EXCURSUS 2

Thomas Land on AFRICA CONFRONTS ALCOHOLISM

The first working model for research into alcoholism throughout the African continent has been erected by specialists engaged in a long-term study at the University of Lusaka in Zambia. It may well be adapted by many other universities. for most African governments are alarmed by a disastrously increase in alcoholism within their borders in the wake of social upheavals that accompany the growing industrialization of the region.

The United Nations World Health Organization (WHO), which has assisted the Zambia project, is planning a global campaign against the makers of alcoholic beverages and the marketing of their products in the developing countries, similar in some ways to the recent drive against the marketing of infant formulas. A spokesman for WHO explains that "the evidence of increasing damage in a large number of developing countries suggests that alcohol-related problems constitute an important obstacle to their socioeconomic development and are likely to overwhelm their health resources unless appropriate measures are taken."

Specialists now talk in terms of a "worldwide epidemic" of alcoholism in both the rich and the poor countries. The developing regions, including even the Islamic world, are particularly exposed.

Alcoholism is a special health risk for vast populations ravaged by conditions of overcrowding, poverty, and squalor. The current climate of family breakdowns and widespread migration of landless peasants away from the depressed countrysides of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and into the anonymous expanding cities may well exacerbate the problem during coming years.

Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, the teetotalling Zambian president, has been disturbed by the spread of alcoholism in his country for many years. Nevertheless, his administration has been unable to formulate effective prevention, control, and treatment programs in the absence of adequate basic research data. Now a set of reports assembled during years of work at the Lusaka University has been published; and Professor Muyunda Mwanalushi, the former dean of humanities, expects them to lead to rapid reforms at home and a spate of related investigations based on the Zambian model in other African countries.

Beer is traditionally consumed in Zambian society, but drunkenness used to be infrequent. Drinking had a place in ceremonial occasions as an offering to ancestral and other spirits. The availability of drink was restricted to the harvest periods, and the alcohol content of beer was relatively low.

Urban pressures have now created a figure unknown in traditional African society: the lonely drinker setting out to get drunk. Statistics assembled by the Zambian investigators show that heavy drinkers are increasingly those of younger years and are becoming more violent—at a rapidly escalating cost to society. In fact, alcohol is considered a significant contributory factor in 24 per cent of all cases brought before the courts and in more than half of all traffic accidents. The problem is so acute in the entire region that the government of neighboring Zimbabwe recently was forced to order the closing of thousands of drinking establishments in an effort to cut crime.

Professor Mwanalushi proposes a set of immediate reforms that are likely to be considered a matter of urgency in the region. They include the establishment of a legally constituted commission on alcoholism and alcohol abuse to undertake continuing research and to provide advice to government departments and other concerned organizations in a broad context of national development. Significantly, the research workers urge social planners to recognize the resilience of governments on the alcohol industry for raising tax revenues and its indirect effect of encouraging alcoholism. They also seek increased restrictions on the availability of alcoholic drinks, particularly to young people, and the promotion of education and alternative social activities.

Thomas Land writes from Europe on global affairs

EXCURSUS 3

Mitzi M. Brunsdale on PSYCHIATRY AND SAMIZDAT

Evidence of growing human misery under Soviet communism continues to filter through the sad literature of samizdat, "self-published" material gathered, written, and circulated in the Soviet Union at a risk unthinkable to most citizens of the West. Since 1968 A Chronicle of Current Events has been at the fore of samizdat literature, edited by necessarily anonymous members of the loosely organized dissident movement in the USSR. Despite abrupt changes in its leadership—the latest in February, 1981, when the KGB confiscated all copies of Chronicle number 59 and arrested its editors—the publication asserts "that its strictly factual style is maintained to the greatest degree possible." Such objectivity is scrupulously preserved in English versions of numbers 1 through 11 available in Peter Reddaway's Uncensored Russia (American Heritage Press,
1972) and subsequent translations published by Amnesty International in London roughly six months after their originals appear in the Soviet Union (available in the U.S. through Routledge Journals, 9 Park Street, Boston, Mass. 02108). Other, often sadly transitory, samizdat texts—economic, religious, ethnic, political, cultural—have since joined the Chronicle, shedding light on aspects of Soviet life least willingly acknowledged by officialdom.

Of all the barbed strands of repression unflinchingly held aloft by the Chronicle, none offends human dignity more than the political perversion of psychiatry that has been on the increase since Khrushchev's fall in 1964.

