

The Nation praises US intervention in Haiti

Alex Lantier
25 January 2010

The US intervention in Haiti after the major earthquake that devastated that country on January 12 has become a subject of international controversy. Though there were no reports of attacks on aid workers, US forces seized Port-au-Prince airport and the main government buildings, flying in thousands of troops and blocking the flow of food and medical supplies to hundreds of thousands of desperate Haitians.

Anger is rising in the country and in aid organizations. France's co-operation minister, Alain Joyandet, even rebuked the US operation at a summit meeting in Brussels, saying, "This is about helping Haiti, not about occupying Haiti."

The Nation magazine, a leading publication of US "progressive" opinion, has responded by applauding the US intervention in Haiti. The magazine's Washington correspondent, John Nichols, recently penned an Orwellian column, "Obama's Fine Moment," to praise the intervention and particularly the "dignity and determination" he sees in Obama's response to the quake.

He writes: "At a time when there is so much disappointment regarding the unmet promise of a presidency that finished its first year on the bitter note of a lost US Senate seat, Obama has responded to the crisis in a spirit that has the potential to reassure not just Haitians but Americans."

Nichols' reference to the recent defeat of a Democratic candidate for the US Senate in the liberal state of Massachusetts, in an election that turned into a referendum against Obama's policies, is significant. Cheerleaders for the Democratic Party, such as *The Nation*, feel surrounded by bitterness and disappointment. Their response has been to deepen their support for the Obama administration. And they see the historic tragedy inflicted upon the people of Haiti largely through the prism of how it will affect Obama in the opinion polls.

Nichols admits that he does not want "to say that Obama has done right by Haiti at every turn.... But as the world came to recognize the full scope of Haiti's humanitarian crisis—a crisis that grew more agonizing with a new tremor on Wednesday morning—the president has projected a concern and a commitment that meets the moment."

Such passages are altogether characteristic of the outlook of *The Nation*. For Nichols, whether the US has "done right" by millions of earthquake victims is less important than the question: has Obama "projected" an acceptable public face for the US occupation of Haiti?

Apparently convinced that the White House has proved up to the task, Nichols continues: "It is early in what could be a long presidency. So there is no need to suggest that we are seeing Obama's finest moment. Yet, we are seeing a fine moment."

Such claims constitute an insult to elementary decency. Over 150,000 people are confirmed dead, not counting those buried privately by their families or still under the rubble. Many have died because the string of corrupt, US-backed regimes that ruled Haiti did not enforce basic building codes. Approximately 250,000 people wounded in the quake are being treated largely without antibiotics or anesthetics, with thousands dying preventable deaths from gangrene and septicemia as the US military blocks the arrival of medical supplies.

Far from constituting a "fine moment" in history, such events testify to profound social obstacles preventing humanity from realizing the potential inherent in its scientific progress. For anyone with a shred of political or moral honesty, the situation is not exemplary, but rather deeply troubling.

Nichols praises Obama's conduct in talks with Haitian President René Préval, installed in the wake of a 2004 US-backed coup against elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Préval has barely been seen in public since the earthquake, and is reportedly holed up inside

the US-controlled Port-au-Prince airport, guarded by thousands of US troops.

Nichols comments, “The American president paid due respect to Haiti’s sovereignty—an appropriately touchy issue for a country that has suffered more than its share of imperial abuse.”

Combining a fleeting acknowledgement of Washington’s oppression of Haiti with unrestrained support for the latest US intervention, Nichols’ statement is saturated with imperialist hypocrisy.

The Préval regime has acted as Washington’s puppet in handing over full control of Haiti to the US government, which has acted without any regard for the country’s sovereignty. The talk of Haiti’s sovereignty being an “appropriately touchy” subject merely reflects fears of mass anger in Haiti over the US takeover and US interference in relief operations.

Nichols is remarkably vague on the “imperial abuse” suffered by Haiti, much of which was meted out to further the interests of the US ruling classes.

After the initial slave revolt against French colonial rule that gave Haiti its independence in 1804, the US blockaded the country for fear the revolt would spread to the black slaves of the American South. From 1915 to 1934, US Marines occupied the country to suppress the *cacos* peasant armies and block growing German influence in Haiti before World War I. From 1957 to 1986, it backed the anti-Communist dictatorship of the Duvaliers. After the collapse of the Duvalier dictatorship, it mounted two coups—in 1991 and 2004—against Aristide, whom it had reinstated in 1994 on the condition that he impose IMF austerity plans.

Nichols comments: “After French colonial rule was overthrown by the Haitians, [in 1805 Thomas] Paine urged Jefferson to position the United States as a ‘guarantee’ of the freedom of Haiti in a manner that ‘accords with the humanity of her principles.’ Thomas Jefferson did not rise to Paine’s call. Nor, for the most part, did succeeding presidents. But Barack Obama can.”

Only someone promoting the most appalling delusions about the US can describe the military-financial clique that now rules Washington as being able to guarantee Haiti’s freedom. The Obama administration presides over a deeply unequal and divided society, and its main representative overseas—the US military—is engaged in unpopular wars

in both Afghanistan and Iraq, and now an apparently open-ended occupation of Haiti.

Nichols’ writings are a sample of a significant strand of bourgeois public opinion: the “progressive” supporter of imperialism. This corresponds not only to these layers’ worship of the Democratic Party, but their increasingly privileged social status and close integration into the state apparatus. *The Nation’s* editor, Katrina van den Heuvel, for instance, now regularly appears as a TV pundit and is a member of the US Council on Foreign Relations.

The *Nation* has enthusiastically promoted “regime change” in Iran, backing the US-supported candidate Mirhossein Mousavi in last June’s disputed presidential election, while both Nichols and van den Heuvel praised Obama for his bellicose Nobel prize acceptance speech defending the ongoing US wars and warning that Washington will launch new military actions whenever and wherever it sees fit.

From the standpoint of these pro-war “progressives,” it is not abhorrent but praiseworthy when an oppressed country targeted by Washington receives—to use Nichols’ phrase—“its share of imperial abuse.” There is no more revealing demonstration of the right-wing character of today’s ex-lefts.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact