

New York Times series *The Ransom* absolves capitalism for Haiti's oppression

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21 June 2022

On May 20, the *New York Times* published a lengthy multipart, multimedia series entitled *The Ransom*, documenting the colonial oppression and pillaging of Haiti at the hands of France and the United States over the course of more than a century and a half following the Caribbean nation's slave uprising in 1791 and its declaration of independence in 1804—the only successful slave revolt in history and the formation of the second republic of the New World.

The *Times* attributes Haiti's deep poverty to the debt peonage that began the day French warships sailed into the country's ports in 1825, demanding restitution for the loss of property and wealth in the slave revolution. A French loan issued that year was predicated on reparations to the former French masters. Haiti then had to pay back both the former slaveowners and the French loan, in what the authors call a "Double Debt."

As the series reviews, Haiti's indebtedness was subsequently reinforced at the hands of American bankers during the violent US military occupation of the island between 1915 and 1934—though the *Times* politely ignores more recent American predations on the island. Finally, the authors also indict the Haitian politicians and officials who, over the years, enriched themselves through these perfidious financial operations with investors in New York and Paris.

The *Ransom* authors argue that all the social ills that continue to plague the former colony and poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, whether abysmal incomes for its workers and peasants or dilapidated roads, schools and social infrastructure, can ultimately be traced to the malfeasance and criminality of domestic and foreign actors. "Every franc shipped across the Atlantic," according to the investigation, "to an overseas bank vault was a franc not circulating" within the Haitian economy, stunting the sort of developments "that help nations become nations, that enable them to prosper."

The authors of *The Ransom*, in other words, wish readers to believe that Haiti's oppression is the outcome of a series of historical mistakes and cruel actions. Haiti might have had a different history, if only these bad things had not happened. As the authors ask in the series' introduction, "What if the nation had not been looted by outside powers, foreign banks and its own leaders almost since birth? How much more money might it have had to build a nation?"

But the fact is that this country was looted by foreign governments, banks and comprador leaders since its birth. The real question is why? This question the *Times* cannot even pose, let alone answer, because it leads in revolutionary directions. Haiti's history, from its days as Saint-Domingue, the richest of all slave colonies, to its present degraded status as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, is the outcome not just of the immoral actions of individuals. It is the outcome of these actions taken within the broader context of the development of global capitalism from its mercantile phase of "primitive accumulation" to the present epoch of imperialism.

But that is all terra incognita to the *Times*. The words "capitalism" and

"imperialism" appear nowhere in the lengthy series.

It must be stated from the outset, however, that there is a noticeable difference in the *Times*' approach between *The Ransom* and the 1619 Project, whose central argument was that all of American history is driven by race hatred, with "anti-black racism" running in the "very DNA of this country," according to the project's lead author Nikole Hannah-Jones. This racial theory of history does not find its way into *The Ransom*. And unlike the 1619 Project, *The Ransom* does not set out to deliberately falsify history to support its thesis.

Humbled by the devastating criticism of the 1619 Project from the *World Socialist Web Site* and leading scholars of American history, the *Times* has gone to substantial lengths to find scholarly support for *The Ransom*. It is a fairly detailed review of Haitian history, with an extensive bibliography and compendium of sources from several prominent historians. The series was the work of four *Times* reporters and involved collaboration with more than a dozen researchers. It was prepared over the course of more than a year, as the authors examined thousands of pages of original documents found in public and private archives and libraries located in Haiti, the United States and France. Additional source material came from hundreds of books and articles, from those published shortly after the Haitian revolution to the most recent period.

Yet, in spite of these efforts, the *Times* cannot explain that which it sets out to answer: The deep, historical poverty of Haiti and its relationship to the old mother country, France, and later to its imperialist neighbor to the north, the US.

