

The reconstruction of Haiti

the missionaries of the rifle and the chequebook

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“The geography

In Chicago, there is nobody that is not black. In midwinter, in New York the sun fries even the stones. In Brooklyn, the people who are alive at the age of 30 deserve a statue. The best houses in Miami are made of rubbish. Pursued by rats, Mickey flees Hollywood.

Chicago, New York, Brooklyn, Miami and Hollywood are the names of some of the neighbourhoods in Cité Soleil, the most miserable shantytown of Haiti’s capital.”

(Eduardo Galeano)

The “Civilizing Mission” of the U.S in Haiti

“The gangs are in control now” say the sensationalist headlines of some newspapers on the desperate situation in Haiti, the country that completely collapsed last week.¹ While the mass media feeds us a diet of hysterical news about a country supposedly at the mercy of criminal gangs who are terrorising the poor citizens and threatening the humanitarian aid efforts of the West, the reality appears to be quite different. It is true that some 3,000 prisoners have escaped from prison in Port-au-Prince after its collapse, many of whom are quite dangerous, having been trained in the school of gangs in the US suburbs. It is also true that there have been some clashes with elements of the security forces and the UN due to the natural exasperation of the people who see the help blocked by a network of inefficiency and indolence². These clashes, however, appear to have been rather bounded and restricted, and aside from being perfectly understandable in the context of absolute abandonment in which the population have found themselves, they have been magnified by the media: the feeling that seems to prevail in the population is Solidarity³.

I do not think, personally, that this media frenzy is so innocent or a case of mere sensationalism. Precisely at a time when these articles occupy the front pages of American and European press, hordes of U.S troops were beginning to arrive, as part of a contingent of 10,000 personnel from the U.S military Southern Command that Obama has decided to deploy to Haiti, allegedly as part of the humanitarian efforts of the “international community”. However, after stepping on Haitian soil on Saturday 16th January, they have come to realise that their role will go beyond purely humanitarian work and that, after heeding the call of Haitians, they can take charge of security. The U.S role in “security” has been openly accepted and it has assumed control of the airport in Port-au-Prince, released by the puppet government of Préval. It would not be surprising if this was the first step in the occupation of ports and other strategic centres of communication.

Obviously, all of this seems to be done as part of an international humanitarian effort and that a measure of force is necessary in order to discipline the savages who kill each other for a packet of rice. The truth is that all imperialist interventions have always shown a humanitarian garb. Never has an imperialist government occupied, looted or bombed a country arguing merely the rights of the strong. Haiti is on the threshold of Florida and the heart of Uncle Sam was moved to see so much barbarism on his own back door. This is not something new: In 1915 Haiti was also gripped in chaos and the “Northern benefactor” had to intervene to spread a bit of civilization to

¹ See for instance, www.infobae.com There are thousands of articles as this.

² www.anarkismo.net

³ www.anarkismo.net

the enraged people. That other “humanitarian” intervention occurred because during one of the frequent rebellions, Haitian dictator Jean Vilbrun Guillaume Sam had to take refuge at the French consulate. But he was taken by a crazed mob that lynched and dismembered him, carrying the remains of his body in a macabre procession across the capital. Faced with the horror, the United States were called upon to fulfil its “civilizing” mission, after which they proceeded to occupy the country from the day after the lynching until ... 1934!

Digging a little at the surface of this “official” story there are many elements that do not match up with the official version of this “humanitarian” occupation. It is rarely mentioned that the lynched dictator was a close ally of the U.S, where in the context of the First World War he sought to reinforce U.S interests against Germany, since the latter had opened itself and important space in Haiti to control much of Haiti’s wealth (trade and financial transactions etc.). Neither did it mention the geo-strategic interest of the U.S to consolidate its “backyard” after achieving absolute hegemony after the Spanish – American war of 1898. Much less is mentioned of the fact that the dictator had ordered, the day before he was killed, the slaughter of 167 political prisoners. Neither did it mention that among the measures taken in this “civilising” process (ie. occupation), was the control over the Haitian banking system and customs, the imposition of the 1919 Constitution, which allowed foreigners to acquire land in Haiti and other measures favourable to the interests of big business –thus paving the way for the US agribusiness. We don’t hear either that in order to build infrastructure to favour these big businesses the US introduced a form of slavery in the form of *corvée*, or forced labour. We don’t hear either of the effects of this occupation: the birth of an army that since the US left formally the island until 1995, when it was dissolved, they didn’t do anything but slaughter civilians and promote dictatorial governments; an extremely atrophied economic structure, modelled upon the narrowest interests of imperialist capitalism; the creation of a centralist autocratic State that paved the way for the later Duvalier dictatorship⁴.

