

Report from Africa By Mary Lalevée

Preparing for a debt conference

Many creditor countries have rejected OAU proposals to "globalize" the debt problem—but it may happen anyway.

A series of top level meetings are due to take place at the headquarters of the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia over the course of March, preparing for two major international conferences on Africa.

The first is the United Nations Emergency General Assembly Session on Africa, due to take place from May 27-31. The two key themes there will be agriculture and debt. The OAU chairman and President of Senegal, Abdou Diouf, said in an interview to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on March 4, that this U.N. conference "must not fail." A "development charter for Africa" should be signed at the session, whose central point will be the rehabilitation of agriculture.

Diouf is going to Germany March 17-20, after a visit to Austria, to seek support for his proposal. He will also visit Moscow, with the same aim. Soviet contributions to Africa's economic development have been virtually nil over the last 30 years.

The key question remains Africa's debt: Sources have stressed: "Unless the debt problem is solved, all other measures will be useless."

President Diouf has been campaigning broadly for the holding of a conference on African debt, and in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* interview, he said that he would be calling for German support for such a conference on debt during his visit.

Diouf sees the danger, wrote the German paper, that too many technical details at the U.N. session will hide

the need for political steps to be taken. A Somali source said that Diouf is determined that the debt problem should not be handled by bureaucrats, but by Presidents and heads of government, as a political problem.

According to Diouf, in his talks so far, his call has been rejected: Every government has insisted that the debt problem can not be "globalized," but should be handled on a case by case basis. Only French President François Mitterrand supports him, he is reported to have said. But even the French bureaucracy has spoken out against such a conference.

Moves to strengthen South-South cooperation are being taken within Africa, very much along the lines of that *EIR* founding editor Lyndon LaRouche proposed for Latin America in his 1982 *Operation Juárez* document. During Tunisian Prime Minister M'zali's recent tour of West Africa—the first ever by a Tunisian government leader—discussions took place about increased barter deals, and economic and political cooperation between sub-Saharan countries and North Africa. The first results of this are a planned "Tunisian fortnight" in Ivory Coast and Gabon, a trade fare presenting Tunisian products to the public. Gabon's President Bongo spent four days on an official visit to Tunisia at the beginning of March to concretize efforts at collaboration.

Urgent solutions have to be found to Africa's economic problems: the falling price of commodities, including oil, is hitting Africa very hard.

Nigeria is being forced to freeze all import licenses, on which domestic industry depends, following the fall in oil prices, and one businessman was quoted in the *Financial Times* saying, "I have written this year off."

What could result from such problems was hinted at in an article in the weekly *African Concord*, by editor Lewis Obi. Writing on the shock that the fall in oil price had caused to the economy, he concluded, "No-one is certain what Nigeria would do in the circumstances [of a further fall in the price], but debt-servicing would certainly not be the priority of a country which had consistently earned more than \$7 billion yearly from oil in the past 10 years and would have to settle for slightly more than \$2 billion."

Zaire's President Mobutu is also hinting at action on his country's debt: In a speech given at the New Year, but only recently drawn to our attention, he pointed out that Zaire had implemented all the IMF's demands, and the result had been: "In three years, Zaire has paid a total of 1,371 million SDRs to pay its debt. During the same period, loans made to our country were only 893 million SDR. If you examine these figures, you will see that we are paying a lot without receiving anything in return. This is not fair for a young country which has to develop. . . . During these three years, the Zairean people has accepted deprivations and agreed to enormous sacrifices. . . . However, there are limits. . . . I do not lead sheep, I lead men. Rigor, payment of external debt, the 'bravos' and the congratulations, they are all good, but you can't 'eat' rigor, you can't 'eat' congratulations. I have another debt, a very important one: the one I have contracted to my people for its happiness and prosperity. When will I be able to honour this debt?"