

go's City College system for advancement into skilled jobs and four-year colleges and universities. Today the 80-year-old City Colleges of Chicago system grants diplomas and certificates to only 3% of its students yearly. The system, operating with inadequate plant and classroom resources—including books!—has instead become the educator of last resort in basic literacy and GED high school diploma equivalency classes. While struggling to fulfill this important role in dank basements, storefront churches, and community centers, the City Colleges system has become a shadow of its former self. Part-time faculty are paid \$12 an hour and have no health insurance benefits.

Even the current anemic funding levels of Chicago's schools are now dependent on an as-yet-unrenewed 20% state income tax surcharge. But Illinois Gov. Jim Edgar has announced that public schools will get even less, due to the emerging state budget crisis. More ominously still, property taxes, which have served as the basic funding source for Illinois schools, will be "capped" this year—the California "Proposition 13" treatment of a decade ago. To make ends meet, the Chicago school system's building fund and teachers fund have been looted to pay teachers' wages. The Chicago schools are already selling 14-22 year maturity "college bonds" to raise current operating funds.

### **Exploding AIDS cases, prison population**

To round out this unforgiving picture, the plight of social services was ignored in the recent city election campaigns, contributing to the lowest voter participation since 1971.

- Eleven percent of Illinois citizens receive financial assistance, the largest number since the Great Depression. The number increased by 12% in 1990 alone. Illinois' new governor has only in the last days made public \$1 billion in required budget cuts, including in General Assistance. General Assistance pays \$165 a month per person, enough to provide "cigarettes, food, an occasional hotel room, and clothing."

- A dozen Chicago hospitals have closed during the 1980s, victims of chiseling Medicare reimbursements that drove hospitals into the red. With the AIDS epidemic out of control, Cook County hospital, the Chicago area's main hospital for the poor, is threatened with \$90 million in Medicare and Medicaid funding cuts. The reason: an antiquated facility without even minimal fire safety systems.

- The Illinois prison system led the nation in 1990, with a 21% jump in the prison population. State officials project that 13 new prisons would be required to handle this spiraling result of societal breakdown. In Cook County (Chicago), the jail currently houses 1,100 inmates on the floor. Such figures mirror the fact that the United States currently incarcerates more of its citizens than any other nation in the world.

Governor Edgar had made his position clear: "The budget that I propose . . . will answer the questions of the bond-raters out East. . . . It will not please a lot of people here in Illinois."

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## South America

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# IMF policies cause holocaust of disease

by Cynthia R. Rush

Although the Peruvian government has announced that "only" 54,000 people are infected with cholera, experts from Peru's own Health Ministry are estimating that the real figure could be as high as 150,000. In the northern coastal city of Chimbote, where the first outbreak occurred, a second wave of the disease is sweeping the city. Bishop Luis Bambarén reports that there are 500 new cases per day there, and over 100 deaths—compared to the government's report of 250 deaths nationwide. Two hundred cases of malaria and 50 cases of a relatively new and painful infectious disease known as uta have also been reported in the same area. In the port city of Callao, near Lima, there are 60 new cases daily, up from an average of 23. The Peruvian press is reporting that the disease is now "uncontainable."

Initially restricted to Peru's coastal areas, cholera has now crossed the Andes Mountains and reached the inland jungle city of Iquitos, where 11 cases have been reported. Iquitos is just a few hours by ship from the Brazilian city of Tabatinga in the Amazon, and Brazilian Health Minister Dr. Alceni Guerra has admitted that Tabatinga could be the disease's port of entry into Brazil. Twenty cases of cholera have also now been reported in Ecuador, to the north of Peru, most likely carried there by Peruvian fishermen. Ecuadoran Health Minister Plutarco Naranjo denied that these cases constituted a national emergency—"at least not yet."

The Feb. 18 issue of the Peruvian magazine *Caretas* reported that cholera is really the "eighth plague," appearing in the wake of seven others, including dengue fever, malaria, yellow fever, Chagas', tuberculosis, and uta. Tens of thousands of people die of these diseases each year.

Why Peru? Bombs have not fallen there the way they have on Iraq. But the destruction produced as a result of years of the International Monetary Fund's austerity policies very much resembles what's left when the bombers get through. IMF-dictated budget cuts and "adjustment" programs imposed by the free-marketeers who think paying the foreign debt is more important than protecting human life, have devastated infrastructure, energy resources, sanitation, and health services, making it impossible to prevent or adequately treat cholera or any of the other diseases.

