

by Nate Hendley
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Last summer, activists erected 2,000 wooden crosses in a park in downtown Vancouver. The crosses symbolized the number of injection-drug users who have overdosed and died in British Columbia since 1992.

ies. Some of these officials sit on a federal taskforce that has been convened to investigate the idea.

According to Rae, Frankfurt's injection rooms were opened at the behest of local police, who saw little point in pursuing failed "zero tolerance" strategies, and business merchants, who disliked having addicts hanging around their premises.

Safe Shooting Rooms

In the near future, organizers might have to plant even more crosses; according to a report issued last fall by the Vancouver-based Harm Reduction Action Society (HRAS), roughly 23 to 30 per cent of the city's estimated 10,000 heroin addicts are HIV-positive. Nearly nine out of ten have hepatitis C.

While still a revolutionary concept in North America, safe shooting rooms are relatively common in Europe.

The federal government is also interested in safe shooting rooms: Ottawa launched a taskforce in the spring to look into the feasibility of setting up injection sites in Canada.

Vancouver, in fact, has the highest rate of HIV infection in western world. Media pundits refer to the shabby downtown east side, where most of the city's addicts live, as the "killing fields."

Since they were launched in Germany, Holland and Switzerland in the 1980s and 1990s, supervised injection sites have been credited with reducing overdose deaths, the spread of disease and petty crime. The main negative impact of such places is that they tend to attract drug dealers, who try to peddle their wares among the clientele.

The task force is headed by Catherine Airth, acting director of the Office of Canada's Drug Strategy, a branch of Health Canada, and Dr. Perry Kendall, chief medical officer for B.C. Rounding out the taskforce are health, justice and police officials, as well as treatment specialists, such as Shaun Hopkins, manager of Toronto's needle exchange program.

The situation in cities such as Montreal and Toronto, while not quite as apocalyptic, is still pretty grim.

Victoria Services
AVI Street Outreach Services (SOS) 3841345
1220 Commercial Alley- needle exchange
Outreach Services Clinic 4801232
2004 Fernwood Rd.- methadone program

Hopkins says the taskforce's research will be included in a draft report on needle-drug use that will be presented at a meeting of provincial health ministers in the fall.

A study by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) suggests that nearly 10 per cent of Toronto's estimated 15,000 heroin addicts are HIV-positive. In Montreal, the infection rate is about 20 per cent.

Nonetheless, injection rooms are becoming an increasingly popular option among policymakers around the world; authorities in Australia opened a safe shooting site a few months ago, while Spain is planning to establish similar venues soon.

Even if the ministers are okay with the idea, the federal government would have to change the Criminal Code before opening any safe injection sites, says Hopkins. At present, laws against possession rule out the possibility of creating such places.

Drug addicts contract HIV by using dirty needles. Needle-sharing - a common practice among junkies - further spreads the disease.

Vancouver Mayor Philip Owen would also like to open a safe shooting room. The mayor has become a firm supporter of a so-called "four pillar" approach to that city's terrible HIV problem. This approach puts equal emphasis on enforcement, prevention, treatment and harm reduction, and might include injection rooms.

In the end, a concern about the bottom line might be the main factor that pushes the feds to make the change.

There is a way to stem the rate of HIV/AIDS among injection drug users: give addicts clean needles, a safe place to shoot up and medical supervision, so they can be revived if they overdose.

Councillor Kyle Rae has taken a similar position in Toronto. He represents the downtown core and has long lobbied for drug-law reform initiatives, including safe shooting rooms. He even visited a pair of supervised injection sites during a visit to Frankfurt, Germany a few years ago.

According to the report "HIV, AIDS and Injection Drug Use," which was written by a Health Canada taskforce in the late 1990s, the average lifetime cost of treating a single HIV patient runs to over \$100,000.

Such locales are called safe - or supervised - injection sites.

"It was interesting watching people shooting up right in front of you," notes the councillor.

