

Down with Duvalierism—Break with Aristide!

Haiti Under U.S. Guns

Reprinted below is the IBT's 18 September 1994 statement on the impending American intervention into Haiti

With a flurry of threats, “human interest” stories and invocations of democratic principle, the U.S. government has laid the groundwork for the occupation of Haiti. The ostensible purpose was to rescue the Haitian population from the bloody rule of Lieut. General Raoul Cédras, who came to power in 1991 by overthrowing Haiti’s popularly elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Yet Cédras and his death squad regime have operated all along with the implicit support of the U.S.

The State Department’s Haitian policy has been chiefly determined by a desire to prevent a mass social explosion in one of the most miserable neo-colonies of the imperialist New World Order. Cédras has to go because he has outlived his usefulness to his masters. He has successfully beheaded the various plebeian grassroots organizations that brought Aristide to power, but his regime is too unpopular and too narrowly based to ensure stability.

For weeks Clinton has hinted that he would prefer that some “reformed” elements in the Haitian officer corps replace Cédras. This would leave the Haitian army intact for use against the civilian population and at the same time avoid direct American responsibility for administering the Haitian nightmare. U.S. invasion strategists have announced that one of their main concerns is “possible revenge killings by supporters of Father Aristide” (*New York Times*, 14 September) aimed at the officer corps and other elements of the neo-colonial ruling class who have supported Cédras. Stanley Schrager, U.S. Embassy spokesman in Port-au-Prince, was reported to have said that:

“any invasion plans would provide for keeping the army intact after the invasion, but without its leaders and in a much less ominous role.”

Despite the brutal repression carried out by the Cédras regime, Marxists are flatly opposed to any intervention by the U.S., its imperialist allies or puppets. All the recent media stories about desperate refugees and hungry children, and all the sanctimonious condemnations of Cédras by the “world community,” are camouflage for an intervention aimed at preserving the status quo in the poorest and most desperately oppressed neo-colony in the Americas. Trade-union militants in North America, the Caribbean and Latin America should call for political strikes against the occupation of Haiti, and “hot cargo” military supplies for the invaders.

Haiti—Client State of U.S. Imperialism

Bill Clinton’s preparations for attacking Haiti have more or less followed the script of George Bush’s 1989 assault on Panama (perversely dubbed “Operation Just Cause”). It opened with a media barrage of “outraged

public opinion” about the lack of human rights and democracy. Neo-colonial leaders who had been on the CIA payroll for years were found to be drug traffickers and murderers (see *New York Times*, 14 November 1993: “C.I.A. Formed Haitian Unit Later Tied to Narcotics Trade”). The next step was to locate an international body (preferably the United Nations) willing to “request” U.S. intervention. This sets the stage for the Marines to arrive, guns blazing. After they have spilled enough blood to ensure “stability” (i.e., obedience to Washington), a new puppet regime is sworn in to serve and protect the agents and mechanisms of imperialist exploitation.

Unlike other recent foreign adventures by U.S. imperialism, such as the invasions of Panama and Grenada, or the Gulf War, which enjoyed solid ruling class support, plans for the invasion of Haiti have divided the American ruling class. Most Republicans and some Democrats oppose the invasion because they prefer Cédras to Aristide. But all talk by Clinton and his backers about democracy and respect for “human rights” is hypocritical cant. The current divisions in Washington over Haitian policy are merely disputes over which tactics are better suited to maintain American imperialist control.

Since the Marines invaded Haiti in 1915, the country has been dominated economically and politically by the U.S. Haiti is a predominately agrarian society, yet because American agribusiness uses the best land to produce crops for export, most of the country’s food must be imported. Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world, and most of its citizens can only afford to eat once a day. As a result, 90 percent of Haitian children suffer from malnutrition. Three-quarters of the population makes less than \$200 *per year*, while the top one percent of the population absorbs almost half of the national income.

Haiti and ‘American Democracy’

The Haitian Republic was the product of the only successful slave revolt in history. The triumph of the Haitian slaves in 1804 in the richest colony in the Americas posed an immediate threat to all the adjacent slave-based economies, particularly those of the southern United States. The U.S. joined with the European colonial powers in an overtly racist attempt to strangle the black republic in its infancy with an economic and political blockade. While the U.S. recognized all the former Spanish colonies in the Americas by the 1820s, it refused to recognize Haiti until 1862, when the southern states seceded from the Union.

