

## Dateline Mexico by Carlos Cota Meza

### Kumate: more criminal than Fujimori?

*Doctors in Mexico are readying a program to fight cholera, despite the health secretary's flippant view.*

**M**exican Health Secretary Jesús Kumate Rodríguez is of Japanese origin. When Alberto Fujimori, another of Ibero-America's rising politicians of Japanese descent, handily won the presidential elections in Peru last year, Kumate's closest collaborators began to moot the possibility that Kumate could similarly become Mexico's next President.

*EIR* is all in favor of Ibero-America's growing minorities taking responsibility for leadership, but if these two prominent figures are being offered as models, the continent's Orientals are going to have to work twice as hard to make up for Kumate's and Fujimori's shameful display of criminal neglect in the face of the cholera pandemic sweeping Ibero-America.

In statements to the daily *El Universal* of May 7, Kumate insisted that "in reality, cholera is merely one variant of diarrhea, and not exactly the most dangerous. Perhaps the population's fear stems from the serious consequences of the disease in past decades, but things are different now." Maybe Dr. Kumate should ask the *maquiladora* workers slaving in subhuman conditions along the Mexico-U.S. border how different things really are.

In his statements, Dr. Kumate even managed to find a positive aspect to the epidemic, "since eight years ago we began a campaign against diarrheic diseases and we have not achieved the desired results. Now, with the appearance of this disease in South America, the [Mexican] population is taking precautions."

In the interview, Kumate minimized the effect of the epidemic, noting that "in Peru, of 150,000 cases, the number of dead patients was less than 1%," implying that the epidemic is now under control.

The Mexican health secretary's statements came in the context of an official state visit by Peruvian President Fujimori to Mexico. The visit of the Peruvian head of state passed virtually unnoticed, leading to comments that Mexico's health authorities had apparently applied Kumate's so-called "precautions" against foreigners arriving from infected nations to the Peruvian President himself.

But Kumate's flippant view of the cholera threat is fortunately not shared by all of Mexico's physicians.

Dr. Cecilia Escandón Romero, head of the Preventive Medicine office of Mexico's Social Security Institute (IMSS), declared May 3 that "we are in a period of alert in the country over the cholera epidemic." She noted that the IMSS is preparing its personnel and revising its infrastructure for rapid deployment against any cholera cases that should appear inside Mexico. More rehydration kits and tetracycline doses have been requested to supply the country's hospital network.

A specialist in epidemiology, Dr. Escandón declared that any epidemiologist worthy of the name should know that an outbreak of cholera in South America must inevitably extend to its neighbors. She insisted that cholera would eventually, unavoid-

ably, enter Mexico. She noted, however, that given the rapidity of its propagation, "one can't make predictions, but we know that we are in a state of alert, and that depending on the kind of measures we take and the level of preparation of the population, the consequences [of the epidemic] could be light or severe."

The last appearance of cholera in Mexico dates back to 1833. Thus, according to Dr. Escandón, the current population is unprepared—both technically and psychologically—to confront a possible epidemic of the magnitude cholera is acquiring elsewhere on the continent and which, "until now, has not been absolutely eradicated anywhere in the world." The epidemiologist observed that "the sources of contagion are contaminated water, consumption of decomposed food, and lack of basic hygiene."

The discrepancy between Dr. Kumate's view and that of Dr. Escandón is rather obvious. It is equally obvious that the preventive measures adopted by the IMSS were *not* ordered by the Health Department. The steps announced by Dr. Escandón follow the guidelines of the World Health Organization (WHO).

WHO director Nakajima declared in late April that "the cholera epidemic is threatening 120 million people in Latin America," and explained that "the conditions which permit the disease's propagation are primarily lack of potable water and proper hygiene, and the consumption of contaminated food." Such conditions, he insisted, "are the result of the economic crisis, the poverty, and the underdevelopment of Latin America." Nakajima's indictment of the international creditor agencies, which have diverted the continent's limited resources from health and infrastructure investment to debt repayment, couldn't be clearer.