

The “friends” of Haiti meet in Canada...

with friends like these, who needs enemies?

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“The exclusion of the poor from the decisions that affect them explains why the most recent pre-earthquake international efforts to help Haiti were focused on increasing the number of maquiladoras — or factories — where businesses pay negligible taxes and Haitians make subsistence wages, if they are lucky. It explains why most international aid is spent on NGO bureaucracies and what relatively little money gets to the Haitian people creates dependencies instead of self-sufficiency. It explains why a UN peacekeeping mission considered a success in New York and Washington is reviled in Haiti. It explains, in part, why the future for hundreds of thousands of Haitians is so uncertain.”

(Reed Lindsay, “Spirit and strength will pull Haiti’s people through”, The Guardian, 24 January 2010)

I.

On Monday 25 January there was a meeting of the “friends” of Haiti: France, the USA, Brazil, Canada and several other countries, prominent amongst whom are governments involved in the Haitian occupation such as Chile, Argentina and Peru. In other words, these “friends” are those countries that in one way or another have participated in the destruction of Haiti over recent centuries. Also present, almost by way of courteous gesture, was Haitian Prime Minister Jean Max Bellerive. The meeting, conducted entirely out of earshot of the Haitian people, was apparently to discuss the strategic guidelines for what is supposed to be the “reconstruction” of Haiti, but in reality was nothing more than a forum to shed crocodile tears, to show off certain donations in emergency funds to the world (supposedly irrefutable proof of the “commitment” of the “international community” to Haiti) and to ask empty, philosophical questions about Haiti’s past and future, such as *“Why has so much effort [ie. on the part of the “international community”] not led to the development of Haiti?”*¹.

The answer to this question from the Haitian prime minister is clear and there was no need to organise an international meeting to find the answer. In fact, the “friends” of Haiti know full well the answer to that question, as would any reader who is reasonably informed about Haitian history. Trying to answer this question without reference to the sanctions incurred by the new Republic of Haiti after it was born in 1804, without reference to the U.S. military occupation of 1915–1934, without reference to prebendary, comprador State model imposed by the oligarchy, without reference to the Duvalier dictatorship backed by France and the USA, without reference to the criminal debt eating up to 80% of its budget that Haiti had to pay from 1825 to 1947 as a price for its independence from France, without reference to the multiple dictatorships, coups, structural adjustment programmes, sanctions and embargoes suffered since the ‘90s in the midst of the struggle for democracy in Haiti, or without reference to the occupation at the hands of the UN (MINUSTAH) since 2004, is an exercise that is nothing if not empty, pointless and a waste of time.

But obviously, none of this will have been touched on. Nor would thorny issues concerning how to overcome the burdensome legacy of misery and exploitation: economic reparations by the great powers, the unconditional cancellation of debt, a strategy of urban and rural development

¹ “La reconstrucción de Haití tras el seísmo busca abrir el camino a su desarrollo”, AFP Noticias, 25 January, 2010.

that puts an end to the neoliberal structural adjustment measures imposed by the IMF-USAID, the recomposition of the peasantry, an end to military intervention, and so on.

II.

It was left to others to raise some of these issues; and in fact a statement signed by more than 200 networks, organizations, movements and individuals from over twenty countries has now been issued, demanding the unconditional cancellation of Haiti's foreign debt as well as an end to the strategy of militarizing Haiti's social problems [see full statement at the end of this article]. It is noteworthy that this call does not come from out of the blue: it has been echoed even by several European and Latin American governments and various representatives of "civil society", and appears to indicate a sort of consensus on the need to completely eliminate Haiti's foreign debt, as extortionate, unjust and illegitimate (it was mainly incurred by the Duvalier dictatorships and the bulk of this money went straight into their bank accounts, a fact that the lenders were well aware of at the time).

Perhaps this is not the ultimate solution to Haiti's problems, which have much deeper roots, sunk into the reality of the imposed model, which requires social and economic changes to be put into effect for the benefit of the oppressed, exploited majority. But it is clear that this measure, if it becomes a reality, would remove a heavy chain that hangs over the necks of the Haitian people. But the measure was too uncomfortable for the "friends" of Haiti, too busy blathering about their altruistic commitment to Haiti. And then came the Haitian prime minister himself to save them from the "trouble", by minimizing the impact of a possible cancellation of Haiti's debt and insisting that the key to the "reconstruction" lies simply in the arrival of more "investors" without specifying what kind of investment or anything. But not only did he minimized the impact of debt cancellation: against all the evidence, he argued that Haiti could continue to honour its debt². This approach is nothing short of a bestiality, a criminal act against a people that does not even have enough to feed itself or cover its most basic needs.

