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AIDS AND THE IMPERIALIST CONNECTION

By Mzala

Several theories have been put forward about the origin of the AIDS virus (HIV). In an article in the October 1988 issue of Sechaba, we discussed one of these theories, showed its origins in scientific literature, and demonstrated the dangers it has created in the racist world.

The problem with reports about AIDS is that they start at the end of the story, not at the beginning. No serious and informed attempt has yet been made to question why such a deadly virus could suddenly spring from 'nowhere' and infect millions of people within such a relatively short time.

Yet this question is crucial in many respects — where was the virus all the time? Was it there among human beings or certain animals, but lying dormant until it was triggered off by something? If so, why did the animal kingdom (including human beings) not develop antibodies to it during its latent stage? How did the virus get into the blood of its first victim? If it was only in the blood of certain animals, how did it cross the species barrier and infect human beings? And why have scientists and medical researchers not found any animal infected with HIV? Is the problem, perhaps, located in our changing environment, in nuclear radiation? Yet how does such radiation, if it is the cause, create such viruses among human beings? And why should it begin with certain specific human groups (homosexuals, for example) and not

affect the whole population simultaneously? Does the 'mysterious' development of the AIDS virus indicate that humankind is now living in an era of uncontrolled and inexplicable health hazards?

Many Questions, Few Answers

Answers to these questions are important because, if a common reservoir of these viruses exists, it should be found before more viruses emerge, and it might hold the clue to ways of combating the AIDS virus, perhaps with vaccines. This is not to suggest that doctors should stop combating the epidemic and merely stand around wondering where the virus came from. The point is that all branches of human knowledge and activity, not least political activists, should search for clues and suggest areas of focus.

Perhaps political analysts are attempting to take too much into their hands when they dismiss the link that some medical scientists have observed between AIDS and the

African green monkey. For was it not the eminent medical scholars themselves, in laboratory conditions, who first made this observation? Furthermore, medical practitioners like Drs A J Nahmias and J Weiss¹ have claimed that human blood samples collected in Africa as early as 1959 contained antibodies against the virus. Their theory is based on one positive specimen of blood taken from a sample of 672 people from four African countries. Of course, many doctors practising in African hospitals and clinics have stated categorically that if AIDS had existed there before the 1980s, they would have recognised it as a clinical entity. Moreover, most of the tests conducted on African blood have been admitted to give false positive, as well as false negative, results.²

Military Projects

Yet the story of the African green monkey has something to tell us. Virologists have discovered that there is a monkey virus called the simian T-cell leukaemia virus (STLV) or simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV), which is closely related to HIV. As early as January 1960, Newberne and Robinson³ revealed that, at the Medical Research Laboratory of the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), based in Bangkok, Thailand, experimenters were surprised by two epidemics of leukaemia (cancer) in gibbons when they attempted to produce cancer in monkeys.⁴ SEATO is a military alliance closely allied to NATO.

The SEATO laboratory work involved the infection of gibbons with human malaria, and the subsequent transmission of that malaria within the primate colony. According to de Paoli *et al*,⁵ the experimental procedures involved infected human blood or immature malaria parasites from mosquitoes being injected into one gibbon, then blood from that gibbon being injected into others and so on. All nine gibbons that developed leukaemia had been injected with blood from two of the human patients. Of the nine, two had had their spleens removed to lower their immunity.

By 1967, the entire colony of gibbons had suffered human herpes.

The Monkey Business

Some researchers⁶ have pointed out that there was, at this period, "a massive trade in monkeys," including from Africa, that went mainly to the United States. A condition known as AIDS was recorded as having broken out for the first time among monkeys at the California Primate Research Centre in Davis, California, in 1969, and it was called simian AIDS. The similarities between the disease of these monkeys and human AIDS is striking: diseased lymph nodes, enlarged spleen, fever, diarrhoea, weight loss, infection with micro-organisms such as staphylococcus aureus, pseudomonas and shingella species.

