

# Imperialism's Coup d'Etat against Democracy and the People of Haiti

We Have an Anti-imperialist Obligation to the People of Haiti

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*This month marks the 10th anniversary of the UN's military occupation of Haiti. This article was first published February 9, 2014.*

We are coming upon the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the February 29, 2004 coup in Haiti that was orchestrated by imperialism[2] against the labouring classes and the democratically elected government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. According to journalist and writer Yves Engler:

On Jan. 31 and Feb. 1, 2003, Jean Chrétien's Liberal government organized the "Ottawa Initiative on Haiti" to discuss that country's future. No Haitian officials were invited to this assembly where high-level US, Canadian and French officials decided that Haiti's elected president "must go", the dreaded army should be recreated and that the country would be put under a Kosovo-like UN trusteeship.[3]

Just over a year after this pivotal meeting of the three Western states in Canada, the democratic government in Haiti was overthrown, President Aristide had been kidnapped and exiled to the Central African Republic, hundreds of Fanmi Lavalas's (FL) supporters were killed, immediate occupation of Haiti by 2,000 Western troops (latter replaced by the United Nations' military intervention), repression against grassroots organizations, filling of the jails with political prisoners and abandonment of the FL government's investment in education, job creation, healthcare, public services and preoccupation with increasing the minimum wage.[4]

The anti-democratic assault on the labouring classes in Haiti has resulted in the banning of the Fanmi Lavalas party from serving as an electoral instrument of the people as well as the execution of initiatives by elite forces to co-opt opportunistic elements within this political organization.[5] Charlie Hinton, an organizer with the [Haiti Action Committee](#), has documented the different ways that the current Michel Martelly regime in Haiti is pursuing a path toward dictatorship.[6] People of good conscience across the world, especially those in the Americas, should develop or strengthen their ties of solidarity with popular organizations within Haiti's working-class and peasantry.

It is only through people-to-people solidarity based on mutual respect and principled collaboration that Haiti will rid itself of the United Nations' (MINUSTAH) occupation force[7]; force France to repay Haiti the ransom of 90 million gold francs (over \$23 billion today) that

was extracted from the latter as the price for diplomatic recognition and freedom from the threat of re-enslavement[8]; end the cycle of Western military interventions, coups and/or propping up of anti-democratic, anti-people regimes[9]; and put an end to the local elite's and foreign capital's exploitation of the people.[10] Based on Haiti's contribution to humanity, it should hold a special place in the internationalist programmes of progressive forces across the world.

The enslaved Africans in Haiti were the only people to have successfully overthrown a system of slavery in the annals of history. They defeated the strongest military forces of the day, that of France, Britain and Spain, in order to free themselves from the servile labour regime and boldly assert their freedom and humanity.[11] This historic feat, the Haitian Revolution, was significant beyond the victory that the enslaved Africans registered in using armed struggle to effect emancipation-from below. These Black Jacobins[12] etched the fear of revolution in the hearts and minds of the enslavers or agricultural capitalists in the other slave-holding territories in the Americas.

America's Declaration of Independence and France's Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen are hailed as seminal texts that affirm inalienable, universal human rights, but the revolutions associated with these two documents were comfortable in maintaining slavery, a state of unfreedom.[13] It was the Haitian Revolution by way of its June 1801 Constitution that unambiguously declared universal freedom from enslavement in Article 3, "There cannot exist slaves on this territory, servitude is therein forever abolished. All men are born free, live and die free and French." [14] Essentially, it was [Caliban](#), in a switch of roles, who introduced [Prospero](#) to the virtue or practice of universal freedom and paid for this significant achievement with the former's blood.

The celebrated French Revolution and the American Revolution were parochial and hypocritical in allowing for the abridgement of liberty through the institution of slavery. But The Haitian Revolution made it clear to the world that the enslaved or the colonized had the capacity to forge the path to freedom through their collective effort against seemingly insurmountable odds. On the conclusion of the 1831-1832 Emancipation Rebellion in Jamaica, the British authority was so spooked by the possibility of another Haiti with its freedom-from-below that it passed an abolition law in 1833, which took effect in 1834; emancipation-from-above.

Haiti's role in Simon Bolivar's wars of independence in Latin America is not widely known. In the spirit of principled international solidarity, Haiti provided a place of refugee to Bolivar and his comrade Francisco de Miranda in 1815 and gave them material aid in the form of schooners, printing presses, fighters and as well as guns for several thousand troops.[15] Haiti's only condition for its contribution was Bolivar's commitment to abolishing slavery, which he didn't vigorously and speedily implement. Haiti was still living up to the ideal of universal freedom from slavery and colonial domination. This country was there, materially and morally, during a crucial movement in Latin America's struggle for self-determination. It is rather instructive and ironic today to see Latin American military forces serving in Haiti as an occupation army under the United Nations' banner.