It is worth thinking not only about words but also about the nature of who expresses them: Bellerive not as individual but as representative of the State. In what condition was prime minister Bellerive speaking? He was speaking as the representative of a puppet government, heir to a coup regime (Latortue-Boniface, 2004–2006) and consolidated through supervised elections in which alternatives were excluded, for example, the *Fanmi Lavalas* party of ousted President Jean Bertrand Aristide. A government that operates out of an obscure police station while the ruins of the Presidential Palace in Port-au-Prince are occupied by US Marines, along with the airports and ports, control of which was ceded by the government headed by Preval. A government that not only gave the USA control of Haiti's vital transport centres and authorized a new military occupation of the country, but which also ceded control of the "reconstruction" of Haiti directly to an informal group of big Haitian capitalists: the Bakers, the Apais, the Mevs, and so on³. That is to say, a regime that does not even pretend to be the "façade" of the *makoute* oligarchy's class domination, but has openly handed all its functions over to them and to their imperial bosses.

While we reject the myth of "representative" democracy whereby the people are represented by their government, in the case at hand this myth is even more deceptive and misleading, since

² Ibid.

³ "Haiti's elite hold nation's future in their hands", Tracy Wilkinson, Los Angeles Times, 21 January, 2010.

this government is totally blind to all popular initiative or demands. Its “representativeness” is absolutely nil. It is very hard to believe, moreover, that the Preval government has any sort of autonomy. So it is very hard to believe, therefore, that the words spoken by his prime minister come from anywhere other than from a script provided by the “Friends of Haiti”, which include, of course, the USA, France, Canada and their international financial tentacles (the Paris Club, IMF, World Bank, etc.).

III.

In any event, what sense can we make of this meeting? Not much.

The USA, France and Brazil had the opportunity to smooth over certain difficulties, as evidenced by the inefficient US administration of Port-au-Prince airport and the priority given to military flights over humanitarian aid. In reality, these difficulties, though evidenced by the humanitarian crisis and the criminal way the USA delayed precious emergency relief that could have saved thousands of lives, reflect the tensions between the various vultures trying to make off with a better chunk of carrion. After years of UN military occupation and consensus between the USA and France on the neo-colonialist control over Haiti, the USA’s declared hegemony has certainly bothered those who will now be relegated to a rather secondary role. The USA are now the ones directly in charge of the occupation⁴, which fits very well into Obama’s priorities to increase the military presence in Latin America (Colombia, the Mérida Initiative, the Fourth Fleet)⁵.

It has also become clear to us that the reconstruction efforts in Haiti will become another big business, just as the reconstruction of Iraq was a couple of years ago. Through it, not only the “Friends of Haiti” will attempt to make as much as possible, but also the aforementioned members of the local Duvalierist oligarchy, who will be coordinating many of these efforts, will try to ensure that the “new Haiti” becomes as similar as possible to the “old Haiti”: i.e., a stunted economic enclave, where they can get juicy dividends from their control over trade and over the rudimentary industrial production in the free-trade zones. The fetish of “foreign investment” waved by the Haitian prime minister will act as the ideological foundation for this “reconstruction” of the country’s misery.

Another thing that has become clear is that the issue of unconditional debt cancellation will be relegated from the agenda of the “Friends” and international finance institutions, thanks to the puppet Bellerive and his intervention, which saved them the embarrassment of openly acknowledging that there is no political will for it — they will surely consider interest-free loan facilities for an unlimited time, the limited cancellation of interest on debt, or the imposition of political and economic conditions. At that point they can say that if this fraudulent, illegitimate debt was not eliminated, it was because the “Friends from Haiti” told them, of their own accord, that it was not a priority. How convenient!

In short, what is being offered by the “Friends” of Haiti? Just more militarization, more debt, more sweatshop-style economic “development”, new slums and more social exclusion.

So with friends like these, who needs enemies?

⁴ “Haiti earthquake, France criticises US ‘occupation’” The Telegraph, 18 January, 2010

⁵ “The forest behind the trees: what’s behind the US occupation of Haiti?” José Antonio Gutiérrez D., 23 January, 2010. See www.anarkismo.net

To the governments and organizations gathered in Montreal on the situation in Haiti

Monday, January 25th, 2010

The recent tragedy in Haiti shocked the people of the world for its destructive impact, the environmental and social consequences, and especially for the loss of human lives. Unfortunately, natural disasters are not new in that Caribbean country, which was impacted in 2008 by hurricanes Hanna and Ike.

Nor is it the first time we have watched the international community make pledges of cooperation and assistance to Haiti. We are concerned, as organizations and social movements and on the basis of permanent contact and consultation with our partners there, that the international response be coordinated on the basis of respect for their sovereignty and in full accordance with the needs and demands of the Haitian people.

Now is the moment for the governments that form part of the United Nations Mission for the Stabilization of Haiti (MINUSTAH), the United Nations, and especially the U.S., Canada, and France, to reassess the many mistaken policies they have implemented in Haiti. The country's condition of vulnerability to natural disasters — in large part caused by the devastation of the environment, the lack of basic infrastructure and the weak capacity of state social action — is not unrelated to these policies, which have historically undermined the sovereignty of the people and their country, thus generating a historical, social, economic, environmental, and cultural debt in which these same countries and institutions have a major share of responsibility. Reparations must be made to the Haitian people for these debts, and all the more so in the face of the present situation affecting the country.