Under the saintly peacemaker Woodrow Wilson, U.S. Marines invaded Haiti in 1915, ostensibly to spread the benefits of democracy and freedom. The ungrateful Haitians responded with the “Cacos Insurrection” which the

Marines savagely suppressed. The national parliament was disbanded and a new constitution was written which gave the U.S. "complete political and administrative control over Haiti." The U.S. authorities duly ratified it with a "democratic" plebiscite which recorded a remarkable 99.9 percent vote in favor. U.S. agricultural concerns moved in during the occupation to "lease" a quarter million acres of the best farmland, in the process dispossessing 50,000 peasants.

Since 1934 Haiti has been ruled by a series of ruthless dictators. François ("Papa Doc") Duvalier ruled from 1957 until his death in 1971 when his son Jean-Claude ("Baby Doc") took over. Under the Duvaliers, the *Tontons Macoute* (paramilitary secret police) murdered thousands of people for "crimes" such as criticizing the regime or joining unions or other popular organizations. For a time, the U.S. regarded Papa Doc (who was given to demagogic black nationalist outbursts) as being a bit too independent. Relations with the U.S. improved during the 1960s, particularly after the crushing of the Haitian Communist Party, and the passing of the April 1969 "Anti-Communist Law," which made "profession of communist belief, verbal or written, public or private" punishable by death (*Haiti: State Against Nation*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot).

Under Baby Doc, U.S. corporations were encouraged to take advantage of Haiti's abundant cheap labor and set up light industrial assembly plants. There was talk of Haiti becoming the Taiwan of the Caribbean. But while labor was cheap, the lack of infrastructure, rampant corruption of the regime, social instability and the vagaries of the world market combined to limit the growth of industrial production.

The chain of events leading to the current invasion began in February 1986 when Baby Doc was overthrown by an escalating wave of strikes and semi-insurrectionary mass demonstrations. General Henri Namphy, head of the National Governing Council, assumed control. Political prisoners were freed and promises were made to hold democratic elections in the near future. But the military rulers were mainly concerned with controlling and demobilizing the heterogeneous popular movement and safeguarding the social hierarchy. During the first year under Namphy, it is estimated that there were more civilians murdered by the state than during the preceding fifteen years under Baby Doc. This was seen as the inevitable, if regrettable, cost of restoring "stability" after the convulsive mass struggles that toppled the Duvalier regime.

What particularly disturbed the state authorities was the "uprooting" (*Dechoukaj*) of the dreaded *Tontons Macoute* by the masses. This alarmed the liberal "anti-Duvalierist" sections of the elite, who launched a massive, and successful, publicity campaign against this form of popular justice. Many of the *Macoutes* who escaped *Dechoukaj* turned up among the right-wing *attachés* (paramilitary assassins) supporting Cédras.

In January 1988 there was a presidential election won by Leslie Manigat, a Christian Democrat. Eight months later he was overthrown by a military coup led by another general, Prosper Avril. Once again there were promises of a new life, an end to state terror and Duvalierism. Once again the masses hoped that life would

improve. Once again they were disappointed. In March 1990 the Haitian masses again took to the streets, and a coalition of opposition groups called for a general strike to begin on 12 March. The U.S. ambassador, Alvin P. Adams, advised Avril that his time was up. Just before the threatened general strike, Avril boarded a U.S. Airforce jet for Miami.

Aristide's Election Worries U.S.

Alarmed by the continued growth of popular organizations and their increasingly radical mood, the U.S. State Department pushed for elections as the easiest and cheapest means to stabilize the situation. The exercise was intended to put Marc Bazin, a former World Bank official who had served briefly as Baby Doc's finance minister, into the presidential palace. Bazin represented a modernizing technocratic layer in the Haitian ruling class that favored closer economic integration with the U.S. Washington poured an estimated \$36 million into Bazin's campaign and he appeared headed to an easy victory.

This prospect evaporated when the Front for Change and Democracy (FNCD—the traditional party of the liberal merchant capitalists) abruptly dumped its candidate in favor of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a prominent cleric who had survived several *Macoute* attacks. Within weeks, a million new voters registered, and the movement dubbed *Lavalas* ("the flood") was born.

