

Protests erupt across Haiti against hike in fuel prices

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19 September 2022

Haiti's capital city Port-au-Prince and other major cities reached a new level of turmoil this week as a result of mass protests against Prime Minister Ariel Henry's pledge to end fuel subsidies and raise gas prices. The crippling price hike comes after weeks of growing political opposition among Haiti's working class to the US puppet regime headed by Henry, the warring gangs representing rival sections of Haiti's kleptocracy and the nation's business elite.

Amid spiraling inflation and rising costs, the government announced Sunday that the price of a gallon of gasoline would rise from 250 gourdes (\$2) to 570 gourdes (\$4.78), while diesel prices would go up from 353 gourdes per gallon (\$3) to 670 gourdes (\$5.60). The price of a gallon of kerosene would rise from 352 gourdes (\$3) to 665 gourdes (\$5.57).

Thousands of demonstrators have blocked traffic throughout the capital with rocks and burnt tires, metal gates and other items. Video footage showed protesters targeting several banking institutions and others were filmed seizing hundreds of pounds of rice from a warehouse run by one of Haiti's biggest import companies. US media outlets have sought to slander the protesters as "looters" and championed police repression to quell the rebellion.

Anti-government protests had been building since last month when hundreds of workers descended on the capital demanding the resignation of Henry, a longtime asset of the US ruling class who was placed in power by the so-called Core Group, led by the ambassadors from the US, Canada, Germany, France, Spain, the EU and Brazil, amid a reshuffle of the government after the assassination of President Jovenel Moise in July 2021.

This week's protests came on top of weeks of unrest caused by a slew of problems that have deepened the nation's economic crisis and the social devastation felt by millions of its toiling masses, including the devaluation of the local currency coupled with higher food prices, a lack of US dollars and the increasing shortages of gas and propane. Another central demand of the protesters is the ousting of Henry, whose regime has been mired in political criminality and scandals, the most notable being the widespread belief that he and other figures helped orchestrate Moise's assassination with the assistance of American intelligence.

The administration has claimed that its widely opposed austerity measure is needed to clamp down on inflation, which hit a 30.7 percent rate increase in July compared to 2021, and because the government could no longer afford to subsidize fuel, on which the government spends \$400 million annually.

It is far more likely that Henry's effort to deepen mass impoverishment is not aimed at combating inflationary pressures but to broker future parasitic deals with lending agencies and financial

institutions. In June, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a Staff-Monitored Program (SMP) for Haiti to track its financial records and serve as a prerequisite for loan authorizations.

The IMF's report lamented the substantial sums the government was pouring into fuel subsidies and that this sector was absorbing at least one-third of Haiti's domestic revenues. The statement blames central bank financing as the reason behind spiraling inflation, noting, "Satisfactory performance under the SMP could lead to an IMF-supported program under a multi-year arrangement that would require approval of the IMF's Executive Board." What lies behind the SMP and Henry's clampdown on fiscal deficits is a desire to line the nation up for yet another round of debt and plunder by imperialist finance capital.

The ending of state subsidies will prove disastrous for millions that suffer from chronically low wages. The decades since the fall of the US-backed "Papa Doc" and "Baby Doc" Duvalier dictatorships have seen American administrations, both Democrat and Republican, reconstruct Haiti into a vassal state protecting the investments and profits of US companies lured by starvation wages. In the face of large-scale demonstrations for higher pay in February, the government increased the minimum wage by 54 percent to less than \$7.50 per day, which is far less than the still meager \$15 per day that some workers had demanded.

The massive earthquake in 2010 plunged the nation deeper into poverty and the only response since on the part of Haiti's venal political elite has been to act in the interest of US multinational corporations and Haiti's oligarchy. Gilbert Bigio, Haiti's sole billionaire and head of the industrial conglomerate GB Group, presides over a virtual monopoly of the Haitian steel market while the average Haitian steel worker is paid around 34,000 gourde (\$300) a month. Dozens of American garment and textile companies generate mountains of profit from the unlivable wages workers receive in Haiti's sweatshops.

The social upheaval has intersected with immense political instability wracking the country, as Henry heads a de facto dictatorship since the government failed to organize presidential elections after his term ended on February 7. The political crisis and protest movement has evoked concerns among the imperialist powers, above all the United States and Canada, that the demonstrations could lead in a revolutionary direction while foreign policymakers are questioning Henry's ability to suppress opposition.

Susan D. Page, a former special representative of the UN secretary general in Haiti and former head of the deadly United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) operation, floated the notion earlier this month that Henry's ruling coalition of the Musseau

Accord be replaced by another layer of equally privileged and corrupt bankers' politicians and journalists that comprise Musseau's arch rival, the Montana Accord.

