

WSWS-SEP conference

On events in Haiti: “Imperialism can only be fought as a globally unified struggle”

27 March 2004

Today, we continue publishing the remarks and written contributions of delegates attending the conference on “The 2004 US Election: the Case for a Socialist Alternative,” held by the World Socialist Web Site and the Socialist Equality Party on March 13-14 in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

A summary account of the event was published March 15, and the opening report to the conference by WSWS International Editorial Board Chairman and SEP (US) National Secretary David North was posted March 17. Presidential candidate Bill Van Auken’s remarks were posted March 18, and vice-presidential candidate Jim Lawrence’s remarks were posted March 19.

Richard (Canada)

I want to center my remarks on the significance of the recent stormy events in Haiti. The overthrow of the country’s duly-elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was in the truest sense a coup made in the USA.

After years of actively funding and supporting a right-wing opposition movement dominated by the country’s tiny elite as a way to pressure Aristide’s government ever more to the right—a policy followed by both Democratic and Republican administrations—Washington then used an armed rebellion of a few hundred fascistic thugs in the country’s north, in which it had a direct hand, to force Aristide out of power.

US Marines were then rushed into the country and navy ships sent to patrol the area. Their most immediate concern was to prevent a massive outflow of Haitian refugees toward Florida’s shores who, in keeping with standard US policy, would be swiftly turned back without even getting a hearing, thus exposing once more the US government’s contempt for the basic right of asylum.

As for the central thrust of the US military intervention in Haiti, it can be seen in the shape of the regime being put in place there, one dominated by representatives of the tiny business elite, supporters of previous military dictatorships, and long-time practitioners of the politics of corruption, patronage and state repression. Those elements, which formed the so-called political opposition to Aristide, had sought to compensate for their lack of popular support by painting the former president as the devil in person. They are now being brought forward by US imperialism.

One of their most pressing demands is the reestablishment of the Haitian military, historically a bulwark of reaction, which was disbanded by Aristide in 1994. They want armed Aristide supporters based in the slums of the capital Port-au-Prince to be hunted down. According to recent press reports, US marines are taking part in such operations under the guise of “disarming” the pro-Aristide gangs.

But there has been no talk coming from Washington of disarming the former military coup plotters and death squad leaders who staged the anti-Aristide rebellion in the north and carried out summary executions of Aristide supporters in the towns they captured. This is not surprising given that their heavy weaponry was drawn from a stock of military hardware provided by the US government to the neighboring Dominican Republic

and then—after Washington gave the green light to be sure—passed on to the right-wing thugs who had assembled and begun training there.

Even though the Bush administration has tried lately to distance itself from those right-wing murderers, the fact remains that they helped topple the Aristide government on behalf of Washington. It may well be that their new marching order is to continue their dirty jobs in the dark hours of the night rather than under the spotlight of the international media, and that Washington prefers to deal now with members of the “political” opposition to Aristide. It is all a matter of a division of labor. In the end, the plain truth is that right-wing extremists have staged a comeback in the troubled waters of Haitian politics under the sponsorship of the most reactionary force on the face of the earth, US imperialism.

Of course, Haiti has no oil for Halliburton and other US corporations to plunder. But even in Iraq, this was not the only issue, as crucial as it was. The US ruling elite is turning to policies of militarism and colonialism to advance its global geo-strategic interests, under conditions where it enjoys overwhelming military superiority over its imperialist rivals in Europe or Japan.

One of the reasons Washington took a more direct role in the developing crisis in Haiti was a concern that France, Haiti’s former colonial ruler, was gaining a foothold in America’s own “backyard” by aggressively supporting Aristide’s bourgeois opposition.

There was also a great measure of hatred toward Aristide, both among his opponents within the native elite and the Bush administration, because of his past anti-imperialist rhetoric.

Above all, US imperialist intervention in Haiti throughout the twentieth century has been driven by the need to violently suppress, directly or through the native, venal, Haitian bourgeoisie, the profound traditions of struggle against oppression and injustice which have deep roots in the Haitian oppressed masses and working people.

In attempting to silence the Haitian people into submission and acceptance of the most horrific socioeconomic conditions, which are the outcome of decades of imperialist oppression, the US government, along with other Western governments such as France and Canada, are targeting the struggles of working people all over the world.

How is this global and violent eruption of imperialism to be fought? On this crucial question, too, there are vital lessons to be drawn from the traumatic experiences in Haiti. In the final analysis, Aristide’s overthrow and its tragic consequences are a confirmation that there can be no national solution to imperialist oppression.

Aristide’s own petty-bourgeois nationalist outlook led him to turn to the Clinton administration, that is political leaders of US imperialism, who for their own reasons decided to put him back in power in 1994 after he was overthrown in a bloody military coup three years earlier. Aristide pledged in return to impose IMF-style structural adjustment programs, which had devastating consequences for a country that was already the poorest of the

Western Hemisphere. This then created the conditions for the political resurrection of the forces of extreme reaction in the country.

The lesson to be drawn is that imperialism can only be fought as part of the global and consciously unified struggles of the international working class. That is the central aim of the electoral campaign of the Socialist Equality Party. As our election statement says under the section “US imperialism and War”:

“We propose a socialist foreign policy, based on international working class solidarity. The resources and technology of the advanced industrialized countries should be employed, not to oppress, exploit or exterminate the people of the ‘Third World,’ but to raise living standards for all working people to a decent level and create, for the first time in world history, conditions of genuine worldwide social equality.”

