

Dominican Republic militarizes border with Haiti, cracks down on migrants

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Dominican President Luis Abinader announced the deployment of troops to the Haitian border on October 9 to stop the flow of refugees fleeing poverty and violence in crisis-stricken Haiti.

Speaking at a press conference in Dajabón, on the northwest frontier with Haiti, Abinader echoed his Haitian counterparts in calling for a foreign military intervention to quell the popular uprising against the US-installed regime of Prime Minister Ariel Henry.

Abinader, speaking for the venal ruling elite of the Dominican Republic—itself a deeply unequal and poverty-stricken nation—no doubt views the mass movement of the Haitian working class with extreme nervousness. He praised the Haitian government's plea for foreign troops as “wise, reasonable and patriotic.”

He went on to declare that, in the event of an intervention, his government would seal the border and accept no refugees: “We understand that this international force will have the methods to prevent a massive migration of Haitian citizens to our country, because we, in that case, would block the border. ... It's very dangerous for the integrity of the Dominican Republic to receive asylum seekers in the country.” Abinader promised even harsher controls on migrations, while boasting that “the Migration Directorate has deported the largest number of Haitian people that has been documented in recent years.”

The president added that the government would purchase six helicopters, 10 aircraft, 21 armored vehicles and four anti-riot trucks, the nation's biggest military procurement since 1961. Troops and tanks were deployed in Dajabón, with Abinader announcing the construction of 400 residences as well as pay raises for the soldiers.

The wealthiest public official in the Dominican Republic—with an official net worth of some \$70 million—Abinader was elected in 2020 on a platform of “law and order” and cracking down on migration from Haiti. During the election, he cultivated close ties with the likes of Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani and then-Secretary of State and former CIA director Mike Pompeo, signaling his desire to

faithfully serve the interests of US imperialism. In 2021, he was named in the Pandora Papers leak, which revealed the hidden wealth that he and other world leaders had stashed away in tax havens.

In February 2021, aiming to cultivate support among far-right chauvinist elements, Abinader announced plans for a Trump-inspired border wall to cover nearly half of the 244-mile (392 km) border with Haiti. Construction began last February. No expenses will be spared in equipping the wall with advanced facial recognition cameras, thermal and motion sensors, and military-grade drones to patrol its length.

Emboldened by the tacit support of the government, outright fascist organizations such as the Antigua Orden Dominicana (AOD) have carried out violent provocations against the Haitian immigrant community and their defenders in the Dominican working class. On October 12, an “Anti-Colonial Day” demonstration in Columbus Park in Santo Domingo was violently dispersed by a mob of fascists chanting anti-Haitian slogans, while police looked on from the sidelines.

Fourteen social and human rights organizations petitioned the Office of the Attorney General of the Dominican Republic for “firm action” to end “the impunity that covers” racist hate crimes and human rights abuses committed against the Haitian migrant community.

The letter reads, “We have seen the proliferation of racist speeches and criminal actions against the Haitian immigrant community in the country continue in the face of the authorities' passive gaze, when it is not under their direct incitement.”

The letter recounts one of these crimes, carried out in Rancho Manuel, in Puerto Plata province. Earlier this month, the local Haitian community was subjected to a brutal lynch mob assault after a rancher and two of his employees were found murdered. Videos posted on social media show the migrants' makeshift dwellings being ransacked and torched, while the perpetrators shouted racist and xenophobic curses.

A 2017 census recorded some 500,000 Haitians living in

the Dominican Republic, though the true number may be twice that. Haitian immigrants make up the majority of the workforce in agriculture and in the burgeoning construction industry.

With no legal protections, they are subject to the most brutal exploitation. On the sugar cane plantations, the laborers are subject to slave-like conditions, including 12-hour days, arbitrary wages and in some cases even physical abuse. Forbidden from striking or organizing, they are at the mercy of their employers, who can dismiss them at will and even call the authorities to round them up, sometimes before wages are paid.

The Dominican constitution had guaranteed birthright citizenship until 2010, when an amendment was made that denied citizenship to the children of undocumented migrants. In 2013, the Constitutional Tribunal, stacked with right-wing nationalists, handed down a draconian ruling that retroactively denied citizenship to anyone born to non-Dominican parents since 1929.

Hundreds of thousands were rendered stateless overnight and subject to deportation. Many of them were children of Haitian parents, who were born in the Dominican Republic, speak Spanish and have never set foot in Haiti. Tens of thousands were deported over the following years, while others “self-deported” to Haiti out of fear. Many settled in makeshift camps on the border, living in abject squalor amid disease and starvation.

As the flow of refugees has increased due to growing deprivation and political instability in Haiti, the Dominican government has stepped up its attacks on migrants, deporting more people in the first half of 2022 than in all of 2021.

In cultivating anti-Haitian chauvinism and xenophobia, Abinader and the rotten comprador bourgeoisie that he represents are following a well-worn path. Historically, the Dominican elite—while profiting enormously from the cheap labor of Haitian workers—have stirred up the most backward and disoriented elements of the population by scapegoating Haitian migrants for depressed wages and unemployment.

The 1937 Parsley Massacre, also known as *El Corte* (The Cutting), provides the most notorious example. The US-backed dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo was then faced with an economic crisis and growing social opposition, triggered by a precipitous fall in the price of sugar, the country’s primary export.

Haitian laborers living in the borderlands provided a convenient scapegoat, and in October of that year, seizing upon a few murky allegations of crimes, Trujillo ordered the extermination of Haitians living on the Dominican side of the border.

Some 20,000-30,000 Haitians and dark-skinned Dominicans were slain, many of them butchered with

machetes in order to make it appear a spontaneous action by the *campesinos*. Cynically, Haitians working on American-owned plantations were left untouched.

No Dominican official was ever charged or prosecuted, and the crime was never officially acknowledged until after Trujillo’s assassination in 1961. In December 1962, the first free-elections in 30 years saw the accession of nationalist reformer Juan Bosch to the presidency. His limited reforms provoked the ire of the possessing classes and their imperialist sponsors, and nine months later he was overthrown in a coup and replaced with a military junta.

In April 1965, workers rose up against the military dictatorship. Arms in hand, they took over Santo Domingo and beat back the efforts of the junta to dislodge them. US President Lyndon Johnson ordered the invasion and occupation of the country to “restore order.” Four thousand died in pitched street battles fought in the slums of Santo Domingo, with poorly armed workers giving battle to US Marines and junta troops equipped with tanks and heavy artillery.

After the carnage, “free” elections were held and Joaquin Balaguer, a former henchman of Trujillo, was installed as president. He would rule for the next 12 years through a combination of fraud and police terror, facilitating the exploitation of the nation’s natural resources and cheap labor by American capital.

With this bloody history in mind, Abinader’s call for a military intervention in Haiti has sinister implications. The Dominican bourgeoisie would also not hesitate to call upon their imperialist sponsors for military assistance in the event their “own” working class threatened their grip on power.

In irreconcilable opposition to the reactionary chauvinism of the bourgeoisie, Dominican workers must fight on the basis of the objective class interests that they share with their Haitian neighbors for the building of a united, socialist Hispaniola. This requires the building of a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International to provide the Marxist leadership necessary for the struggle against the comprador bourgeoisie and their imperialist overlords.



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