In an article published by the Council on Foreign Relations, Page referred to the Montana Accord as "a broad group of Haitian citizens [which] has coalesced to form a roadmap to the restoration of democratic norms without the interference of foreign powers. For the United States, working in greater partnership with such organizations ... could help restore Haitian confidence."

Page's comments echo a piece written by former National Endowment for Democracy (NED) vice president George Fauriol, which was published by the Washington think tank Center for Strategic and International Studies in February.

Highlighting the "near collapse of Haitian public authority," the article is a road map for regime change. Fauriol lauded the Montana Accord for generating "a plausible transition formula out of the crisis" and establishing ties with a political coalition made up the Protocole d'Entente Nationale (PEN), a coalition of some 70 political organizations and groups.

The protest movement has also triggered renewed calls from Caribbean political officials that Washington and the other imperialist powers intervene in Haiti through another colonial-style military intervention paralleling the United Nations "peacekeeping" forces that were deployed under the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) after the 2010 earthquake. In a meeting this week with Vice President Kamala Harris, US lawmakers and leaders of the Organization of American States, Dominican Republic President Luis Abinader warned that Haiti's crisis was approaching "a low-intensity civil war."

Another component of the crisis is the acceleration of gang violence organized by the notorious G9 Family and Allies gang, which is run by former policeman Jimmy "Barbecue" Chérizier. Chérizier has longstanding ties to a section of Haiti's bourgeoisie represented by the Haitian Tèt Kale Party (PHTK), which includes the Clinton-backed puppet regime of former president of Michel "Sweet Mickey" Martelly and Moïse, the latter being notorious for unleashing such forces in violent crackdowns against popular opposition to his presidency.

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Over the past several months G9 has routed Haiti's frail security forces and police, seizing control of significant chunks of territory including much of the shantytown of Cité Soleil. The gang wrested control of the city after significant gun fighting against G-Pep, the next largest gang federation in the country.

Although posturing as opponents to Henry and claiming to lead a popular "revolution" in response to the Moïse's assassination, G9 has been utilized to crush opposition and consolidate power for Haiti's business elite. Earlier this month, Chérizier's G9 led a violent assault in Cité Soleil, where resistance has broken out in the face of extreme repression and where several local activist groups have organized mass protests.

Christella Delva, a 17-year-old student protester, was killed by the gang with a bullet to the head, while two young Haitian journalists, Tayson Lartigue and Frantzsen Charles, were also killed by G9 while returning from an interview with the parents of Delva.

The ubiquitous gang violence and kidnappings along with the entrenched corruption of Haiti's ruling class serve as components for maintaining capitalist rule in Haiti, whose chief headmasters, US and

European imperialism, have for decades utilized such forces to enforce a climate of brutal social inequality, political oppression and squalor. The demand of Abinader for a "peacekeeping" intervention is part and parcel of US imperialism's continued domination of Haiti, which can be traced back to the 1915-34 US occupation and the series of bloody invasions and violent dictatorships directed against Haiti's insurgent working class.

After a massive nationwide rebellion deposed "Baby Doc" Duvalier's dictatorship in 1986, the CIA orchestrated the overthrow of theologian-priest Jean Bertrand-Aristide in the early 1990s, while Washington used Haiti's army and remnants of the Duvalier's Tonton Macoutes paramilitary as its principal instruments for terrorizing the population. Upon returning to power, Aristide's pledge to carry out piecemeal reforms while accommodating imperialism did nothing to prevent the US, Canada and France from kidnapping the former president and transporting him on a plane destined for the remote Central African Republic in 2004.

In the face of demands for new elections, a warning must be made that in countries of belated capitalist development such as Haiti there is no section of the national bourgeoisie that is capable of or willing to wage a revolutionary struggle against imperialism that is needed to secure the elementary democratic and social aspirations of the workers and toilers.

No illusions should be held in Aristide and nationalist parties such as his Lavalas, which itself carried out IMF and World Bank demands for "structural adjustment" policies, inundated Haiti with US goods and privatized profitable government-owned companies. Aristide headed a regime that for the masses of Haitian workers meant further destitution and the elimination of tens of thousands of jobs.

Aristide has continued this role since the coup, as he met with Henry at the former's Tabarre home as part of the prime minister's efforts to form an alliance with several middle-class groups and enlist their efforts to derail social opposition. Two weeks prior, Aristide hosted Helen La Lime, the former US ambassador to Angola and current special representative of the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), at his home, revealing the deep ties the Lavalas leader maintains with imperialism.

The Haitian working class masses must sever all its ties with nationalist forces and establish its political independence from all factions of the national bourgeoisie while leading the oppressed masses in a revolutionary struggle for socialism in unison with workers throughout the Caribbean, the Americas and globally.



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