Aristide's candidacy rested on an alliance between the traditional Haitian merchant bourgeoisie and the burgeoning and politically amorphous popular movements of students, peasants, urban slum dwellers, trade unionists and Catholic social activists. Aristide, a proponent of "liberation theology,"

"had close contacts with the traditional bourgeoisie. A few rich Haitian merchants had underwritten his education and travels as a young priest as well as his orphanage, Lafanmi Selavi."

—*NACLA Reports* (January 1994)

Aristide proposed to carry out a modest land reform and to eliminate Duvalierist corruption, cronyism and terror. Against the candidate of the State Department:

"Aristide's program called for support for Haiti's faltering national industries, a land reform to revitalize Haitian agriculture and increase self-sufficiency, stanching the hemorrhage of contraband imports through regional ports, raising the minimum wage, and overhauling the government bureaucracy."

—*Ibid.*

Aristide won an overwhelming mandate—67 percent of the votes—while the State Department's candidate, Bazin, finished a distant second with a mere 14 percent.

Aristide preaches the debilitating message that the desperately poor Haitian masses can achieve social liberation under imperialism. He promotes illusions that the U.S., France, Canada and other imperialist powers in the "world community" can be induced to act as agents of progress in Haiti. But for all Aristide's servility, the imperialists instinctively distrust any politician in such a desperately poor country who enjoys substantial popular support. They know that any expression of mass politics can quickly escape the control of the liberation theologians, liberals and reformers who initiate it.

In the few months he was in power, Aristide enacted some minor fiscal reforms, closed a few tax loopholes, removed a layer of corrupt officials and reduced Haiti's foreign debt. Under Aristide the stream of political and economic refugees fleeing the death squads was reversed and thousands of expatriates began to return.

With Aristide in power, Washington suddenly became extremely interested in "human rights" in Haiti—something that had been ignored in the past. The U.S. was particularly worried about reports of a few incidents of "class-based" retribution against wealthy Duvalierists.

American financiers, in particular Citibank and Bank of Boston, were alarmed at reports that Aristide had raised \$500 million in foreign aid without resort to the U.S. financial system. Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas, but it has never rescheduled its foreign debt and had been a dependable source of revenue for U.S. banks. The U.S. Agency for International Development (U.S.AID) objected to Aristide's proposed price controls on basic foods and denounced his plan to raise the minimum hourly wage from 33 to 50 cents as a disastrous mistake.

The 30 September 1991 coup by Raoul Cédras is widely presumed to have been covertly supported by the U.S. The 1 November 1993 issue of the *New York Times* reported that:

"Key members of the military leadership controlling Haiti and blocking the return of its elected President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, were paid by the Central Intelligence Agency for information from the mid-1980's at least until the 1991 coup...."

The U.S. formally condemned the coup and called for the eventual reinstatement of Aristide. Yet, within a week of Cédras's coup, as army and *attaché* gangs were engaged in the bloody extermination of Aristide's supporters, the U.S. ambassador to Haiti, Alvin Adams, produced a thick dossier on alleged human rights violations during Aristide's brief tenure. The corporate media in the U.S. obediently played this up as a big story, all but ignoring the brutal repression launched against the popular organizations that had supported the deposed president.

U.S. Embargo Starves Masses

To demonstrate its opposition to the coup, the U.S. imposed a trade embargo that explicitly *exempted* American companies with Haitian branches. In the first year of the embargo, Haitian exports to the U.S. jumped dramatically (from \$110 million in 1992 to \$160 million in 1993). Meanwhile prices for food and other consumer goods shot up, as friends of the regime seized the opportunity to engage in profiteering. It appeared that the embargo was not aimed at the Haitian military at all, but rather at grinding the impoverished workers and peasants into passively accepting whatever regime the U.S. imposes.

Under Clinton the U.S. has combined rhetorical support for Aristide with portrayals of him as an erratic, obstinate, uncooperative psychopath. The 1 November 1993 *New York Times* quoted Brian Latell, the CIA's "chief analyst for Latin America," as describing Aristide as

"unstable and as having a history of mental problems." Latell considered Cédras to be one of "the most promising group of Haitian leaders to emerge since the Duvalier family dictatorship was overthrown in 1986," and claimed that during a July 1992 trip to Haiti he "saw no evidence of oppressive rule."

