

Austerity is killing Mexico's children

by Carlos Méndez

The conditionalities that the International Monetary Fund imposes in Mexico through the government of President Miguel de la Madrid are killing more than 500 children each day. According to the United Nations International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF), in its report "World State of Infancy 1988," the result of the financial crisis in Mexico is that children are dying from malnutrition, and from diseases that are both preventable and curable at minimal cost.

This alarming number of infant deaths, according to the UNICEF report, can be added to the 250,000 children who die each week in the countries of the Third World, primarily due to the austerity imposed by foreign debt obligations. The report describes this situation as one of "silent carnage," and urges "the forgiveness or restructuring of many debts," and real aid and financing from the private banks, at "reasonable interest rates."

Mexican labor foresaw it

Back on Oct. 2, 1986, the social security director of the Mexican Workers Confederation (CTM), Dr. Héctor San Román, warned President de la Madrid that "the constant deterioration of wages, evident for the past three years, has caused the nutrition levels of the Mexican population to fall as much as 20%, such that current nutrition levels are below those which existed 10 years ago."

In his report, Dr. San Román indicated that a full 60% of the Mexican population was undernourished, and that from 1982-84, caloric consumption had shrunk 18%, while that of animal protein had fallen 50%. The cause, he said, was unemployment and the deterioration of purchasing power. The crisis is creating malnourished workers, physical and mental invalids condemned to premature old age, concluded the CTM leader.

The response of President de la Madrid was, "The government cannot avoid all this, because this is what the crisis consists of."

Today, "the crisis" is not only condemning Mexicans to "premature aging," but to premature death. According to UNICEF, of every 1,000 children born in Mexico, 48 die before reaching one year of age, and 71 of every 1,000 born die before the age of five.

In Mexico, says the UNICEF report, the problem of infant mortality is worsened daily by the growing number of children who are forced to live in the streets of Mexico City.

The principal cause is soaring unemployment.

However, what UNICEF doesn't say, is that in Mexico, the "financial crisis" has become an instrument of genocide, due to the austerity policies imposed by a government determined to pay its foreign debt at any cost. Thus, during the period 1982-86, the government reduced the budget allocation for health by 47.9%, in real terms. The picture is bleaker still when one considers that the devaluation of the peso decreed in November has seriously affected the health sector, because of the high percentage of imported medicines and medical equipment that make up the health budget.

Worse still, the highest incidence of AIDS in Mexico is among the infant population, and the percentage of AIDS-infected people under 15 years of age is three times greater in Mexico than in the United States, according to an address by Mexico's health minister, Dr. Guillermo Soberón, before the First National Congress on Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, held Dec. 1-2 of last year.

In fact, the situation is so serious that, according to Minister Soberón, "AIDS is already a priority national problem," and more budget resources should be allocated to battle it since, otherwise, "Mexico will be unarmed in the battle against AIDS, which threatens to become an epidemic in our country as of 1988."

To judge by the government's decision to dedicate 60% of the national budget to paying the debt, and by the brutal austerity measures of the so-called Economic Solidarity Pact imposed last December, not only will there be no available resources to fight AIDS, but living standards are guaranteed to fall even further.

Ecologists offer their two cents

While infant genocide proceeds apace in Mexico, official and unofficial ecologists in the country are making life even more difficult for Mexican parents under the pretext of defending the health of their children. As of Jan. 4, the Public Education Ministry (SPP)—in official agreement with the "green" Ecology and Urban Development Ministry (SE-DUE), and with the various greenie bands it protects—decreed a change in the hour Mexico City's public school children begin classes. Instead at 7 a.m., 8 a.m., or 9 a.m., as previously, schools will now open at 10 a.m. The measure has triggered widespread protests among working parents, and the public in general, who cannot wait until 10 a.m. to go to work.

The argument of the SPP, SEDUE, and allies is that "the sacrifice is worth it," because the children will be spared exposure to deadly ozone layers, which dissipate at approximately 10 a.m. each morning, when temperatures rise.

Despite their "concern" for the health of Mexico's children, these ministries and their greenie protégés have yet to utter a word about the more than 500 children who die daily in Mexico, nor about the children condemned to misery on the streets of Mexico City.