Anyone who protests against the Soviet state, embodiment of history's laws, is by definition a traitor or insane, and dissenters often are arrested, tried in absentia, and "treated" by outmoded psychiatric methods. Departing markedly from established Western practice, Soviet psychiatry blends Marx's premise that social and economic conditions determine human behavior with Pavlov's theory that "normal" functioning of the nervous system is maintained by a balance of excitation and inhibition. An imbalance, according to Soviet medicine, produces mental illness curable by certain drugs. The result is a system of psychiatry shaped to political expediency.

According to Sidney Bloch and Peter Reddaway, authors of Psychiatric Terror (Basic Books, 1977), the typical Soviet diagnosis for dissent is "schizophrenia," by which is meant "an irreversible, deep-seated illness with extremely broad diagnostic criteria." Professor Daniil R. Lunts of the Serbsky Institute, Leningrad, has even called for "the theoretically, but not clinically, present in the patient," Pavlov's theory of "treatment" here includes arbitrary heavy doses of neuroleptic drugs, unnecessary spinal punctures by untrained personnel, and insulin shock. This last, the most dangerous "treatment" here includes arbitrary heavy doses of neuroleptic drugs, unnecessary spinal punctures by untrained personnel, and insulin shock. This last, the most severe, involves the risk of irreversible mental impairment and even death, and has been largely abandoned by Western psychiatrists since the advent of major tranquilizers in 1953.

A Soviet doctor's training includes 250 hours of Marxist-Leninist political theory, as compared to 213 hours of surgery and 297 hours of anatomy. The oath, in contrast to Hippocrates, stresses "responsible to the people and the Soviet state...guided by the principles of Communist morality." In such a framework, Soviet psychiatry has developed into an instrument of intimidation and punishment. The number of Soviet mental-hospital beds doubled between 1962 and 1977, and new facilities continue to be built. The officially adopted "Snezhevsky School" of Psychiatry, named for a leading practitioner of psychiatric abuse, has molded an entire generation of Soviet physicians. Soviet-style psychiatric intimidation has been verified in Yugoslavia, Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Physicians in the USSR who protest these abuses are confined to the very institutions they have denounced. Further, increasingly large segments of the Soviet populace are threatened: not only well-known political protesters, but Christians, nationalists, artists, and those simply wishing to emigrate.

Psychiatric abuse has been laid bare in Vladimir Bukovsky's To Build a Castle (Viking, 1979) and Viktor Nekipelov's Institute of Fools (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980), but more current material is offered by the Chronicle, the USSR News Brief (published in Brussels), and the Bulletin of the International Association on Political Uses of Psychiatry, London. Among the recent reports: The Christian and manual worker Vladimir Tsurikov applied to emigrate in 1974 and has been held three times since in Special Psychiatric Hospitals, forcibly treated with aminazin, sulfaflzin, triflazin, and insulin shock. His physician, E. I. Rusakov, told him: "Either you renounce the idea of emigration...you go on insisting on it, in which case you chose the fate of a martyr..."

Ten pages of Chronicle 61 (March 16, 1981) recorded the arrests and trials of members of the Working Commission on Psychiatric Abuse in Moscow. Felix Serebrov, last to be arrested, had been imprisoned in labor camps twice between 1947 and 1975 and was sentenced in July of 1981 to four years in strict-regime camps. The group's consulting psychiatrist since 1979, Dr. Anatoly I. Koryagin, who supplied fifty-seven reports to the West on insane dissenters forcibly incarcerated, was arrested in February, 1981, convicted as a "traitor," and is presently held in Perm Camp No. 37. His colleague Dr. Vasily N. Nikitenkov, a surgeon, was transferred in the spring of 1982 to a psychiatric camp near Kazan.

With an accuracy remarkable under the circumstances, the Chronicle and other samizdat texts supply the primary grounds for international protests against Soviet violations of human rights. Reinforced by samizdat reports, the World Psychiatric Association voted in 1977 to condemn the Soviet Union's unethical use of medicine. The British and Danish Psychiatric Associations have moved to expel the Soviet delegation (which to date has never paid full membership dues) from the World Psychiatric Association at the Vienna General Assembly in 1983. Until world outrage forces the Soviet Government to abandon its political use of psychiatry, however, its people must share exiled poet Constantin Kuzminsky's somber assessment of their fate:

"Apparently, we're due for 70000000000 fat years, followed by 70000000000 lean years."

...the cross remains on our shoulders. Insomnia, Golgotha, dreams.

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