A significant factor in investigating the history binding Haiti and the colonial powers necessitates a thoroughgoing and honest historical examination of its origins. However, this finds a quite mangled and, indeed, superficial appearance in the *Times*' series. Besides a few remarks pointing to Napoleon's military assault on Haiti after the revolution, the frothing desire of French colonists to reconquer the territory and the international isolation Haiti was subjected to by the United States and other major powers, no worthwhile connection is made between developments in each country.

In fact, no association or reference is made to the French and American revolutions despite the incredible influence both events imparted to the struggles of slaves in Haiti to free themselves from bondage. The presentation of this connection, instead, is reduced merely to the most abject hostility, with the *Times* noting a former colonist who drafted a plan "to put Haitians back in bondage or 'crush them'" or the fact that "American lawmakers in particular did not want enslaved people in their own country to be inspired by" Haitian independence.

In the years preceding the Haitian Revolution, Atlantic slave traders were importing up to 40,000 slaves a year to France's colony, then known as Saint-Domingue. Conditions for slaves were atrocious, with the average life expectancy 21 years.

C.L.R. James recounts in *The Black Jacobins* (1938) how slaves worked unceasingly from daybreak to the late night on the sugar plantations. Men

and women could be found digging ditches in the cane fields, the majority either naked or covered with rags. Slaves were forced to labor in scorching heat and with daily rations barely sufficient to enable work. They were housed in ramshackle huts that offered a minimum of protection from the elements. A regime of calculated brutality and terrorism reigned. James noted:

Mutilations were common; limbs, ears, and sometimes their private parts; to deprive them of the pleasures which they could indulge in without expense. The masters poured burning wax on their arms and hands and shoulders, emptied the boiling cane sugar over their heads, burned them alive, roasted them on slow fires, filled them with gun powder and blew them up with a match, buried them up to the neck and smeared their heads with sugar that the flies might devour them, fastened them near to nests of ants or wasps, made them eat their excrement, drink their urine, and lick the saliva of other slaves.

These were the ghastly conditions that drove the Haitian masses to rebel against the planters.

The Haitian Revolution was a monumental event. It was the first successful slave rebellion in human history. The analysis of the *Times*, however, presents the Haitian Revolution as if it originated in a historical vacuum.

The world historical significance of the Haitian Revolution cannot be fully grasped if it is not placed in the context of the American and French revolutions that transpired only a few years prior to the revolt in Saint-Domingue. Both revolutions had been ideologically nourished by the progressive intellectual traditions of the Enlightenment, which spread democratic sentiments of equality and liberty and undermined feudal privilege and aristocracy.

These sentiments resonated among Saint-Domingue's free blacks, who were oftentimes educated and had property but who faced brutal discrimination by the great slaveowners and the petty-bourgeois whites. From the free blacks, the revolutionary contagion made its way to layers of the slave population, as James showed in his landmark work. Just as crucially, in undermining aspects of the mercantilist economy in the Caribbean, the American and French revolutions directly undermined slavery.

In the course of establishing the thirteen British colonies' independence, the American Revolution became the first great world event that posed a political and moral challenge to the practice of slavery. Refuting the reactionary notion pushed by *The 1619 Project* that the revolution occurred as a means of "protecting slavery," historian Gordon Wood noted in an interview with the WSWS the very opposite is true: "The Revolution unleashed antislavery sentiments that led to the first abolition movements in the history of the world." This came with the formation of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society in 1775, a year before the publication of the Declaration of Independence.

France's first great abolitionist society—the Society of the Friends of the Blacks, *Société des amis des Noirs*—was founded a year before the start of the revolution in February 1788 and a year before the publication of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. The society's aim was to abolish both the institution of slavery in France's overseas colonies and French involvement in the Atlantic slave trade.

The liberals who comprised the Society were among the most prominent figures in the first years of the revolution. James describes the positive reception free mixed-race blacks (mulattos) received in their appeal for political emancipation at the beginning of the French Revolution. In October 1789, the National Assembly had welcomed a delegation of

mulattos to reply to their petition for equal rights with whites on the island, a step that was widely recognized as a harbinger for the total abolition of slavery.