That's the kind of figure likely to bring around diehard opponents of safe injection rooms, who are otherwise unmoved by the sight of countless crosses in a park.

The HRAS report defines them as, "controlled health-care settings where drug users inject drugs under supervision and receive health-care, counselling, and referral to health and social services, including drug treatment."

Nate Hendley is a freelance journalist who lives in Toronto. He has written extensively for This Magazine, the National Post and eye weekly, among other publications.

A growing number of high-ranking officials would like to open safe injection sites in Can-

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who voice opinions critical of government policy or who plan to take part in demonstrations."

While the reports are revealing, what is omitted is reference to the long history of state repression against dissent in both Canada and the U.S, not only to "criminalize dissent" but also to "neutralize" dissent. In 1971 the Church Commission in the U.S. revealed the FBI's secret COINTELPRO (Counterintelligence Program). This program would use schemes to "misdirect, discredit, disrupt and otherwise neutralize" specific individuals and groups. When this failed the program turned to extreme methods. As author Brian Glick writes, the FBI used "harassment, intimidation and violence: Eviction, job loss, break-ins, vandalism, grand jury subpoenas, false arrests, frame-ups, and physical violence were threatened, instigated or

directly employed, in an effort to frighten activists and disrupt their movements. Government agents either concealed their involvement or fabricated a legal pretext. In the case of the Black and Native American movements, these assaults--including outright political assassinations--were so extensive and vicious that they amounted to terrorism on the part of the government."

These types of campaigns are neither over nor limited to the U.S. Recent evidence from RCMP tapes made during the siege of the Ts'peten Defenders at Gustafson Lake in 1995 reveal what RCMP Staff Sergeant Peter Montague referred to as a "smear campaign". This campaign would include fabricating bullet holes in a police truck and flack jackets, shooting at an unarmed Defender from a police helicopter and reporting it as "self defense" and planning the assassination of indigenous Defenders within the camp.

IMF...Continued from page 3

the nation's GDP had already dropped 2.1% below the year earlier mark, and nosedived since.

What on Earth would induce Argentina to embrace the IMF's goofy program? The payoff, if Argentina does as it's told, is that this week the IMF lend \$1.2 billion in aid. This is part of an emergency loan package of \$26 billion for 2001 put together by the IMF, World Bank and private lenders announced at the end of last year.

But there is less to this generosity than meets the eye. The Understanding also assumes Argentina will "peg" its currency, the peso, to the dollar at an exchange rate of one to one. The currency peg doesn't come cheap. American banks and speculators are charging a whopping 16% risk premium above normal in return for the dollars needed to back this currency scheme.

Now do the arithmetic. On Argentina's \$128 billion in debt, normal interest plus the 16% surcharge by lenders comes to about \$27 billion a year. In other words, Argentina's people don't net one penny from the \$26 million loan package. Little of the bail-out money escapes New York where it lingers to pay interest to US creditors holding the debt, big fish like Citibank and little biters like Steve Hanke.

Hanke is President of Toronto Trust Argentina, an 'emerging market fund' which loaded up 100% on Argentine bonds during the last currency panic, in 1995. Cry not for Steve, Argentina. His annual return that year of 79.25% put the speculator's trust at the top of the speculation league table. This year he'll do it again.

Hanke profits by betting on the failure of the IMF's policies. But 'vulture' investing is merely Hanke's avocation. In his day job as professor of economics at Johns Hopkins University, Maryland, he freely offers straightforward advice to end Argentina's woe, advice which would put him out of the speculation game: "Abolish the IMF."

To begin with, Hanke would do away with the 'peg' - that one-peso-for-one-dollar exchange rate - which has proven a meat-hook on which the IMF hangs the Argentina's finances.

It's not the peg itself that skewers Argentina - but the peg combined with the Four Horsemen of IMF neoliberal policy: liberalized financial markets, free trade, mass privatization, and government surpluses.

