

## Editorial

### *The lessons of Hurricane Mitch*

In a Nov. 6 national address, Honduran President Carlos Flores summarized the situation facing his nation and its neighbors, in the wake of Hurricane Mitch: “We have before us a panorama of death, desolation, and ruin in all the national territory. There are corpses everywhere, victims of the landslides or of the waters.”

Two weeks later, that panorama is little changed. If international relief efforts do not quickly initiate *rapid, and large-scale, construction of key infrastructure* in Central America, new corpses, of people brought down by epidemic diseases and starvation, will start piling up, on top of the more than 10,500 already confirmed dead, and 8,850 missing and believed dead, from the storm itself.

Time is of the essence. Lakes of stagnant water, breeding grounds for disease-transmitting mosquitos, must be drained immediately. Already, 50,000 children in the slums of Honduras’s capital, Tegucigalpa, have been exposed to malaria, Health Minister Marco Rosa warned on Nov. 15. With almost 80% of Tegucigalpa still without water services, and an outbreak of cholera already reported in El Salvador, large-scale emergency water purification systems are urgent.

What are the lessons of this disaster? Waste no time bemoaning the severity of the storm. The geography of Central America is such, that such storms have hit it for millennia, and will do so again in the future. Only as short a time ago as 1974, Hurricane Fifi left 10,000 people dead in Honduras.

Do not blame non-existent “demographic pressures” or economic activity, as are the people-hating ecological kooks (including the head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Sergio Vieira de Mello), either. Mitch’s death toll is the foreseeable result of a *policy* to not develop the economies, infrastructure, and nations of the region. Remember Henry Kissinger and his 1983 Bipartisan Commission on Central America? The Commission’s report was explicit: Central America was fit only for plantation agriculture, drug-trafficking free trade zones, and sweatshops.

That same kind of thinking is now crippling interna-

tional relief operations in Central America—as it is the broader task of defeating the current global crisis with world reconstruction. The *Wall Street Journal*, for example, bemoans the fact that free trade “economic reforms could be delayed for years,” if Central American “governments dedicate resources to providing housing and building roads before anything else.” The International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) Michel Camdessus visited the region in mid-November, to extract promises from the governments that they would continue with devastating “structural reforms.” And Tipper Gore, the U.S. Vice President’s wife, went so far as to propose that one “solution” would be to use the disaster to spur implementation of one of her husband’s pet projects, the creation of an Internet registry for “private voluntary organizations.”

Compare this collective lunacy to the response of the Chinese government to the record flooding that nation suffered earlier this year, which, as Lyndon LaRouche writes in his article in this issue, “Is Western Europe Doomed?” exemplifies “a nation . . . which enjoys a quality of leadership matched to an efficient cultural commitment to survive even awesome catastrophes.”

The fact is that the Central American tragedy is a microcosm of what is happening around the world. The starvation spreading across North Korea, the killings and epidemics that are decimating Africa, the danger that tens of thousands of people could die of hunger and cold in Russia this winter—these are all markers of a civilization descending into a New Dark Age.

Central America’s ability to recover will be largely determined by what kind of aid, how fast, it gets from its foreign friends—emphatically including the United States. The governments of the region, like the United States itself, will need to take the kind of approach Franklin Delano Roosevelt would have adopted, and organize large-scale public works projects which put the millions left unemployed by the destruction of agriculture and industry, to work rebuilding the infrastructure, this time better. The countries’ foreign debt must simply be written off—and the IMF be damned.