In order to avoid appearing unreasonable, Aristide entered into a round of "negotiations" with Cédras in June 1993 under the auspices of the UN in New York. To avoid the massive demonstrations from the expatriate Haitian community (60,000 of whom had rallied in October 1991 to denounce the coup), the meetings were held on Governor's Island in New York City harbor. The outcome of the "negotiations" had been arranged in advance by their sponsors. The military dictators got to appear on the world stage as a legitimate party in a domestic dispute. Aristide got an empty promise that he could resume his duties in late October 1993. Bill Clinton proclaimed the talks to be "an historic step forward for democracy."

On 11 October 1993, in a highly publicized media event, the U.S. frigate *Harlan County*, with hundreds of American and Canadian troops, was chased out of Port-au-Prince by a handful of *attaché* thugs waving handguns. Juan Gonzalez, a reporter for the *New York Daily News*, had learned of the plan a day earlier at a Duvalierist meeting in Port-au-Prince *which was also attended by U.S. embassy personnel!* The lesson for Cédras and his supporters was clear:

"The leader of the paramilitary organization FRAPH, responsible for so much of the [*attaché*] terror, said that 'My people kept wanting to run away, but I took the gamble and urged them to stay. Then the Americans pulled out! We were astonished. That was the day FRAPH was actually born. Before, everyone said we were crazy, suicidal, that we would all be burned if Aristide returned. But now we know he is never going to return.'"

—*Z Magazine*, July 1994

Over 4000 individuals associated with the popular movements have been murdered since the coup, while many thousands more have been driven underground or into exile. The attempt to destroy the organizations of the poor, extensively documented by Americas Watch, a hemispheric human rights organization, was not born of a completely irrational bloodlust on the part of Cédras. The popular movements in Haiti were perceived as a potential danger to the whole structure of neo-colonialism in the region. Noam Chomsky's quotes Americas Watch in drawing the conclusion that:

"The terror is functional: it ensures that even if Aristide is permitted to return, 'he would have difficulty transforming his personal popularity into the organized support needed to exert civilian authority'..."

—*Ibid.*

This explains the apparent contradiction of U.S. policy since the coup. While officially denouncing Cédras, the White House (under both Bush and Clinton) was in no hurry to oust Cédras. Instead U.S. policy has combined democratic posturing with attempts to reconcile the two "extremes" represented by Cédras' naked state terrorism and Aristide's toothless reformism. If Aristide made enough "compromises" to demobilize the popular movements, then perhaps Cédras would relent and a

“political settlement” could be reached.

U.S. Hands Off Haiti!

A few months ago Washington was glossing over reports of the crimes of the junta:

“In April, a cablegram signed by William L. Swing, the American Ambassador in Haiti, and sent to [U.S. Secretary of State Warren] Christopher asserted that Father Aristide and his supporters were exaggerating and even fabricating reports of human rights abuses.”

—*New York Times*, 13 September

In the months that followed the U.S. position gradually hardened, and by August the White House began to take a more belligerent stance. Preparations went ahead for landing some 20,000 American troops (with a few token contingents from various Caribbean dependencies and other vassals). For months the press has been full of accounts of how the Cédras regime was murdering orphans, raping young girls and starving infants. This was accompanied with absurd and crudely racist claims that the exodus of a few thousand Haitian boat people posed a vital “security risk” to the U.S. But the American population has shown little enthusiasm for intervention in Haiti. At the same time, Congressional Republicans have complained that Clinton is timing his gunboat diplomacy with an eye to giving the Democrats a boost in the November polls.

Cédras is a repulsive murderer, but he is a minor player who has served his masters well. The plebeian movements have been beheaded. Aristide’s room for maneuver has been reduced, and he has promised to leave the presidency after a year. His craven pleas to the “international community” (i.e., the big capitalist powers) to take “some action” against Cédras have provided a cover for imperialist occupation.

The arrogance and cynicism of the American ruling class, prating about its “humanitarian” mission, is matched by the credulity and muddleheadedness of much of the self-styled “solidarity” milieu. Most of the Haitian left (like the left internationally) recognized that the Duvaliers and their successors were creatures of the imperialist world system. And yet the illusions persisted that somehow the U.S. (with its Canadian junior partner staying a half-step behind, as befits an “impartial” mediator) could somehow be pressured or maneuvered into playing a “progressive” role in Haiti. The *only* reason for any U.S. intervention is to preserve the neo-colonial social order that has condemned the masses of Haitians to lives of desperate poverty, hunger and misery.

