

Report from Africa by Mary Lalevée

Debt now on the agenda

The continent's situation is desperate, and in the absence of action on the debt, what is happening in Uganda may well spread.

Preparations are now under way for an emergency United Nations conference on Africa, due to take place in May at the U.N. headquarters in New York. This is the first of two conferences called for by the Organization of African Unity summit last July, in response to Africa's worsening plight. The second conference called for is a conference on African debt.

This year's OAU chairman, Senegalese President Abdou Diouf, is expected to tour Europe in the next few weeks to drum up support for the debt conference.

France has given its support to the idea of a conference, in President Mitterrand's usual ambiguous style. A French foreign ministry spokesman told me that the French government had "agreed to study the project of a debt conference," adding that French policy was based on two principles:

"1) Debtor countries should assume their responsibility, and 2) there should be North-South solidarity."

Even such lukewarm support is more than has been given by other Western governments.

Diouf again stressed the urgency of the situation at the recent conference of the International Fund for Agricultural Development in Rome. Said the OAU head:

"Despite all the efforts which our countries must undertake, it would be an illusion to think that the African economies in general, and their agricultural sectors in particular, can have rates of growth that match their real needs, unless adequate solutions are

found with respect to certain externally caused barriers, which are out of our control, but whose burden weighs heavily on our prospects for development.

"Among those limitations, I refer above all to the burden of the foreign debt. The spectacular growth of the volume of foreign debt, as well as the accumulation of debt service, are a serious object of concern for the OAU countries. In fact, at the end of 1985, the cumulative debt of all of the African countries was more than \$170 billion.

"Payments related to debt service went from about \$13 billion in 1982 to over \$20 billion in 1985. These figures mean that debt service, which in 1982 was already at the level of about 20% of export income—a level which it is generally advisable not to exceed—represented, at the end of 1985, more than 27% of total export revenues."

Diouf pointed out, "The seriousness of this situation can be illustrated by the fact that, according to some estimates, the African countries will repay the International Monetary Fund more in 1986 than they have received."

Diouf's remark about 20% of export earnings which should be the maximum used for debt repayment, is a clear hint that the OAU is carefully considering Peru's step of unilaterally making 10% the ceiling on debt repayments.

Nigeria's decision to limit debt service payments to 30% of export

earnings, while at the same time imposing severe austerity measures, is not a solution that can last long. Nigeria's earnings from its oil exports, 95% of all its export earnings, are going to suffer greatly as the price of oil falls.

The future for much of Africa is bleak, according to the scenarios of financiers who have written off vast areas of the continent. The West's Malthusian genocidalists and the Russians agree that millions more Africans must die. Starvation and disease are a favored, but not the only means.

An example of what must tend to become widespread in the absence of a major policy change by the West, is the situation in Uganda, where civil war has been under way since 1979. The French daily *Le Figaro* has estimated that during the years of dictator Idi Amin, 1971-79, more than half a million people were killed, and since 1979, one million more may have lost their lives.

The government of Uganda had actually implemented many of the demands of the International Monetary Fund in 1983-84, benefiting no one, and contributing to the breakdown of the economy. The civil war in Uganda, by no means ended with the takeover of National Resistance Army leader Museveni, could spill over into southern Sudan and eastern Zaïre. A "Thirty Years War" scenario could be just beginning.

The need for a new world economic order and the end of IMF austerity measures will be the theme of an international conference to begin Feb. 2 in Paris, organized by the Schiller Institute and numerous other associations. Prominent speakers from Africa, Latin America, and Europe will speak on the need to create a North-South action committee to campaign for a new world economic order.