 21 countries. The proportion of low birth-weight babies increased in at least 10 countries between 1979 and 1982, including Barbados, Cameroon, Guinea-Bissau, Jamaica, Malaysia, Rwanda, and Tanzania."

"Yaws and yellow fever, once thought to have been eliminated, have reappeared in Ghana," she said. "In Chile and Ghana, primary school attendance has been falling, and dropout rates rising; child labor has become more common." Ghana has rigorously implemented IMF policies.

Given this life-or-death situation for African nations, Western nations should support Africa's efforts to find a solution to the debt crisis, along the lines of Lyndon LaRouche's proposals, published in *EIR*'s Aug. 28 issue, for the issuing of credit lines to permit the development of the continent.