In 1980, per capita calorie consumption in Peru was 1,600 daily. A decade's worth of neoliberal economic austerity has lowered that figure dramatically, making the malnourished population even more vulnerable to any disease. Only 55% of Peru's houses have piped drinking water, and only 48% are served by sewage systems. Cholera has spread quickly because untreated sewage carrying the bacteria flows into Lima's inshore coastal waters, contaminating water and fish which are, in turn, consumed by humans. Fifteen cubic meters per second of untreated sewage pours from five large outlets around Lima into these inshore waters.

"Such an epidemic of a preventable disease augurs ill for the future welfare of Latin American countries like Peru," London's *Financial Times* reported on Feb. 28, noting that all these nations "have sustained a decade of large public spending cuts and collapsed infrastructure."

In Peruvian jungle towns like Tingo María, where there are no funds for spraying the mosquito that carries dengue, local authorities have resorted to training school children to search out and physically destroy the mosquito larvae instead.

### **An evil policy**

Despite Peru's poverty and the destruction of infrastructure, President Alberto Fujimori is committed to imposing the same IMF economic policies, so anxious is he to please foreign creditors. Desperate to give the impression that the epidemic is under control, and to encourage Peru's trading partners to start buying its exports once again, Fujimori and his wife ignored the warnings of several Peruvian and international experts and produced television ads in which they both consumed raw fish, and told citizens it was safe to do so. Raw fish is a key ingredient in many traditional Peruvian dishes, and is one of the means by which cholera is being transmitted.

Dr. Eduardo Ayala Bravo, chief of epidemiology at the Daniel Alcides Carrión Hospital in Callao, blames Fujimori's propaganda for the increased number of cases. "People believe these authorities' reports," Dr. Ayala Bravo complained angrily, "and no longer follow the Health Ministry's recommendations, consuming raw fish with abandon, without following even the minimal norms of hygiene. Now, all the prevention campaigns and efforts we've made and expense we've incurred to try to control the disease have gone to the devil."

If Fujimori's actions are the result of criminal stupidity, the U.S. government's behavior represents something even worse. The Bush administration knows full well that its policies mean genocide for Peru, yet it insists that the Fujimori government will only be deemed creditworthy if it adheres strictly to the IMF's austerity regime and adopts Bush's free market "anti-drug" policies—which are no anti-drug policies at all. Washington has just announced that it will hold up a \$94.9 million assistance package for Peru,

charging that the Fujimori government has not acted aggressively enough to curb the drug trade. Sixty million dollars of that aid package—a pittance in terms of what Peru actually needs—was economic assistance intended for a variety of purposes.

The March 6 *Christian Science Monitor* reported statements by Norman Gall, executive director of the São Paulo-based Fernand Braudel Institute of World Economics, who predicted that the foreign aid sent to Peru to help with the cholera epidemic won't be enough to save the region as a whole. "People are writing off the Third World," Gall said, "and these countries have to help themselves to gain credibility. Only then may, I repeat, may they get some outside help."

### **No country is safe**

Virtually no Ibero-American government is equipped today to provide proper treatment and services to those who become ill—let alone to prevent diseases from breaking out. A recent occurrence of malaria in the Pacific coast region of Colombia was attributed by health authorities to the fact that mosquito-spraying programs had been suspended six months earlier. The collapse of Ibero-America's urban infrastructure is causing outbreaks of tuberculosis, leprosy, meningitis, dengue, and malaria.

Baldur Schubert, president of Brazil's National Commission to Combat Cholera, admits that it will be difficult to prevent cholera's entry into his country. It was hoped that the Andean Mountains would have served as an obstacle to the disease's transmission inland to Iquitos; since this failed, there is every likelihood that it will quickly move through the Amazon region, to the port of Manaus, probably borne by human carriers into Brazil's impoverished Northeast, where it will spread rapidly. Two suspected cholera cases have already been reported in the industrial center of São Paulo.

On March 1, the director of the Pan-American Health Organization, Dr. Carlyle Guerra, warned from Guatemala that cholera is now moving toward Central America. "It's necessary to underscore that the poverty and unsanitary conditions which exist in Peru are similar to almost all of Latin America," Dr. Guerra warned, adding that he is particularly worried about Guatemala, because its severe economic crisis has devastated health infrastructure.

The Mexican newspaper *La Jornada* on March 2 charged editorially that with an epidemic of a "medieval" disease such as cholera, "the last decade doesn't represent 10 years of misery and looting, but 100 years of backwardness. Cholera, as a disease of the last century, tends to express that crude reality."

*La Jornada* placed the blame for this crisis squarely on the industrialized nations' banks and financiers, who squeeze capital out of the underdeveloped sector for debt payment, but who "haven't wanted to give the importance required to our nations' great social problems, including public health."