The enslaved people of Saint-Domingue rose up in August 1791, setting the Haitian Revolution into motion.

Under the weight of burgeoning antislavery sentiment among the French masses and agitation of the Friends of the Blacks in the Constituent Assembly, a decree was passed in February 1794 abolishing slavery in several Caribbean colonies. The 1794 decree by the Assembly in Paris was also prompted, in no small part, by the unfolding colonial slave revolt in Saint-Domingue and incursions by Britain and Spain on the island to suppress the uprising and assert their own colonial interests.

The chronicle of the *Times*' analysis of Haiti's debt servitude frames the abolition decree of 1794 by the revolutionary French government as merely a temporary respite in French barbarism, citing historian Laurent Dubois who claims the decree was the most dramatic change brought about by the French Revolution, yet for enslaved people of Saint-Domingue "it was only the end of the beginning of a long struggle for freedom."

But the obvious question left unanswered by *The Ransom* is how a French society that abolished slavery in 1794 could have suddenly resurrected its colonial heritage, first in Napoleon's military incursion in Saint-Domingue in December 1801 aimed at reimposing it, and then after the Bourbon monarchy's return to power two decades later. This phenomenon can only be truly understood through a historical materialist analysis, i.e., identifying what changes had taken place that allowed the creation of a system just as embroiled in social contradictions and class domination as the previous one.

Europe's monarchies waged war against the French Republic soon after the revolution, with Napoleon taking power in a 1799 coup. Napoleon's criminal betrayal of the promises of the revolution was inevitable if the conditions for the development of European capitalism were to be solidified. The infamous trade in slaves and sugar was at the heart of the Atlantic Ocean commerce, and Napoleon rescinded the 1794 decree abolishing slavery while negotiating an 1802 peace treaty with Britain. He sent an army to Haiti that waged a bloody war in a failed attempt to reimpose slavery, and later, in 1804, he crowned himself emperor, ending the First Republic.

The insufferable conditions the Haitian masses dealt with after winning independence can be traced back to the international isolation that was enforced upon them as result of the massive hostility and fear the uprising triggered among the ruling classes in France, America and beyond by the 1820s. The revolutionary phase of the bourgeoisie in the industrialized countries waned in accordance with the emergence of the proletariat. In addition to this, the political representatives of America's newly found republic, whose territory still kept close to 2 million people enslaved in the South, were immensely frightened by the geopolitical impact of the Haitian Revolution.

Haiti served as a living example of the first victorious slave rebellion, a feat that could not be tolerated by the slaveholders of America's South who feared the revolt might spread from the island of Hispaniola, just a few hundred miles away, to their own plantations. The nascent US bourgeoisie also feared upsetting their French partners with whom they conducted substantial trade throughout the 18th century, as Hispaniola accounted for nearly all US sugar and coffee imports. Among many of the tragic and politically reactionary compromises the US North made with the Southern slaveocracy was refusing to acknowledge Haiti's independence until 1862 and embargoing trade with Haiti.

A centerpiece of *The Ransom* is the consolidation of debt bondage imposed on Haiti by French and American banks. According to the *Times*' analysis, from "1825 to 1957 ... international debt drained an average of 19 percent of the country's [Haiti] annual revenue, and in

some years ate up more than 40 percent.” In 1825, France demanded that Haiti pay 150 million francs in restitution. The first annual payment alone was about six times the country’s entire revenue that year.

Haiti was then forced into taking out additional loans to pay off the original debt, embroiling the nation in greater poverty while French bankers profited in interest payments and commissions from the loans. Although France ultimately agreed to reduce its original debt demand to 90 million francs, financial records indicate that Haiti made payments totaling 112 million francs over the course of seven decades, or about \$560 million in today’s dollars. “If that money had remained in Haiti,” The Ransom authors argue, “rather than being shipped off to France it would have added \$21 billion to Haiti’s economy over the last two centuries.” The *Times* investigators estimate the payments to France cost Haiti up to \$115 billion in lost economic growth.