Haiti's legacy of defying and exposing the farcical nature of the racist characterization of Africans as sub-humans by defeating the best European armies of the period, taking its freedom in its own hands, contributing to the liberation of Latin America and threatening the continued viability of slavery has probably earned the country the unenviable economic and political status it currently holds in the region.[16]

I believe Wordsworth's was right in declaring to the deceived and fallen Toussaint (and by extension Haiti), "thou hast great allies / Thy friends are exultations, agonies, /And love, and man's unconquerable mind." Our anti-imperialist obligation to Haiti and its people for their contribution to universal freedom entail the provision of political, moral and material support in fighting our common enemies of social emancipation and justice. Our internationalist sensibilities and politics ought to be informed by Martin Luther King's claim, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." [17]

We may demonstrate our international(ist) solidarity commitment with the people of Haiti in the following manner:

1. Form or join an organization devoted to Haiti internationalist solidarity work. This type of formation is necessary to effecting consistent and systematic public education, mobilizing and organizing in support of the struggle of the Haitian labouring classes.
2. Mobilize and educate to pass a resolution or policy on internationalist solidarity with the people of Haiti. Mobilize, educate and organize members in your trade unions, student organizations, community organizations, faculty associations, progressive religious organizations and other civil society groups to support a resolution specifying actions and programmes that will be implemented to materialize people-to-people solidarity with grassroots and popular organizations in Haiti.

These Haiti-based organizations are worthy of people-to-people support: [Défenseurs des opprimés](#) (Defenders of the Oppressed) – a human rights organization; [Tèt Kòle Ti Peyizan Ayisyen](#) (Small Peasants Working Together) – Haiti's largest organization of small farmers; [Batay Ouvriye](#) – one of the most prominent labour organizations; [Ayiti Kale Je](#) (Haiti Grassroots Watch) – investigative reporting; [SOPUDEP](#) (Society of Providence United for the Economic Development of Pétion-Ville) – education and community development; and [Bri Kouri Nouvèl Gaye](#) (Noise Travels, News Spreads) – investigative reporting.

3. Raise awareness about the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2004 coup. Organize teach-ins, film series, lectures, rallies, demonstrations, informational pickets, do radio and television interviews and/or write articles to raise awareness about the February 29, 2004 coup d'état in Haiti and the role played by imperialist actors such as Canada, the United States, the International Monetary Fund, the Inter-American Development Bank, non-governmental organizations, local elite and the Canadian International Development Agency in overthrowing the pro-people government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. A primary objective behind the commemoration of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2004 coup is to motivate individuals and groups to participate in solidarity projects or actions in support of the struggle in Haiti.
4. Support the lawsuit of the Bureau des Avocats Internationaux and [Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti](#) that is aimed at holding the United Nations accountable for the introduction of cholera to Haiti. The 2010 cholera outbreak has resulted in over [8,300 deaths and infected close to 650,000](#) Haitians. You can educate the people in your community or civil society organizations about the action of the United Nations and support or develop campaigns directed at

getting this international body to accept legal and moral responsibility for the devastating action of its occupation forces.

5. Mobilize and organize to end the UN's occupation. Create or contribute to a broad-based campaign of progressive forces in your community, country or region aimed securing the withdrawal of the United Nations' occupation force of over 8,000 uniformed personnel in Haiti. Haiti did not experience a civil war and there are no warring sides being kept apart to justify this military presence. Support initiatives in states that have troops or police personnel in Haiti to build support for the pull out of their respective military and police contingents.
6. Contribute to the fight against neoliberalism. Your organizations ought to support Haitian trade unions, rural organizations and other progressive civil society groups that are fighting neoliberal capitalist policies in Haiti. They have devastated Haiti's rice industry and flooded the country with heavily subsidized agricultural products from abroad. As a result of the extreme neoliberal economic policies imposed on Haiti, it has one of the most open economies in the Americas. For those of us who are based in global North countries the fight against neoliberal capitalist policies starts where we live and work.

I am in full agreement with the following assertion of international solidarity activist Kali Akuno "As we gather our forces to support the resistance of the Haitian people, and join with it in common struggle against imperialism, we will appear as a new defiant spirit and a force to be reckoned with." [18] Challenging anti-working class policies at home is a part of the global solidarity work of delegitimizing them and pushing an alternative approach to human economic and social development.

7. Mobilize against any attempt to bar Fanmi Lavalas from participating in the next round of elections. The conservative political and economic forces have conspired to exclude this movement from participating in recent elections because of its popular support among the people. Fanmi Lavalas was the political organization used by President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to win the presidency on two occasions (both times unseated by a coup). It can lay claim to the series of economic, social and physical infrastructure programmes that benefitted the peasantry and the working-class during the Aristide administrations. [19]

Irrespective of how we might feel about elections, if a progressive and popular Haitian organization is deliberately and deviously barred from participating or Fanmi Lavalas is seen by large segments of Haitians as representative and reflective of them [20], as allies we ought to stand in principled solidarity with the self-determined goals of the people.

