

CAN WE TACKLE AIDS *WITHOUT* CHALLENGING CAPITALISM?

by John Spritzler (<http://newdemocracyworld.org/healthcare.htm>)

1) POVERTY => AIDS

“AIDS experts emphasize a variety of economic and social factors in explaining Africa's AIDS epidemic, placing primary blame on the region's poverty. Poverty has deprived Africa, for example, of effective systems of health information, health education, and health care. Thus, Africans suffer from a high rate of untreated sexually-transmitted infections (STIs) other than AIDS, and these are believed to open the way to infection by HIV. African health care systems are typically unable to provide AIDS counseling, which could help slow the spread of the disease, and even HIV testing is difficult for many Africans to obtain. AIDS treatment is generally available only to the elite. Poverty forces large numbers of African men to migrate long distances in search of work, and while away from home they may have multiple sex partners, increasing their risk of infection. Some of these partners may be women who have become commercial sex workers because of poverty, and they too are highly vulnerable to infection.” [From the National Council for Science and the Environment (a branch of the Library of Congress providing nonpartisan research reports to members of the House and Senate.), May 14, 2001, Raymond W. Copson, <http://cnie.org/NLE/CRSreports/international/inter-34.cfm>]

2) CAPITALISM => POVERTY

Anglo American Corporation paid its shareholders \$547 million in dividends in 2001 by extracting gold and diamonds from ‘poor’ **South Africa**. That comes to \$22,000 per year for each of its estimated 25,000 HIV infected workers in **all of Africa**—far more than the \$10,000 to \$15,000 cost in the U.S. of the most effective AIDS ‘cocktail’ drug regimen. Yet on April 17, 2001 the Wall Street Journal announced that Anglo American had decided **not** to start a pilot study to examine even the feasibility of providing AIDS drugs to its African work force. The poverty of South African mineworkers that prevents them from buying AIDS drugs is a result of the fact that their country’s wealth goes into the pockets of foreign capitalists. A South African mineworker who spends 20 years underground faces a one-in-thirty chance of being killed and a one-in-two chance of being permanently disabled, all for the princely sum of a \$160/month wage. [Based on <http://www.angloamerican.co.uk/res2002/AR13%20March%2002.PDF>, <http://www.newint.org/issue265/gold.htm> and <http://www.hivnet.ch:8000/global/media-aids/viewR?98>]

“Colonial governance was for colonial benefit. What about the post-independence governance? The facts are clear and well documented, it is the question of responsibility that raises problems and a debate. The facts are that the common people of Africa have not benefitted from post-independence governance. If anything, they are materially and physically worse off than before. The facts are that famine and civil strife are daily taking a massive toll of African lives, especially of children and their mothers. The facts are that the external debt of sub-Saharan Africa is roughly equal to their entire combined national incomes, and that, together, they use up 40% of the total value of their exports just to service these debts. The facts are that 90% of these debts should not be paid in any case, for many of them are either fraudulent (in the technical, legal, sense of the term) or are accumulated interest. The facts are that the commodity prices of Africa's exports have tumbled over the decades, and African peasants are working three to four times harder today than two decades ago just to receive the same quantum of value, of which then 40% goes to service the debts. The facts are that when the World Bank's total lending to sub-Saharan Africa had reached the US\$ 2 billion mark in 1988, Africa's hard currency debt had already risen to US\$ 200 billion. The facts are that Africa's commodities are undervalued, African peasants over-exploited, and African governments are trapped in a vicious circle out of which, as individual members of government, they can escape

only through graft and kickbacks from transnationals [multinational corporations] who win tenders for projects which do not benefit the masses of the people. And finally, and not the least, the facts are that the [International Monetary Fund's] Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) that have been going on in most of Africa over the last decade or more have worsened, not bettered, the condition of the common people of Africa in terms of health, access to education, and access to basic means of survival.

One can go on documenting these hard realities of post-independence Africa. But it is not necessary, for we have the answer to the question, "whose governance?" **It certainly is not governance on behalf of the common people. It is governance on behalf of a couple of hundred industrial and banking transnationals who are draining Africa's natural resources at enormous profit for themselves (see their annual reports to their shareholders), a couple of thousand African billionaires who have tucked away their ill-gotten gains in Western banks, a couple of million white settlers who still own farmlands, mines and tourist resorts in Africa, and a couple of million black intermediaries who are acting on behalf of their foreign companies.** That's the rough arithmetic of those who benefit from the rich resources of Africa. Excluding the transnationals, they constitute barely 0.5% of Africa's population. ” [From: *Reclaiming Africa's Agenda: Good Governance and the Role of NGOs in the African Context*, paper presented at the Conference "Good Governance for Africa: Whose Governance?" organized by the University of Limburg and ECDPM Maastricht, 23-24 November 1995, Yash Tandon, Harare, <http://www.ecdpm.org/pubs/govtan.htm>]

3) U.S. GOV. => CAPITALISM

“ [W]e have about 50% of the world's wealth, but only 6.3% of its population....In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity....To do so, we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and day-dreaming; and our attention will have to be concentrated everywhere on our immediate national objectives....We should cease to talk about vague and...unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of the living standards, and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are then hampered by idealistic slogans, the better. ” [From *Policy Planning Study 23*, written by George Kennan for the State Department planning staff in 1948]

“ For declassified U.S. government documents explaining the role of Third World countries, see for example, N.S.C. [National Security Council Memorandum] 144/1, "United States Objectives and Courses of Action With Respect to Latin America," March 18, 1953, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Vol. IV ("The American Republics"), Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983. The Memorandum begins (pp. 6-7, 9):

“There is a trend in Latin America toward nationalistic regimes maintained in large part by appeals to the masses of the population. Concurrently, there is an increasing popular demand for immediate improvement in the low living standards of the masses, with the result that most Latin American governments are under intense domestic political pressures to increase production and to diversify their economies.”

Aiming to avoid this "drift in the area toward radical and nationalistic regimes" -- which is "facilitated by historic anti-U.S. prejudices and exploited by Communists" -- the Memorandum then lists the objectives and proposed courses of action for the United States, which include "Adequate production in Latin America of, and access by the United States to, raw materials essential to U.S. security. ” [From *Understanding Power*, by Noam Chomsky, Chapter 2, footnote 52]

Note: old documents are cited here because newer ones are generally still classified. Despite grandstanding trips to Africa by U.S. Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill (and Bono), there is no evidence of fundamental change in actual U.S. foreign policy.