Hefty loans continued to eat into Haiti’s economy up until it made the last of its payments in 1888, as France threatened a military invasion and the bombing of the country’s ports if Haiti failed to clear its debts. Besides emptying the nation’s treasury and forcing those residing in the towns to endure squalid conditions, the debt erased whatever gains Haiti made from its vital natural resources, with coffee farmers ultimately paying for the bulk of the debt payments through taxes on their exports.

At the center of the vortex of debt which beleaguered the country was the National Bank of Haiti, a central bank that was controlled by a Parisian bank, *Crédit Industriel et Commercial* (CIC), and later dominated by Wall Street financiers and American diplomats, both of which used the National Bank as a mechanism to deepen Haiti’s indebtedness to the imperialist powers and charge the local government for every deposit and expense it made, generating massive profits for shareholders abroad.

French control over the island would eventually be superseded by American financiers and officials who exploited France’s preoccupation with World War I as an opportunity to buy up nearly all of the shares of Haiti’s central bank and exert complete financial control over the country.

The *Times*’ presentation misleads the reader into thinking that the good or bad intentions of individual actors are the determining factors behind such historical events. Everything is reduced to the avarice of this or that banker or foreign policy official. The *Times* fails to address why profit was such a driving force for these criminal undertakings. The nature of imperialism in the 20th and 21st centuries, its inescapable drive towards domination of the capitalist world market, go entirely unmentioned.

In “Imperialism and the Split in Socialism” (1916), Vladimir Lenin defined the imperialist epoch as a specific and terminal stage of capitalism. The expansion of capitalist production brought with it the concentration of capital into the hands of a small cabal of financial oligarchs, supplanting free competition with monopolistic domination at the hands of a small number of cartels and big banks. This is expressed today in large international financial institutions which control the economies, monetary systems and productive output of entire countries.

The Ransom obfuscates this basic fact of modern capitalist economy by explaining the incredible sums of debt forced on Haiti as the product of the nefarious workings of a single bank, the CIC.

But, as Lenin explained long ago, French capitalism and banking flourished from financial parasitism, lending exorbitant sums of money to countries with unbearably high interest rates. It was not just the National Bank of Haiti where Parisian authorities and bankers acted as board of directors to siphon away funds from indebted nations. In the first decade of the 20th century French banks used exorbitant debts to extract profits from, among others, Russia, China, Morocco and Egypt.

The extraordinarily high rate of profit obtained from the issuance of bonds, which is one of the principal functions of finance capital, played a critical part in the development and consolidation of the financial oligarchy.

In the modern era, despite the heroic struggles of anti-colonial movements which erupted in the wake of World War II, imperialism has created a predatory and parasitic domination of the less developed countries by international finance. A financial hegemony exists, with massive financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank serving as instruments which dictate policy to smaller states which rely on their credit.

Through their domination of the world market, the imperialist powers drive down prices of raw materials and keep the smaller states impoverished. Countries are forced to implement austerity policies that cut deep into their state revenues, thus making them poorer the more they are forced to borrow. None of this is peculiar to Haiti, though the operations of finance capital have been particularly brutal there.

The division and redivision of the entire world along imperialist lines became absolute by the late 19th century, around the time the CIC had constructed the National Bank of Haiti as its personal syndicate and looting operation for financial investors. The issuance of credit and forced indebtedness was one manifestation of a parasitic and decaying capitalism, a characteristic that was found in every monopoly under the system of private ownership of the means of production.

It was in the emergence of the imperialist epoch at the end of the 19th century, that American capitalism began to supplant French capitalism in the domination of Haiti, as part of a broader consolidation of US economic and military dominance over the Western Hemisphere.