This information is corroborated by a report published by researchers at another military project of the United States in San Francisco in 1973, which reported the condition of "three gibbons (that) were available to us for clinical studies."⁷ These gibbons, the report continued, had shown irregular leucocyte counts since 1968-69, and in 1970 one of them had died. In January 1971, two young gibbons were injected with bone marrow from the dead animal, and what was thought to be a new retrovirus was found in the two gibbons. According to T G Kawakami *et al*,⁸ it was known by December 1971 that the virus could infect human tissue grown in culture.

Immune Deficiency

Another case of malignant lymphoma (cancer), seen for the first time in over 11 000 monkeys housed at the California Primate Research Centre, was diagnosed on February 23rd 1969. Stowell and Smith⁹ admit that, though these monkeys had not been exposed to any known cancer agent, but had instead simply been injected with malaria parasites of the monkey type (*plasmodium cynomolgi*), they subsequently developed cancer of the blood, whose clinical symptoms resemble those of present-day AIDS. The discovery of this cancer, Stowell reported, caused much excitement among scientists conducting the experiments, because of, "its astonishing incidence, its similarity to some lymphomas in man, and the possibility that the

study of this model of human lymphoma may help in our understanding and preventing similar types of human cancer."

Most of the monkeys kept at this centre (at least between January 1969 and December 1977) had a history of weight loss, lethargy, loss of appetite, diarrhoea, disease of the lymph nodes, and vomiting during the last few weeks of illness. Several factors suggested that the immune systems of the monkeys had been weakened, especially those parts dependent upon certain blood cells known as lymphocytes. Because of the high incidence of viral or bacterial infection affecting them, it became clear that the development of lymphoma, as well as other infections, was secondary to the deficiency in their immunity. Was it a mere coincidence, once again, that the clinical picture in these monkeys resembled what later was to develop in human AIDS patients? Maybe.

Less Than Noble Motives

The import of monkeys from Asia and Africa by the United States and other major imperialist powers has not, of course, been only for experimenting in their military laboratories. It is a well-known fact that some medicines used for human purposes have been extracted from certain parts of the monkeys, as from other animals. For example, much of the polio vaccine used throughout the world is produced on cultures of kidney cells from African green monkeys. This point, however, does not dismiss as impossible or impractical that other, less noble, motives have been behind the experimentation with animals from the wild forests of Africa and Asia.

HIV is related to the monkey virus only to the extent that both of them belong to the type of virus called 'retrovirus.' The word, 'retro' means 'backward,' and retroviruses are so called because the virus pervades the host cell to convert viral ribonucleic acid (RNA) back into deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), contrary to the normal method of operation of the cell, which involves making RNA from DNA. DNA is the blueprint of life; it carries the genetic information unique to the organism. RNA contains

the information the cell needs for making proteins. Generally, retroviruses have been known to cause leukaemias.

Human Retroviruses Appear

As recently as 1979, scientific literature acknowledged that, "our current knowledge of retroviruses does not suggest that they should be of practical importance to the human clinician, in contrast to the veterinarian."¹⁰ But this was precisely the error that some scientists were making, since they ignored the possibility for the creation of new viruses in laboratory conditions. New 'human' retroviruses were discovered in the 1980s, for example, HTLV I and HTLV II. Tests showed that these viruses were not genetically related to any known monkey viruses, although there was a close similarity with SIV. Virologists say that HTLV and SIV share at least 95% of their genetic structure. The degree of genetic similarity between SIV and HIV is less than 75%, which suggests that the monkey virus could not have been directly — **directly!** — transmitted to man in the recent past. This does not dismiss, however, possibilities of cross-species transmission.

Suggestions that African green monkeys could have passed on their virus to human beings, either when people ate them (and admittedly monkey meat is regarded as a delicacy in some African cultures) or through an accidental bite, are genetically uninformed. Attempts to infect non-human primates with human HIV have generally been unsuccessful, except in the case of chimpanzees. While they can be experimentally infected with HIV, even they do not develop clinical AIDS, except for a stubborn disease of the lymph nodes which was noticed in one animal.

HIV a Laboratory Product?

HIV is structurally so distinct from the other, similar, type of retroviruses that its origin is 'new' in the sense that it never existed in its present form in any other species before. HIV has a cylindrical, bar-shaped nucleoid containing the genetic material,

whereas other, similar, types of viruses have round, central nucleoids.¹¹ In fact, HIV is said to be rather more closely related to a visna virus found in Icelandic sheep, though there are other distinctions.

