

Exploitation, poverty, and repression threaten Haitians facing deportation from US and Canada

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More than 50,000 Haitians face deportation from the United States when their Temporary Protected Status ends in January; thousands who have crossed into Canada in search of better conditions are faring no better. Both imperialist governments, if they follow through on the deportation plans, will be sending people back to a country where those who are lucky enough to find work are paid a pittance enforced by a ruthless government in league with the native bourgeoisie.

Haiti's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Religion Antonio Rodrigue told *Le Nouvelliste* last week that, while he feels a responsibility to receive fellow Haitians deported by Canada, he doesn't think the country can afford to accept them. According to Rodrigue, Hurricane Matthew destroyed 32 percent of Haiti's wealth last year. "We're not ready nor happy nor do we have the means to receive them," said Rodrigue.

Millions of Haitians cannot afford electricity, and either go without or illegally wire their devices to the grid. The Haitian government and IMF call this practice "theft," in a country where the unemployment rate is at least 30 percent and more than half the population subsists on less than \$1.25 per day.

Haiti has no reserve stock of gasoline, most of which it imports from Venezuela through the Petrocaribe program; a missed delivery can therefore be catastrophic. Hundreds of thousands of households use charcoal for cooking.

While the textile industry employs only 41,000 workers, the European Union—in addition to the United States and Canada—is looking for cheap labor. At a September 2016 Round Table on "Micro Industrial Parks," then-Minister of Commerce and Industry Jessy C. Petit-Frère boasted of 189 million Haitian gourdes the government had received from the EU in 2016 and of plans to put the funds toward industrial parks in industries including tourism,

agriculture, energy, and fishing.

On May 19, textile workers at the SANOPi industrial park in Port-au-Prince went on strike, demanding an increase in the minimum daily wage from 300 to 800 gourdes (US \$12.70 at the time). The government first offered an increase of only 35 gourdes, which it then increased by another 15 on July 27. The resulting amount, 350 gourdes per day in a country with an inflation rate of more than 15 percent, still stands.

The unions then called another week of strikes starting July 31, but were met on the first day by the PNH (Haitian National Police), which had deployed at least three police vehicles in front of each factory. The strike was then called off.

The government has promised a paltry subsidy of workers' meals—bringing the cost for a worker from 75 gourdes to 40—as an excuse for keeping the minimum wage low. A 40 gourde meal is still more than 10 percent of the daily minimum wage. In a June 7 press conference, Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Roosevelt Bellevue also promised a fleet of 300 buses which would carry textile workers to and from their jobs for free. In reality, this scheme will benefit the employers whose labor costs will remain criminally low while the government pays for transportation.

At the end of 2013, when workers were protesting for an increase of the minimum wage to 500 gourdes—the government had offered only 225—the factory owners cried that the existing rate was already four times higher than Bangladesh's. According to the *Guardian*, the owners went so far as to issue an open letter to workers about "keeping Haiti competitive."

The government has spent years building up the 15,000-strong PNH to replace the UN's hated MINUSTAH "peacekeeping" force, which is scheduled to

be withdrawn in October. It is also re-establishing the country's army, the Forces Armées d'Haiti (FAD'H), which will soon be recommissioned. The FAD'H, a pillar of the blood-soaked Duvalier dictatorship was disbanded by Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1995, but its reconstitution was begun by Michel Martelly in 2011. A July recruitment drive was heavily advertised; recruits were required to be celibate and in possession of a "Certificate of Good Living and Morals" from the PNH.

Defense Minister Hervé Denis' instructions from the Prime Minister include "assuring the defense of the coast; protecting the maritime borders; monitoring the maritime territory ... and ensuring maritime patrols." In other words, the FAD'H will stop the poor and desperate from leaving the country in boats. Borrowing from the US government's propaganda, the FAD'H will carry out its mission under the pretext of fighting drug trafficking and terrorism.

Denis began his political career in 1969 in the Duvalier regime, and in 1985 he was appointed Minister of Labor and Social Affairs by Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier. According to his biography, in that job he "developed close relations among the employers and unions in order to re-enforce the ties between these institutions."

On July 20, *Le Nouvelliste* published a long commentary in support of the new army by Prosper Avril, a Duvalier general who seized power after the St. Jean Bosco massacre in 1988 and whose year-and-a-half rule was infamous for torture. In the article, Avril lays out a detailed list of tasks for the new organization.

MINUSTAH forces brought cholera to Haiti in 2010, and, according to a recent Associated Press report, sexually exploited Haitian children beginning shortly after the mission arrived in 2004. Despite acknowledgement of the crimes and promises of reform by the UN, sexual exploitation by its troops occurred as recently as 2016.

Although the rate of cholera infections is decreasing, more than 7,600 suspected cases were reported in the first six months of this year. Even though its own epidemiologists released a report less than two years after the outbreak proving that UN soldiers were responsible, Ban Ki-Moon refused to acknowledge the fact until last year. The UN then promised to raise \$400 million to fight the epidemic but, according to Foreign Policy, only \$2.7 million had been raised as of June 1 of this year. The Trump administration has refused to contribute anything to the fund.

The Dominican Republic has increased its military presence on the border between the two countries in

anticipation of MINUSTAH's withdrawal. According to *Dominican Today*, Defense Minister Ruben Dario Paulino toured the border on August 9 and warned Haiti that "an army is to defend its territory, not to invade another territory." Since June 2015 nearly 200,000 people have been deported from the Dominican Republic to Haiti or returned themselves under threat of deportation.

Having won an election in which only 20 percent of eligible voters turned out, Moïse is well aware that he is sitting on a social powder keg. The US—which deployed only 200 marines after Hurricane Matthew, compared to the tens of thousands of troops it sent after the 2010 earthquake—expects him to rely on the PNH and FAD'H. Nonetheless, they are keeping a close eye on his government: in June Defense Minister Denis was summoned to Washington to meet with the US Congress and the Inter-American Development Bank about Haiti's maritime borders.

Moïse, a former secretary general of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Haiti, has close ties with Haiti's big bourgeoisie, including Reginald Boulos and André Apaid, Jr., one of the biggest textile bosses of Port-au-Prince.

The destitution from which Haitian immigrants have fled is the direct result of more than a century of US imperialist oppression, which followed a century of French revenge for the revolution of 1804.

In a December 1914 prelude to the 20-year occupation of the country by the US, Marines from the USS *Machias* seized \$500,000 of Haitian reserves and took them back to New York. From that act of aggression through Reagan's support for "Baby Doc," to the 2004 coup against Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the US bears responsibility for the crimes of Haiti's ruling elite.



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