The tremendous growth in American industry in the aftermath of the Civil War fueled the violent eruption of US imperialism in the 1890s, taking its most brutal expression in America’s so-called “backyard,” comprising the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

One of the palpable weaknesses of *The Ransom* is that it treats US-Haiti relations as an isolated process separate from the broader geopolitical imperatives and foreign policy interests on the part of Yankee imperialism to dominate the entire region at the expense of its rivals in Europe.

Over the course of more than 130 years, the US has engaged in dozens of interventions, occupations, proxy wars, dirty wars and coups throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. It has invariably waged these operations in the interests of American banks and corporations. Though Haiti may be the poorest and most brutalized, there is no fundamental distinction between these operations in Haiti and El Salvador, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic or anywhere else in “America’s backyard.”

But the *Times* seeks to minimize the US role even in Haiti. Contrary to its assertion that “how much responsibility the United States bears for Haiti’s chronic instability is still a matter of fierce disagreement,” there is in fact nothing to speculate over the culpability of American imperialism for Haiti’s protracted crisis. The invasion of 1915 saw the seizure of Haiti’s treasury and customs houses, while armed Marines were sent into the country’s parliament to ensure that it installed Washington’s choice for president. Over the next two decades, approximately 3,000 Haitians were killed by American Marine forces, while the occupiers suffered merely 16 fatalities.

The Marine occupation left behind a powerful US-trained military that served as a bulwark of oppression. Francois “Papa Doc” Duvalier came to power on the back of this army in 1957. His regime of murder and torture was not some inherent product of Haiti’s backwardness, as imperialist apologists claimed, but the direct outcome of US counterinsurgency strategy in the region following the Cuban Revolution in 1959.

While the *Times* series acknowledges many aspects of this history of US-Haiti relations, from the savage suppression of the peasant-based Cacos movement during the occupation to the diplomatic backing of the 30-year Duvalier dictatorship, what goes unmentioned are developments that followed the ouster of “Papa Doc’s” son Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier.

The Haitian army's gunning down of four school children in Gonaives in November 1985 provided the spark for the popular revolt that brought down the dictatorship. In a preventive coup orchestrated by American intelligence, Jean-Claude Duvalier was flown out of the country along with millions of dollars from the state treasury to France aboard a US Air Force plane in February 1986. The junta that ended up replacing him was handpicked by the US Embassy in consultation with Duvalier himself.

The airlifting of Duvalier resembled the same action the US took with the Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos. Both instances saw US imperialism respond to the social instability in oppressed semi-colonies which it had been able to rule for a long period of blood-soaked dictatorships. A "democratic" phase was initiated in both nations to gloss over the continued exploitation and counterrevolutionary violence of the regimes that served as stooges for imperialism.

Haiti was ruled by the bloodthirsty junta of Henri Namphy, a former army commander under Duvalier. A bloodbath was carried out by Haitian army troops and the former members of the Tonton Macoute, the hated political police of the Duvalier regime, against voters during the national elections in November 1987.

The same Haitian army that was supplied with American military training and financial support for decades would go on to depose former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, leader of the social-democratic Fanmi Lavalas, or "Lavalas Family," party on September 29, 1991 in a coup led by former army Commander Raoul Cédras. High-ranking officials of the Haitian National Intelligence Service (SIN), which had been created and financed in the 1980s by the CIA, had been involved in the coup. SIN plotters were reportedly still receiving US government funding and training as CIA henchmen for intelligence-gathering activities at the time of the coup.

In 1993, scores of Aristide supporters were targeted and killed in a violent terror campaign organized by the Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti (FRAPH), a CIA-backed death squad whose leader, Emmanuel Constant, had been on the CIA's payroll as an informant since 1992. According to an article published in *The Nation* by investigative journalist Allan Nairn, Constant revealed that he formed FRAPH at the request of the US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). Constant noted "other people from [his] organization were working with the DIA" who were aiding in operations directed against "subversive activities."