In this regard, we reject the militarization of the country as a false response to the recent disaster, including in particular U.S. unilateral action to send an additional 20,000 troops to safeguard its economic and geopolitical interests. The occupation troops of the MINUSTAH, over the past six years, did not contribute effectively to the stabilization or the provision of infrastructure and public goods, and nothing indicates that maintaining this policy would be effective from now on.

We call on governments and international organizations to immediately and unconditionally cancel the external debt claimed of Haiti, the servicing of which affects millions of lives. We also demand that the resources allocated for relief and reconstruction do not create new debt, or conditionalities that are imposed or any other form of external imposition which vitiates this goal, as is the practice of international financial institutions like the World Bank, the Interamerican Development Bank, the IMF, and the so-called donor countries. We also reject the intervention of private multinational companies who seek to take advantage of this tragedy to reap multibillion dollar profits in the reconstruction of Haiti, as happened in Iraq, or to exploit cheap labor and continue to plunder the country's natural resources.

Haitian society, its organizations, social movements and state representatives should be the protagonists of the international effort to rebuild their country: the first to be heard and the final and sovereign decision over their destiny. The Haitian people have lifted themselves up many times on the basis of their own will, with the strength and conviction of their historical example

of having been the first people to free themselves in America. Any cooperation can be effective only if it is based in this commitment and full popular participation.

We are alert, and following developments in dialogue with Haitian organizations, in order to ensure that international cooperation takes place on the basis of this kind of solidarity and that the errors of past policies are not repeated. For a free and sovereign Haiti!

January 25, 2010

SIGNED BY:

Global and regional organizations and networks

Jubileo Sur/Jubilee South – Marcha Mundial de Mujeres/World March of Women – Via Campesina – Amigos de la Tierra Internacional/Friends of the Earth International – Alianza de Pueblos del Sur Acreedores de Deuda Ecológica/ Southern Peoples' Ecological Debt Creditors Alliance – LDC Watch – Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras de las Americas (CSA) / Trade Union Confederation of the Americas – Alianza Social Continental / Hemispheric Social Alliance – Jubileo Sur/Américas / Jubilee South/Americas – Confederación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo (CLOC) – Programa de Incidencia sobre Deuda Ilegítima de la Federación Luterana Mundial / Program on Illegitimate Debt of the Lutheran World Federation – Réseau CADTM mondial / CADTM International Network – Red Latinoamericana Mujeres Transformando la Economía (REMTE) /Latin American Network of Women Transforming the Economy – Latindadd – Kairos Europa- Africa Jubilee South – CADTM Afrique – Caribbean Policy Development Centre – Grito de los/las Excluidos Mesoamérica – Jubilee South Asia-Pacific Movement on Debt and Development APMDD – CADTM South Asia Network

National and Local organizations and networks:

Argentina Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos – ATTAC – Central de los Trabajadores de la Argentina (CTA), Secretarías de Relaciones Internacionales y Derechos Humanos – Centro Cultural la Muralla – Centro de Políticas Públicas para el Socialismo (CEPPAS)- Comisión Justicia y Paz Misioneros Claretianos- Congregación La Santa Unión de los Sagrados Corazones – Dialogo 2000- Equipo de Educación Popular Pañuelos en Rebeldía- Espacio Ecueménico – Estudiantes Haitianos en Argentina – Frente Democrático para la liberación de Palestina – Fuerza Obrera Socialista FOS – Fundación para la defensa del ambiente- El Grito Argentino – Grupo Ecológico 9 de Julio Valles del Carmen – Iglesia de Fátima de Isla Maciel – Iglesia Evangélica del Río de la Plata- Instituto de Relaciones Ecueménicas (IRE) – Liga Argentina por los Derechos del Hombre – MOCASE-V.C – Movimiento de Víctimas de crímenes de Estado en Colombia, Capit. Arg. – Movimiento por la Paz, la Soberanía y la Solidaridad entre los Pueblos (Mopassol)- Movimiento por la Soberanía y la Integración de los Pueblos MoSIP – Movimiento Social Misiones- Multisectorial de Solidaridad con Cuba- Organización Feministas – Parroquia de Santa Cruz – Partido Comunista – Partido Humanista – Plataforma Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, Democracia y Desarrollo Capit. Arg Programa de Incidencia sobre Deuda Externa Ilegítima de la Federación Luterana Mundial- Red por el Uso Responsable del Agua de Traslasierra- Revista “La Resistencia- Servicio Paz y Justicia – Bachillerato UST – Vecinos Autoconvocados de Villa de las Rosas **Bangladesh** EquityBD – Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust **Belgium/Bélgica** Centre Tricontinental – CADTM **Bolivia** Capitulo Boliviano de Derechos Humanos (CBDHDD) **Brasil** Rede Jubileu Sul – PACS – Central Unica dos Trabalhadores (CUT) Brasil – Comitê Pró-Haiti Brasil – CONLUTAS – Auditoria Ciudadana de la Deuda – Centro de Pesquisa e Assessoria – Grito de los Excluidos – Pastoral da Mulher Marginalizada, Regional Norte- Casa da Mulher Oito de Março – Organização Feminista do Tocantins- Red

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