However, as has already been said, there is evidence to suggest that two different viruses can be genetically combined to create a new one, a process known in genetic engineering as phenotypic mixing (swapping of genes). The newly-created virus may take some properties from both parents and possess infecting capabilities in a far wider range of species than the individual parents. An example often cited to demonstrate this possibility is that of the mixing of Rous sarcoma virus (RSV), which normally infects chickens, and the mouse sarcoma virus (MSV) which normally infects mice. The resultant virus can infect rats, mink, mice and human beings.¹²

In the London *Sunday Express* of October 26th 1986, some scientists expressed the opinion that more than one virus may have combined to give rise to human AIDS. In 1982, some virologists and immunologists suggested that AIDS could be linked with known viruses. The main question, then, is — was this accidental or a deliberate laboratory procedure?

CIA and Germ Warfare

It is common knowledge among politically conscious people that in the 1970s the Cuban government alleged, on the basis of its successful infiltration of the CIA, that the United States government was planning to infect Cuban pigs with African swine fever, in the hope that the Cuban population would eat contaminated pork. Various leaders of the Cuban government and Party revealed this, particularly Fidel Castro.

It is also a known fact in medical history that when the first retrovirus was discovered (the maedi-visna), which is a natural virus in sheep and goats, there was much excitement among the military branches of SEATO because of the clinical observations on the sheep that were suffering from a disease called *scrapie*.¹³ The visna virus, which can be transmitted from animal to animal in saliva and respiratory excretions,

destroys the outer coating of the nerve cells in the central nervous system, causing irritability, loss of balance and grinding of teeth. The affected animal rubs away its wool against a fixed object, loses weight and dies within months.

Interestingly, during the mid-1970s, after this discovery, the Fore tribe in a remote valley of Papua New Guinea was found to be suddenly infected with a disease causing brain damage, with loss of balance and a shiver-like tremor that progressed to complete paralysis and death in less than a year from onset. The virus said to be causing this condition was very rare, and though it was admitted to be related to the visna virus, it was a new virus. Was this a result of experiments on human beings by those keen to develop germ warfare? If not, why was this virus uniquely attacking the Fore tribe? The disease came to be known as *kuru*.

Where Death Is 'Success'

Other diseases, similar to *kuru*, have since developed in the world, such as Cruetzfeld-Jakob Disease and Alzheimer's Disease, all of which are caused by unusual viruses, resistant to ultra-violet light as well as to radiation. Whatever and wherever these viruses are manufactured, it seems most clear they are meant to resist all cure!

At the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, USA, viruses obtained from the *kuru* disease have been injected, in combination with other diseases, into brains and blood of chimpanzees, gibbons and the African green monkey. According to Dr C L Masters,¹⁴ this laboratory used no less than 54 chimpanzees in *kuru* research alone. Dr B A Kakulas,¹⁵ on the other hand, writes of a total of over 300 primates that had already been used by 1976 in what was described as a "continuing project." Months later, some of these primates died of pneumonia, a quite untypical disease for *kuru*, yet quite typical for AIDS.

In 1980, it was published¹⁶ that in the Bethesda laboratories the viruses of *kuru* and Cruetzfeld-Jakob Disease had been grown in cultures of African green monkey cells mixed with foetal bovine serum and

ten other animal viruses. At these laboratories, a combination of the viruses were injected into goats, guinea pigs, hamsters, voles, mice, ferrets, mink, sheep, raccoon and rats "with varying degrees of success in each species."

What was not revealed was the purpose of this wide range of experimentation. Why was there a trial on all these animals?

Biological Bomb?

In 1980, Y M Cripps¹⁷ revealed that, at the US Army Biological Warfare Establishment in Fort Detrick, 423 human cases of serious infection and three deaths had occurred over a period of 25 years, because of contamination with germs at the laboratory. This was despite the fact that this is regarded as the most secure of US Defence Ministry laboratories. Obviously, these figures do not give precise information, because such establishments are hidden from the public eye, and are also protected by laws governing official secrets.