Aristide was briefly restored as president in August 1994 after the Bill Clinton administration and the United Nations dispatched 15,000 troops and a US delegation to ostensibly force the military out of power. The US and UN "peacekeeping" missions, however, were not aimed at "restoring democracy in Haiti," as US officials claimed, but rather at protecting the murderous Haitian army and its brutal paramilitaries.

The former priest Aristide would again be the target of a violent overthrow and forced exile in the 2004 bloody coup orchestrated by the George W. Bush administration and aided by the government of Jacques Chirac in France. Among the coup leaders were former Haitian army officers like Louis-Jodel Chamblain and leaders of the CIA-backed FRAPH organization that carried out state terror against opponents of the military regime a decade earlier. Another death squad leader was Guy Philippe, a former Haitian army recruit who received training from US Special Forces in Ecuador in the 1990s and was then sent back to Haiti to become a ruthless police chief.

The Ransom was published amid a deepening political and economic crisis in Haiti. The life expectancy for the country's 10 million people stands at an abysmal 63.5 years. More than half of the population lives on less than \$2 a day. Deepening social misery has forced Haitians to flee the country in droves. Many Haitians drown in the Caribbean while risking the perilous journey to the United States on small motor boats. The brutalization of Haitian immigrants trying to cross the Mexican border into the US at the Rio Grande by American border guards on horseback in

September 2021 is seared into the consciousness of millions. As of February 2022 the Biden administration had deported more than 20,000 Haitian refugees back to the island nation.

The assassination of President Jovenel Moïse last July has roiled Haiti's political system and spilled over into gang violence. The capital Port-au-Prince saw at least 200 people killed and thousands displaced in April alone, according to a report from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Meanwhile, the criminal US puppet regime is now headed by Ariel Henry, who serves both as acting prime minister and acting president. Henry, an exemplar of Haiti's ruling kleptocracy, is in fact one of the main suspects in his predecessor's death.

After the 2004 US-orchestrated and French-backed coup that overthrew Aristide, US troops present on the island were soon succeeded by a United Nations "peace-keeping" force known as MINUSTAH (United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti), which was commanded by Brazilian generals and brutally quelled popular unrest in the shantytowns of Port-au-Prince. MINUSTAH was tasked with pacifying the Haitian masses until the Haitian National Police and military could be revived. The UN force remained in Haiti until 2017, leaving behind a cholera epidemic that spread from foreign troops to the population, killing an estimated 10,000 Haitians.

Since the devastating 2010 earthquake, Haiti's continued political crisis has borne the stamp of direct US interference. Reactionary and corrupt governments were installed like that headed by Michel "Sweet Micky" Martelly, a former singer and associate of the blood-soaked Duvalier dictatorship. Sweet Micky was a favorite of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who threatened to withhold aid from the country if Martelly was not placed frontrunner in the tampered 2010 elections.

Martelly then transferred power to his hand-picked successor, the recently assassinated Moïse. Both presided over governments dedicated to the interests of multinational corporations and Haiti's venal ruling elite, violently suppressing mass protests and operating a network of corruption with local businesses that siphoned off billions of dollars in government funds. Moïse maintained US support even as he gutted the country's legislature, judiciary and local governments, ruling by decree and seeking to erect an authoritarian regime in the final stages of his presidency.

Despite this support, a mountain of evidence has emerged pointing to Washington's involvement in Moïse's assassination. The Colombian mercenaries alleged to have carried out the killing were from an elite US-trained special forces unit. Phone records and an interview with Rodolphe Jaar, a Haitian businessman who helped finance and organize the coup, also pointed to the role of American officials, who he says green-lighted and helped orchestrate the conspiracy against Moïse.

All of these crimes have been given blanket support or glossed over in the highly-selective coverage of the *Times*.