The abolitionist, former enslaved African, feminist and statesman Frederick Douglass had this to say about Haiti's role in promoting "universal human liberty" and it serves as a reminder of our debt of gratitude and obligation to its people:

In just vindication of Haiti, I can go one step further. I can speak of her, not only words of admiration, but words of gratitude as well. She has grandly served the cause of universal human liberty. We should not forget that the freedom you and I enjoy to-day; that the freedom that eight hundred thousand colored people enjoy in the British West Indies; the freedom that has come to the colored race the world over, is largely due to the brave stand taken by the black sons [and daughters], of Haiti ninety years ago. When they struck for

freedom, they builded better than they knew. Their swords were not drawn and could not be drawn simply for themselves alone. They were linked and interlinked with their race, and striking for their freedom, they struck for the freedom of every black man [and woman] in the world.[21]

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## Notes

[1] Quoted in Brian Hickey, "Wordsworth Sonnet: "To Toussaint L'Ouverture", 38, Retrieved from [http://users.unimi.it/caribana/essays/caribana\\_2/HICKEY.pdf](http://users.unimi.it/caribana/essays/caribana_2/HICKEY.pdf)

[2] Richard Sanders, "A very Canadian Coup d'état in Haiti: The Top 10 Ways that Canada's Government Helped the 2004 Coup and its Reign of Terror", The CCPA Monitor April 2010, Retrieved from [http://coat.ncf.ca/Haiti/Canada\\_in\\_Haiti.htm](http://coat.ncf.ca/Haiti/Canada_in_Haiti.htm); Putting the Aid in Aiding and Abetting: CIDA's Agents of Regime Change in Haiti's 2004 Coup, Press for Conversion, May 2008, Issue #62

[3] Yves Engler, "Remembering the Overthrow of Haiti's Jean-Bertrand Aristide: The Occupation Continues" Counterpunch, January 31-February 2, 2014, Retrieved from <http://www.counterpunch.org/2014/01/31/remembering-the-overthrow-of-haitis-jean-bertrand-aristide/>

[4] Peter Hallward, Damming the Flood: Haiti, Aristide, and the Politics of Containment (New York: Verso, 2007), 250-276.

[5] Charlie Hinton, "10 Steps to Dictatorship in Haiti: Why the Grassroots is Taking to the Streets against President Michel Martelly," Counterpunch, December 7, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/12/17/10-steps-to-dictatorship-in-haiti/>; Hallward, "Damming the Flood," 263-264.

[6] Charlie Hinton, "10 Steps to Dictatorship."

[7] Deepa Pachang, "UN in Haiti: Keeping the Peace or conspiring against it?" Pambazuka News, November 3, 2011, Retrieved from <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/77635>

[8] Noam Chomsky, Paul Farmer & Amy Goodman, Getting Haiti Right This Time: The U.S. and the Coup (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 2004), 13; Hallward, "Damming the Flood," 226.

[9] Haiti Action Committee, Hidden from the Headlines: The U.S. War against Haiti, (Berkeley: Haiti Action Committee, 2003).

[10] Kali Akuno, "Confronting the occupation: Haiti, neoliberalism and Haiti," Pambazuka News, April 15, 2010, Retrieved from <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/comment/63698>; Hinton, "10 Steps to

Dictatorship”.

[11] C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), viiii.

[12] “The Black Jacobins.” Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Black\\_Jacobins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Black_Jacobins)

[13] Nick Nesbitt, *Universal Emancipation: The Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 81-82,

[14] Nick Nesbitt, *Toussaint L’Ouverture: The Haitian Revolution* (New York: Verso, 2008), 46.

[15] Kim Ives, “Hugo Chavez’ legacy in Haiti and Latin America,” *Haiti Liberté*, March 7, 2013, Retrieved from <http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/8263>; Michael C. Twomey, “Questions Concerning the Haitian Revolution and its Impact in the Spanish Caribbean,” Retrieved from <http://www.historyvortex.org/HaitianRevolutionImpactSpanishCaribbean.html>

[16] Hallward, “Damming the Flood,” 11.

[17] Martin Luther King, “Letter From Birmingham Jail,” April 16, 1963, Retrieved from <http://abacus.bates.edu/admin/offices/dos/mlk/letter.html>

[18] Akuno, “Confronting the occupation.”

[19] Haiti Action Committee, *We Will Not Forget: The Achievements of Lavalas in Haiti*, (Berkeley: Haiti Action Committee, 2005)

[20] Hallward, “Damming the Flood”, 136-140.

[21] Frederick Douglass, “Lecture on Haiti, Delivered at the World’s Fair, in Jackson Park, Chicago, Jan. 2, 1893”, Retrieved from <http://www.canadahaitiaction.ca/content/frederick-douglass-1893-speech-haitian-pavilion-chicago-world-fair>

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