No laboratory can guarantee the absolute security of its work in germ experimentation. The Marburg virus incident is an illustrious example. Around August or September 1976, laboratory workers in Marburg and Frankfurt in the Federal Republic of Germany contracted a disease from their working environment and developed high fever, slow heart rate, headaches, stomach aches and inflammation of the eyes. Some of the workers died, and it was later diagnosed that they had been exposed to the tissues or cell cultures of African green monkeys, recently imported from Uganda via London. The virus got its name from that incident. In 1970, a report said that those infected had been exposed to an "unusually virulent strain of the virus" that normally has the monkey as its host.¹⁸

Unnecessary Danger

Ecological disruption and human invasion of the animal environment has given rise to previously unknown infections. Some viruses, carried quite safely by animals, begin to be fatal only when they have been

transferred to human beings. Lassa fever is an example, being spread by rodents, but without seeming to harm them. Animals certainly have a reservoir of viruses not yet discovered by human beings.

At times, sheer mishandling of the material for experimentation exposes human beings to great danger. The following letter to *The Lancet* from Drs Simpson and Zuckermann of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine mentions dangers involved:

"Research and teaching in this school are necessarily concerned with exotic diseases ... it is only natural that we regularly receive material from all over the world for diagnoses and identification. We are happy to provide such assistance, and where we cannot do so ourselves we forward the specimen to someone who can. It is probably not generally known that Lassa fever serology is now being carried out at the Microbiology Research Establishment, Porton Down, Wiltshire.

"The condition in which many of the specimens arrive causes us extreme concern. Our most recent examples have been badly smashed blood samples sent by post from overseas for hepatitis and Lassa fever studies. These samples were potentially highly infectious, but were so badly packed that serum was leaking freely through the outer paper. There is no need to stress the hazard to postal workers or to those who have to open the package ..." (my emphasis)¹⁹

From bubonic plague to malaria, many human disease epidemics have been traced back to infectious organisms carried by animals. A series of new diseases has come about because of the experiments with animals described above, but also more specifically because of the work on germ warfare that goes on within military establishments and laboratories.

In 1986, three scientists from the German Democratic Republic, J Segal, L Segal and R Dehmlow, produced an 80-page paper in which they argued that the AIDS virus was a product of United States military conspiracy. Their case may have been overstated, but there are basic facts to follow on this thesis. This is despite the fact that, in

July 1987, the US State Department published a report denying the involvement of the Fort Detrick Military Establishment in the production of the AIDS virus.

Military-Industrial Secrets

On the basis of some of the stated positions in this article, it seems most reasonable that, when investigations are conducted on the origins and development of HIV, laboratories of the military-industrial complex should not be excluded. Public attention has been drawn to the danger of nuclear weapons — the visible missile silos that threaten to explode the earth into a rubble of uninhabitable matter — but little or no attention has been given to the development of deadly viruses in the secrecy of the laboratories of many imperialist countries. Yet these germs are no less lethal than nuclear weapons. Campaigns for signing of peace treaties should cover them also.

Imperialism is aggressive, and respects no human values. Militarism is its most dangerous doctrine, since it proceeds from the assumption that mankind can be disposed of, if only for the use of the products of military-industrial enterprises.

There is no conclusive statement here that HIV was developed in the laboratories of the United States military establishment, but an argument has certainly been advanced, backed by facts, that AIDS-like viruses were being created through genetic engineering within these establishments. And it might also be sheer coincidence that the laboratory where the first claim was made for the discovery of the AIDS virus, in Bethesda, Maryland, is actually the laboratory that has been involved in experimentation with animal viruses as described above. Our task is not to make wild and irresponsible statements, even if they are against the class forces that are hostile to us. Serious analysts, we believe, should not be alarmists. But, on the basis of facts, we can proclaim that the international community needs to develop a sensitive awareness of the proceedings within military laboratories, as well as within those civilian laboratories where dangerous germs are being created.

In countries like the United States, where prisons are owned by private companies or individuals, prisoners can be vulnerable members of society when it comes to the need to experiment on human beings to prove the effectiveness of these germs.

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