No section of Haiti's petty-bourgeois leadership and liberal reformists, much less the corrupt trade unions which oversee sweatshop conditions, can be relied on to offer a democratic solution to the political and economic crisis which wracks the island. History has proven that without the Haitian proletariat leading the masses of oppressed peasants and urban poor in a united fight for socialism, any struggle against the Haitian ruling class and imperialism will be defeated and drowned in blood. Haiti's working class and rural toilers must advance a program for the nationalization of the land and its distribution to the peasantry, a program which no other social force is capable of carrying out.

It is no accident then that it is the middle class and nationalist layers of Aristide and his Fanmi Lavalas movement that represent what the *Times* series markets and glorifies as the forebears of progressive, democratic reform for the Haitian population. This is fleshed out in the last section of the series, which is entirely devoted to lionizing the ousted president and glorifying his nationalist demand for financial reparations as compensation for the billions in debt Haiti was forced to pay to France

after the Haitian Revolution.

The *Times* presents Aristide's call for restitution as "a bombshell that became a hallmark of his presidency" and describes the former Fanmi Lavalas leader as a "polarizing figure who rose to office as a champion of the poor." The series quotes favorably a speech by Aristide where he placed the reparations demand at the center of a national development program for the impoverished nation. Aristide argues, "What beautiful schools, universities and hospitals we will be able to build for our children! How much food we will have in abundance!"

In its enthusiastic approval of restitution payments for Haiti, the *Times* authors are not speaking as advocates for Haiti's oppressed and destitute masses but as an arm of the Democratic Party and middle class black nationalists in the US who have increasingly openly embraced a racial reparations program for the African American descendants of slavery.

Although they emerged under different national and historical backgrounds, the call for reparations from the proponents of identity politics in the US and Fanmi Lavalas in Haiti share the same fundamental purpose: They deflect attention away from capitalism as the root cause of society's social ills and the sufferings of the working class.

Aristide's campaign was in fact a reactionary diversion, a desperate cover for his own capitulation to US imperialism and the impossible bind he found himself in trying to carry out a nationalist reform program within the confines of Haiti and above all without challenging imperialism. If anything, a monetary package from France would not have gone to improving the social conditions of the working class, but instead it would have been diverted and appropriated by the privileged classes who would oversee its distribution.

Large sections of the Haitian bourgeoisie turned to the former radical priest during the 1990 presidential elections as a means to contain the growing popular opposition of Haiti's oppressed in response to the electoral campaign of Roger Lafontant, a Tonton Macoute leader under Duvalier. The reparations demand constituted one element of Aristide's earlier attempts at enacting limited social reforms and proposals to dismantle the Haitian army, along with the disarming and prosecution of the Duvalierist forces.

None of this proved possible. Aristide's time as president was marked by repeated conciliations of the Haitian ruling class and acquiescence to imperialism. Right from the beginning in his 1990 presidential bid, Aristide had agreed to head a coalition with various bourgeois parties and campaigned on a platform that called for a "marriage between the people and military." He opposed any significant land reform or redistribution of wealth.

Haiti's ruling class soon lost confidence in Aristide's ability to subdue the revolutionary movement of the masses, and his regime was toppled in a military coup just eight months later in September 1991. The head of the putsch was army General Raoul Cédras, who had been appointed by Aristide himself in June. Even as his supporters in the neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince were being machine-gunned, Aristide restrained the mass movement. Upwards of 3,000 people were killed by Cédras' forces.

After finding refuge in the United States, Aristide refused any appeal to the American and international working class to assist Haiti's oppressed in a struggle against the junta, and instead made overtures to the Clinton administration and to US imperialism, the same force that subjected the nation to humiliating destitution and repression for an entire century.

What accounted for this? Aristide's movement represented a petty bourgeoisie whose class outlook spoke to the social grievances of the masses but lacked any genuine independence from the national bourgeoisie and imperialism.

