

Haiti: The State Apparatus Collapsed Too

When the 7.0 earthquake struck Haiti the state's political infrastructure collapsed along with the National Palace. In a country as desperately poor as Haiti, and with such revolutionary traditions, first and foremost in importance in this state infrastructure are the forces of repression. These forces – in the form of the police – disappeared entirely from the streets of Port-au-Prince after the earthquake.

1985 Mexico City Earthquake

The situation had some similarities to that in Mexico City after the 1985 earthquake rocked that city. There, the state did not collapse, but it largely failed to provide any rescue or aid for Mexico City residents. As a result, workers in the neighborhoods organized themselves to do this. These neighborhood groups continued after the emergency and formed the basis of a massive community-based political opposition to the corrupt and repressive capitalist state in Mexico.

In Haiti, the danger to capitalism was far greater, as the state did more or less collapse. Further, in Haiti there was a tradition of a left political party (Lavalas, the party of Jean-Bertrand Aristide) which had a strong base in the working class communities. Clearly, neighbors were going to start organizing themselves to carry out rescue and



The Haitian working class taking matters into their own hands.... Where would this lead politically?

mutual aid operations themselves. Through this, they would have formed community-based groups, which would have then started coordinating with different neighborhoods to provide aid throughout the city of Port-au-Prince.

The continued strength of Lavalas would also have been a factor. This party is clearly organized in many of the

city's main working class neighborhoods. This could have made it even easier for workers to organize.

Possibility of “Dual Power”

In every revolutionary situation in history, some form of workers' councils started to develop into the embryo of a workers' state. These councils started to compete with the established capitalist state and “crowd out” the functions of that state. In classical Marxist theory, this is known as a situation of “dual power”. In the case of Haiti, the capitalist state had more or less collapsed already, leaving a huge vacuum. It would not have taken that much for the Haitian working class, with all its tremendous revolutionary traditions to take power in that situation.

Even had dual power not developed to a great extent, there was also the threat of Aristide's return. In that situation, with the collapse of the forces of state repression, the most likely outcome would have been another left populist regime in Latin America, similar to those in Venezuela, etc. This, in itself, would have been a severe blow to US capitalism.

The situation of the Haitian people in general may have been desperate, but that of capitalism in Haiti was even more desperate still. This was why Hillary Clinton told Fox News that the chief aim of the US effort was to ‘assert authority’ and to ‘reinstate the government’ in Haiti.”

10,000 US Troops

The Obama administration cannot claim that they focused on sending in the 10,000 troops (plus their equipment, fuel, etc.) to the exclusion of food and medical supplies because there was violence in the streets in the days immediately after the earthquake. As al-Jazeera reported: “While there were reports of isolated incidents of violence, for the most part, there was an ‘organized calm’ in the capital.” And the *Wall St. Journal*, written more to keep the heads of corporate America informed than for propaganda purposes, reported (1/19/10), “US officials have blamed security concerns for holding up providing relief. Yet a team of Cuban doctors were seen Monday treating hundreds of patients without a gun or soldier in sight.”

The Obama administration has turned parts of Port-au-Prince into an armed fortress. Sebastien Walker reports to DemocracyNow that where “the United States has taken control(,) it looks more like the Green (militarized) Zone in Baghdad than a center for aid distribution.” A Haitian “man in the street” commented to DemocracyNow that, “These weapons they bring, they are instruments of death. We don't want them. We don't need them. We are a traumatized

people. What we want from the international community is technical help—action, not words.”

Naturally, capitalism cannot allow a state of continual chaos and utter breakdown such as exists in Haiti now. They need a certain amount of stability, a somewhat functioning infrastructure, plus a working class that is not absolutely starving. US capitalism would also be utterly discredited, both at home and abroad, if they stood by, New Orleans-style, and did nothing. Finally, there is the consideration of regimes such as those in Venezuela and Cuba further increasing their influence. Therefore, some rescue and aid measures have to be taken.

The Future

The situation in Haiti bears being closely watched. From afar, it is impossible to tell to what degree the working class is or will organize to assert its class interests in the immediate future. If they do so, clashes with the US and UN troops are likely. The US military command is in a risky situation. Many of their troops are black, meaning they will tend to sympathize with the Haitian people. Maybe even more important, the troops, including National Guards, would be open to considering the needs of their class brothers and sisters in Haiti. A campaign of fraternization with these – as well as the UN troops – would go a long way towards undermining their intended role of

repression. Most likely, the Obama administration does not intend to substitute US troops for UN troops over the longer term, though.

Where to Donate?

After Hurricane Katrina, the American Red Cross was so inefficient in organizing aid that it had to fire its director in charge of those operations. It also cooperated in the corporate campaign to drive tens of thousands of workers out of New Orleans. The Red Cross, as well as many establishment non-profit groups in Haiti, will be used to reinforce the capitalist state power. They will also be inefficient in any efforts they do carry out to provide aid. This is because they have no direct connections, no base, within the working class communities so all efforts will have to be organized from outside. Some organizations that apparently have a greater community base include: www.batayouvriye.org, <http://fondationavenir-ht.org/home.html>, <http://www.marguerite-laurent.com/donate/donate.html>, <http://www.standwithhaiti.org/haiti>, and www.haitiaction.net

US Unions

Several large US unions are now mobilizing to send aid to Haiti. This is being done so far under the control of the established union officialdom. This establishment has a long history of acting as the labor face for the US State Department and even the CIA. They have no intention of breaking with this criminal tradition in

this instance. However, in the United States, there are many thousands of Haitian members of these unions. Through these and other active members of the unions, independent teams of US workers could be sent to Haiti. They could be sent both to bring aid as well as to organize direct links between the Haitian workers' movement and organizations and that in the United States.

- **All US and UN troops out of Haiti!**
- **No confidence in the Red Cross or any of the mainstream “aid” organizations or non-profits!**
- **Donate to worker/community-based aid groups in Haiti!**
- **For direct links between US and Haitian workers!**

Motion proposed before the Liverpool Trade Union Council (TUC):

- 1) We appeal to the trade unions and labour movement organizations to make a solidarity campaign in support of Haitian workers and collect contributions to send to the Haitian labour movement.
- 2) We propose to send the money directly to the labour movement in Haiti, for example Batay Ouvriye (<http://www.batayouvriye.org/>)
- 3) We urge the British labour movement to send a delegation to Haiti to establish direct links with Batay Ouvriye reciprocating the journey they made in 1996 to support the Liverpool dock workers.
- 4) We agree to organize a labour movement meeting in order to deepen support.
- 5) We support the Trade Union and Community Seminars that are showing “The Price of Sugar” film in support of Haiti.
- 6) We call on the Trade Union movement to bring pressure on the government and international movement to write off Haiti international debt of £550 million. This will enable Haiti to at least attempt to stabilize the dire financial crisis facing this devastated country.

The fastest way to get money and messages of support to Batay at this moment is through CONLUTAS (www.conlutatas.org.br), Brasil. CONLUTAS will also guarantee to send a letter of receipt from CONLUTAS and Batay.