All this, of course, was done in the name of restoring “peace and order.” Now, once again, the U.S feels called upon to carry out their “civilising mission”. U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, reminds us that their work is not intended to supplant the Haitian government but to support it. However, arbitrary decisions taken by the U.S. occupation forces in command of the airport, are delaying the humanitarian aid rather than speeding up distribution, which has already caused more than one protest from other international aid agencies⁵. Incidentally, while the planes carrying medical aid are delayed, no military flights have been delayed, which gives an approximation to the idea of “help” managed by the U.S.. Either way, this crisis allows the U.S. to strengthen its military presence in the Caribbean region precisely at a moment when they have reactivated the Fourth Fleet and turned Colombia into a hemispheric military platform.

Moreover it is not only the U.S who feels called upon to civilise Haiti. For some time now, many nations have seen it as their right to carry out this task. Some people tell military occupations in a somewhat Manichaeian way, between “good” occupations like that of the U.N and “bad” occupations like that of the U.S. We can not forget that Haiti is a country that is under military occupation since 2004, under a mission of blue helmets known as MINUSTAH, whose supposed goal was to stabilize Haiti after the coup against President Jean Bertrand Aristide⁶. The UN

⁴ See Renda, Mary, “Taking Haiti”, University of North Carolina Press, 2001, p.10; See also Trouillot, Michel-Rolph, “Haiti: State Against Nation”, MR Press, 1990, pp.100–101 y Dupuy, Alex “Haiti in the World Economics”, Westview Press, 1989, pp.131–133.

⁵ www.telegraph.co.uk

⁶ For further information please check www.anarkismo.net and www.anarkismo.net

mission has failed to “stabilize” Haiti, but has been quite successful in consolidating the absolute predominance of a tiny neo-Duvalierist oligarchy⁷, established itself as the *de facto* army of the dictatorship post-coup, to murder opponents of the regime, terrorise any form of protest and engage in all sorts of abuses against the local population, including many cases of sexual abuse⁸. Also this mission has proven to be quite inefficient when carrying out humanitarian tasks, as demonstrated by the last hurricane season⁹. It is unknown to us then how it could be of any “help” to Haitian people when Ban Ki Moon announces that he is sending a further 3,500 new troops (2000 soldiers and 1500 police officers) of MINUSTAH to Haiti¹⁰. With a hunger for bread, it seems a diet of lead would be good. The “international community” keeps treating the Haitian people like a rabid dog to be kept at bay.

The “humanitarian mission” of international financial organizations in Haiti

Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said it would supply U.S. \$ 100,000,000 to Haiti¹¹, with words we are led to believe that they also feel to be in sort of “mission” to Haiti. But (and with these things there’s always a but) these funds would be added to the debt that has already accumulated in Haiti and the IMF are not yet clear on the conditions to be imposed on Haiti in exchange for this loan, which in the past have included freezing public sector wages, austerity programs as a means of controlling inflation and price increases of services like electricity, among others¹². It is absolutely unacceptable to use this tragedy in one of the poorest countries in the world to force anti-popular policies or to further increase its foreign debt, which is a lucrative business which for centuries has extorted the Haitian people: Remember that between 1825–1947 Haiti was forced through the imposing of an embargo and diplomatic blockade lead by France , Britain and the U.S , to pay indemnities of 90 million francs to France, which at the end of the 19th century was a slice of no less than 80% of Haiti’s national budget. This indemnity would cover the cost of the French military campaign and the losses of the slave owners who were deprived not only of their property (ie. their slaves), but also the possibility of profit at their expense¹³. When in April 2003 Aristide demanded that France return the money stolen shamelessly, he faced hostility and ridicule by the French government then led by Chirac. It is time to take this claim seriously.

These world powers do have a huge debt with Haiti, after three centuries of colonialism and post-colonialism the have left the country bankrupt. Considering this history, France’s call to cancel Haiti’s debt with the Paris Club, is clearly insufficient¹⁴. Not only is it not enough to simply cancel this extortionists’ debt, it is also important to make an act of historical justice and demand that France return the money fraudulently obtained by this indemnification. We must,

⁷ The Duvaliers where a dynasty of dictators that ruled Haiti from 1957–1986.

⁸ www.anarkismo.net

⁹ www.anarkismo.net

¹⁰ “Haiti Aid Security Boosted as Looters Swarm”, Andrew Cawthorne & Catherine Bremer, Reuters, 18 de Enero, 2010.