The program of implementing limited national economic development identified with petty-bourgeois nationalists, such as Cuba's Fidel Castro or Nicaragua's Sandinistas, proved unfulfillable with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and as no alternative to imperialism could be found for

whom such so-called radical anti-imperialists or anti-capitalists could maneuver with.

Although allowed to return to Haiti with Washington's blessing in 1994 to finish his first term and subsequently win a second presidential bid in 2000, Aristide's restoration was only contingent on carrying out IMF-dictated policies and containing the struggles of the Haitian working class.

Despite his capitulation to the right-wing parties, the political opposition among Haiti's privileged classes towards Aristide grew evermore ferocious because of his rhetorical identification with the strivings of the workers and poor people, laying the cement for a coup carried out at the hands of US-funded and CIA-trained death squads. The flight of Aristide into exile and Fanmi Lavalas' melting popular support was a testament to the bankruptcy of his populist political movement and the entire project of opposing imperialism on the basis of petty-bourgeois nationalism.

Aristide's chosen successor and Fanmi Lavalas presidential candidate René Préval would go on to enforce the IMF structural adjustment programs demanded by finance capital which led to major cuts in subsidies on food and transportation, spiraling inflation, the privatization of state-run companies such as the flour and cement sectors and the imposition of crippling loans that tore deep into the impoverished nation's social fabric. Social devastation for the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere widened, and aid from the US and other major powers shriveled up as imperialism increasingly backed the government opposition organized in the Group of 184 and the Democratic Platform.

Whatever one is to make of his feeble demands for "reparations," Aristide's appeal to France for restitution was to be the last of many hollow and meaningless attempts he made to burnish his "radical" credentials. Aristide never sought to overthrow the capitalist state that was the product of two centuries of foreign military intervention and repression or create any foundation of state rule based upon the working class. Settling accounts with the historic and current crimes of capitalism is not a matter of satisfying a tiny layer of dishonest and self-proclaimed "representatives" of those who suffered in the past. It must take the form, rather, of a nationwide struggle for socialism by the Haitian working class as part of an international socialist revolution with the goal of establishing genuine social equality worldwide.

All of the pressing problems facing the Haitian masses cannot be addressed in isolation. A political program for the emancipation of Haiti's oppressed from foreign subjugation and capitalist exploitation requires above all the independent political mobilization of the working class and poor farmers, and their unification with the masses of the Caribbean, Latin America, the United States and ultimately the entire world. This means the fight for the United Socialist States of the Americas and Caribbean.

The conditions in Haiti are not unique to the Haitian masses but are in fact the same and are growing more severe throughout the so-called developing world and developed world alike.

Soaring inflation and food prices fueled by the reckless US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and trillions of dollars in bailouts for Wall Street now threatens hundreds of millions around the world with starvation. This is the outcome of the breakdown of the global capitalist system, caused by massive economic dislocation instigated by climate change and regional conflicts and the homicidal handling of the COVID-19 pandemic by capitalist governments throughout the world.

The ongoing monetary tightening by the US Federal Reserve, as well as the increasing costs of basic necessities, are plunging Third World countries into bankruptcy. The balance of payments of African and Latin American countries is going to run into huge deficits due to an outflow of investment money, as well as higher prices of oil and food and rising interest rates on foreign debt. The world's financial oligarchies are demanding that governments implement drastic austerity measures aimed at privatizing state-run entities and selling off public assets to predatory

banks and investors.

The monopolistic control of the world's giant transnational corporations and their subordination to the private profit of a handful of billionaires act as a block to the revolutionary potential of modern technologies and the source of unendurable suffering for the global population. The world economy must be run on the basis of social need, and this requires a revolutionary overturn of the entire capitalist system.

As part of this, working people in Haiti must link their struggles to a conscious and unified movement along with their class brothers and sisters in the Caribbean, South and North America and beyond on the basis of the Theory of Permanent Revolution as developed by Leon Trotsky, through the building of the International Committee of the Fourth International as an independent mass political movement of the international working class for socialism.



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