D’Art (Michigan)

The Bush administration and the middle class radicals would like to think that the working class has not followed events over the last year. They try to create political amnesia, but as the report and the discussion shows, the party is the living memory of the working class. The radicals try to restrict political discussion to the question of getting rid of Bush because they don’t want workers to look at the international experiences they have gone through in the last period.

I want to address the question of internationalism, democracy and inequality. In this regard we can look at what is happening in Haiti, one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere. It has a population of 8.5 million people and there are two “presidents”—one that is in exile and one that has been brought in by the military.

This is a country where offshoring is very big and where Haitian workers are employed by major international corporations to assemble goods and ship them to other parts of the world. This has not improved the social conditions of the Haitian workers but deepened the social inequality. In fact, less than 1 percent of the population controls all the wealth. This inequality has led to the breakdown of all the old forms of political rule and now the Haitian ruling class is using the military to crush the growing animosity and frustration of Haitian workers. This is also why the United States has intervened.

It is ironic how some try to present the US military as a liberating force in Haiti. But it can’t be one sort of army in Iraq and Afghanistan, where it is regarded as an occupying force, and another sort of military somewhere else.

Another thing that struck me about the situation in Haiti was the issue of race. Race, which the rich use to divide the working class, is not a legitimate concept in the field of science but only applies in statistics, law and government.

In Haiti the native ruling class, along with their descendents from European capitalism, have created a system where there are 64 different categories of race. This virtual caste system is used to weaken and divide the working class in every possible way.

To be a revolutionary means you have to be a social scientist. In a research paper I wrote some months ago I explained that European capitalists invented the concept of race after discovering the New World. Prior to that race was used to describe animals. This concept was transferred over to the population after America was discovered. As the SEP election statement says, we have to be on guard against all kinds of bourgeois ideology and the influence it has on the consciousness of the working class. I think this needs to be emphasized.

Nate (Michigan)

I can remember the exact moment when I became interested in socialism. I was in middle school and although I don’t remember what I was researching I looked up communism in an encyclopedia. It talked about a political and economic system in which profits were equally shared, something that is not part of our experience under capitalism.

I’m actually at college now but throughout high school I was fairly

politically confused, although I always took a fairly left-wing view of things, especially with regard to my own situation. In high school my father lost his job and he is still unemployed today.

After the terrorist attacks of September 11 there was a wave of US nationalism and patriotism sweeping the country. You couldn’t go anywhere without seeing an American flag or things supporting the president or some kind of slogan like that. It was around this time that I began looking on the Internet for different political viewpoints and was told about the *World Socialist Web Site*. The analysis, articles and editorials on the site made so much sense. I attended the conference last year and found it extremely interesting and that is why I’m here today.

I’m not a member of the Socialist Equality Party but consider myself a socialist. There is a lot of opposition to this ideology in this country and many people ask why I’m a socialist and cite Stalinist examples to say that socialism has gone wrong. I don’t feel that it’s necessary respond to this all the time, but instead explain the contradictions of capitalism. People will generally agree on this but then say that things will stagnate under a socialist economy. But I think it would be exactly the opposite.

Any technological innovation under capitalism is done with a huge amount of cost cutting. Companies always try to do things with the least amount of money, whether by using fewer people or lots of people on lower wages and benefits. That’s how things are done in this country—not for the good of people but to make more money for those at the top.

I recently saw a report on CNN about the Bush administration’s job creation program and they reported that 21,000 jobs were created in February. This was far lower than the official estimate, which was somewhere in the area of 100,000 or a similar ridiculous figure. But in addition to the 21,000 jobs created they said 29,000 jobs were lost. So the Bush administration is imposing an Orwellian view of job creation. When 21,000 jobs are created and 29,000 lost, this means 8,000 fewer jobs than we had before. Yet they claim 29,000 jobs created is a positive result. I believe that 3,000 of these jobs were in manufacturing, which indicates a further downward spiral of manufacturing in America.

Emanuele (Minneapolis)

First of all I want to thank you for this meeting. To see the cross generations represented here and the political commitment that is lacking at universities, at least the university that I’m from, is very inspiring.

The question of the United Nations and so-called Old Europe—the older more cultured imperialist powers—is very important. This is a big obstacle when talking to progressive people because initially their instinctive reaction is to point towards the UN or nations such as Germany or France, which for a while appeared on the surface to have abandoned imperialist ambition.

Related to this is the Kosovo experience, which is very important and needs to be dealt with separately and highlighted in the statement. This is crucial because it would show how the Clinton administration prepared the ground for some of the events we are now witnessing. This I take from the excellent analysis provided by the *World Socialist Web Site*. It is important to draw attention to this because it was a fully armed intervention under the Democrats.

The section on the social crisis in the US and the point on education should also be illustrated with some statistics. It says that the situation in higher education is getting harder, but it needs to spell this out. This would make that section more compelling.

Finally, there is the section that deals with the quasi-populist wing of the Democratic Party and which mentions Kucinich and Sharpton. In Minnesota that really means Paul Wellstone, the senator that died in October 2002. Well, who knows the exact circumstances that led to his death. I wonder how much of a national resonance that event had, because if I were to present an argument along these lines in Minnesota one would have to struggle against ghosts. One doesn’t want to slip into poor taste, but the question of political corpses has been raised.

Wellstone is a peculiar case. In fact, a myth has already been created about him along the lines of JFK. This often makes the whole conversation about Wellstone bizarre and quite difficult because you're arguing against a largely fictional entity.

To be continued



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