¹¹ www.reuters.com

¹² www.thenation.com

¹³ Ver Dupuy, op.cit., p.94

¹⁴ www.rfi.fr

for our part, demand absolute and unconditional cancellation of Haiti's external debt in all its forms, be it from the IMF, the Inter-American Development bank (IDB) or any other international financial institution (totalling about \$ 1,000,000,000). This cancellation must be done without imposing any kind of economic or political conditions on Haiti: remember that this country has already qualified for the HIPC Initiative to reduce external debt of highly indebted developing countries, but this has not been effective because it calls for a series of neo-liberal measures which they already have not been able to meet¹⁵. A minimal sense of justice also demands that the powers and organisations that have caused the ruin of Haiti should be committed to effective assistance, without ulterior motives, transparent and based on grants, not new loans. We are not so deluded as to think that this will be achieved simply by appeals to the goodwill of the powerful. Therefore it is of paramount importance that we mobilise effective solidarity with Haiti, which lend a hand to Haitian grassroots organisations in the field, fighting for a new order as they remain vigilant so that this tragedy does not become a new mechanism to further deepen dependency and neo-colonialism.

What kind of Haiti do we build? For an *Ayiti* built from below and suitable for living with dignity

Haiti is in ruins. But it has been in ruins long before the earthquake. Already the "international community" had advanced this process of impoverishment through a deadly combination of economic sanctions, political blackmail in the form of loans and open looting, coupled with the MINUSTAH occupation. Haiti is nothing but the most dramatic result of a criminal model which has been implemented globally.

Already there are voices warning that Haiti should openly become a protectorate¹⁶. We refuse to believe that this should necessarily be the fate of Haiti. We refuse to believe that the fate of a brave, intelligent and fully able people should be that of charity, neo-colonialism or subhuman misery.

Haiti must be reconstructed from the rubble-and that requires not only mechanical shovels or financial assistance but political vision. It is on the latter that a dispute is being waged between two ideological projects in Haiti, two which have been living in a situation of declared combat for almost 50 years now: it is between those who want a Haiti built for the people, and those who want a Haiti built for rapacious capitalism, represented by their national and trans-national agents.

The Haitian people and those who stand in solidarity with them, have to confront those who want who use this tragedy to rebuild the Haiti of the military occupation, the Haiti of the sweatshops and desolate fields, a Haiti where people starve and eat mud-cookies or a Haiti where *makoutes*¹⁷ are still masters of the streets in the major cities. We do not want to rebuild the Haiti of the sex tourism industry, or the Haiti of the neo-Duvalierist oligarchy, or a Haiti of chronic illiteracy. Nor are we interested in re-building a Haiti where children die before they are men or women from all sorts of preventable diseases. That is the Haiti which the missionaries of the rifle and the chequebook want to build. That Haiti, the Haiti described by Eduardo Galeano through

¹⁵ www.jubileeusa.org

¹⁶ www.anarkismo.net

¹⁷ Makoutes were the secret agents of the Duvalier.

his insane “geography” will hopefully remain buried forever. The Haiti that we want to build with the people of Haiti should meet the conditions laid out by comrade Camille Chalmers of the *Plateforme Haïtienne de Plaidoyer pour un Développement Alternatif* (The Haitian Platform for the Defence of an Alternative Development , PAPDA):

- a. **Overcome illiteracy** (45% of the population)
- b. **Build an effective public school system** that is free and that respects the history, culture, and ecosystem of our country
- c. **Overcome the environmental crisis** and rebuild Haiti’s 30 watersheds with the massive participation of young people and international volunteers
- d. **Construct a new public health system** which brings together modern and traditional medicine and offers quality, affordable primary services to 100% of the population to overcome child mortality, malnutrition, and maternal mortality (currently 630 women per 100,000 live births)
- e. **Reconstruct a new city based on different logic:** humane and balanced urbanization, respect for workers and the real wealth creators, privileging public transportation, parks that maximize our biodiversity, scientific research, urban agriculture, handicrafts and the popular arts.
- f. **Construct food sovereignty** based on comprehensive agrarian reform, prioritizing agricultural investments that respect ecosystems, biodiversity, and the needs and culture of the majority.
- g. **Destroy the dependency ties with Washington, the European Union, and other forms of imperialism.** Abandon policies issued by different versions of the Washington Consensus. Cut ties with the International Financial Institutions and their plans: structural adjustment, the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, and Post-Conflict Countries.
- h. **Expel MINUSTAH and build solidarity people to people brigades.**¹⁸

This is not too much to ask, and Haitians deserve this and much more. In order to obtain this, the Haitian popular movement must decide openly and without sectarianism on a platform for a common and inclusive struggle. The liberation of the Haitian people will be conquered by the Haitian people themselves, thus building a better future, a new *Ayiti*¹⁹ from below and for the people, not for capitalists. And we in the international solidarity movement, we are always willing to support them with our own solidarity.

¹⁸ www.anarkismo.net

¹⁹ Ayiti is the name of Haiti in the language of the Haitians, kreyole.

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