'Liberalizing' financial markets means allowing capital to flow freely across a nation's borders. Indeed, after liberalization five years ago, the capital has flowed freely, with a vengeance. Argentina's panicked rich have dumped their pesos for dollars and sent the hard loot to investment havens abroad. Last month alone, Argentine's withdrew 6% of all bank deposits.

Once time, government-owned national and provincial banks supported the nation's debts. But in the mid 1990s, the government of Carlos Menem sold these off to Citibank of New York, Fleet Bank of Boston and

upon a youth curing their ennui by "indulging in protest, misguided" by naive notions. The media plays to this theme, focusing on the few thousand marching in Genoa, but not the 80,000 in the streets of Buenos Aires last May, nor the general strike honored by 7 million Argentine workers last June.

*I can not only see another world I can feel another world
- protester during general strike in Argentina*

other foreign operators.

Charles Calomiris, a former World Bank advisor, describes these bank privatizations as a "really wonderful story." Wonderful for whom? Argentina has bled out as much as three-quarters of a billion dollars a day in hard currency holdings.

There's more cheer for creditors in the Understanding, including 'reform of the revenue sharing system.' This is the kinder, gentler way of stating that the US banks will be paid by siphoning off tax receipts earmarked for education and other provincial services. The Understanding also finds cash in "reforming" the nation's health insurance system (cut cut cut).

But when cut cut cut isn't enough to pay the debt holders, one can always sell 'la joyas de me abuela,' grandma's jewels, as journalist Mario del Carvil describes his nation's privatization scheme. The French picked up a big hunk of the water system and promptly raised charges in some provinces by 400%.

The Understanding's final bullet is imposition of "an open trade policy." This requires Argentina's exporters, with their products priced via the 'peg' in US dollars, into a pathetic, losing competition against Brazilian goods priced in a devaluing currency. Stoopid.

Still, the IMF's scheme could work. All, that is required is 'flexible' workforce, willing to bend to lower pensions, lower wages or no wages at all. But, to the dismay of Argentina's elite, the worker bees are proving inflexibly obstinate in agreeing to their own impoverishment. One inflexible worker, Anibal Verón, a 37-year-old father of five, lost his job as a bus driver; his company owes him 9 months pay.

Verón joined the 'piqueros,' the angry unemployed who blockade roads (39 blockades began just this week). In clearing a blockade in November, the military police allegedly killed him with a bullet to the head.

The death in Genoa of anti-globalization protester Carlo Giuliani was Page One news in the US and Europe. Verón's death was page zero. Nor did you read about Carlos Santillán, 27 nor Oscar Barrios, 17, gunned down in a church courtyard in Salta Province when the police fired on a protest against the IMF austerity plan.

Globalization boosters like Tony Blair prefer to portray resistance as a lark of pampered Western

(SERPAJ) charges de la Rúa's government with using hunger and terror to impose the IMF plans. SERPAJ leader Adolfo Pérez Esquivel told me he is documenting cases of torture of protesters by police in the town where Santillán and Barrios died. To Pérez Esquivel who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1980 repression and liberalization are handmaidens. He told the Observer he has just filed a complaint charging police with recruiting children as young as 5 years old into paramilitary squads, an operation he compares to the Hitler Youth.

But Pérez Esquivel, who led protests against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, doesn't agree with my verdict against the IMF in Argentina's death. He notes that the economically fatal 'reforms' are embraced with enthusiasm by the nation's finance minister, Domingo Cavallo, best remembered as the head of the central bank during the military dictatorship. For the aging pacifist, that suggests that the untimely demise of the nation's economy wasn't murder, but suicide.

Award-winning investigative reporter Greg Palast writes, Inside Corporate America, fortnightly in the Observer (London), Sunday paper of Britain's Guardian recently threatened by Barrick Mining of Toronto for an expose of that companies questionable involvement in an African mining disaster. Barrick has on its board of international advisors, ex-pres. Bush Sr., whom Palast has also provided with publicity which may have upset them all.

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