Aristide is returning as a figurehead for an American occupation. He will be recorded in history as a traitor to the Haitian nation. He will deliver nothing to the millions of desperately poor Haitians who put their faith in him because his program has always been one of guaranteeing the interests of the wealthy elite and their imperialist partners.

Haiti and the Permanent Revolution

The Haitian ruling class knows that the exercise of democratic rights (freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right to organize un-

ions and to strike) by the masses would pose an immediate threat to their power and property. This is why in countries like Haiti, any serious struggle for democratic reforms tends to very quickly pose the question of political power, i.e., social revolution.

In quasi-colonial countries such as Haiti, the working class may be small in numbers, but its political role is pivotal. It is the only social force with both the internal cohesion and material interest to lead a successful struggle to overturn capitalist property and sever the connection to imperialism. Even in countries like Haiti, where the working class is tiny and dispersed, it can still act as the leader of the dispossessed of the country. In the struggles against both Namphy and Avril, strikes by teachers, civil servants, taxi and truck drivers, power workers and employees in the state-run factories and flour mills played an important part in the massive popular upsurge that toppled those regimes.

To make even minimal social gains, the Haitian masses must be prepared to expropriate the foreign multinationals (as well as their Haitian dependents), smash the exploiters’ state, and establish armed bodies of workers and the oppressed. A successful seizure of power by a Haitian workers’ and peasants’ government could provide a powerful impetus for revolutionary struggle by workers in the neighboring Dominican Republic and ignite the entire Caribbean basin.

A revolutionary upsurge in the region would open new prospects for the Cuban Revolution, which the imperialists are attempting to strangle. In Clinton’s 15 September televised speech announcing the occupation of Haiti, he explicitly denounced Cuba as the other blemish on “democracy” in the Western Hemisphere, ominously signaling that the intervention against Haiti can open the door to a military assault on the Cuban deformed workers’ state. The Cuban Revolution, deformed though it is by the Stalinist regime headed by Fidel Castro, represents an important gain for the working people of the world—and one that must be fiercely defended against the counterrevolutionary intrigues of imperialism.

A revolutionary upsurge in Haiti would find a powerful echo throughout Latin America. It would also electrify the 300,000 largely working-class Haitian exiles concentrated in several important urban centers in North America (New York, Miami and Montreal). A breakthrough in Haiti would have an immense impact on the consciousness of millions of black proletarians in the U.S. and radically transform the political landscape.

The key to social revolution in Haiti is the forging of a Leninist party rooted in the Haitian masses, particularly the working class, armed with a political program (the program of the Permanent Revolution first articulated by the great Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky) which links the democratic struggles to the necessity of expropriating the capitalist exploiters and establishing a workers’ and peasants’ government.

Workers of the World Unite!

The capitalists recognize that they have common interests across national boundaries. In recent years the transnational corporations have increasingly pitted

workers against each other internationally by shifting production from one area of the globe to another in deliberate, and often successful, attempts to ratchet down wages and living conditions. The result is that the standard of living for North American workers has been dropping for twenty years. Juliet Schor, in *The Overworked American* (1991), writes that “to reach their 1973 standard of living” production workers “must work 245 more hours, or 6-plus extra weeks a year.”

Today, more than ever before, working people are compelled to see themselves as participants in a global, rather than a regional or national, economy. The corollary of this reality is that the victories and defeats of working people and their allies in any area of the world affects those in every other area. International solidarity

is not some empty idealistic notion, it is an urgent necessity for the working class today. North American workers have a direct material interest in defeating our “own” rulers’ gunboat diplomacy in Haiti, just as we have a vital interest in defending the Cuban Revolution (the main target of imperialism in the Caribbean).

- ***Down With Gunboat Diplomacy! Down with the U.S. Occupation of Haiti! Defend the Cuban Revolution!***
- ***Down with Cédras—Break with Aristide! Forward to a Haitian Workers’ and Peasants’ Government in a Socialist Federation of the Caribbean!***