

## **Letter to Caricom-Support return to democracy in Haiti--Appeal from Labor-Religious Delegation to Haiti**

**\* A letter supporting Caricom for its principled and courageous stand supporting the return to democracy in Haiti.**

**\* The Haitian people implore you--Do not recognize the illegitimate coup government of LaTortue.**

Dear Friends,

In late April and early May 2004, a nine-member Labor/Religious fact-finding delegation from the US and Canada, organized by the San Francisco Labor Council, went to Haiti at the invitation of the Confederation of Haitian Workers (CTH), Haiti's largest labor organization, which was holding its Congress. We interviewed scores of workers and union leaders from all over Haiti, as we participated as fraternal delegates in the CTH Congress. We attended a mass meeting of 500 people in Port-au-Prince. We met neighbors in the Delmas neighborhood where we stayed in the capital.

We traveled to the North of Haiti near Cap Haitien, and interviewed Moises Jean Charles, mayor of the rural town of Milot. Members of the delegation had previously met the mayor during a visit to Milot in 1997, and had hosted him on his subsequent visit to California. This popular mayor, elected by an overwhelming majority, was in hiding as the death squads associated with Guy Philippe and the coup government of LaTortue continued to kill, brutalize and imprison supporters of President Aristide and his Lavalas party.

We interviewed dozens of people, including elected government officials, who had fled to Port-au-Prince from the Central Plateau and other areas, who had been beaten, whose homes had been set afire, who are unable to return home to their families because of the terror unleashed by the February 29, 2004 coup d'etat.

To sum up what our Labor-Religious Delegation learned -- We can state without any reservation, that the vast majority of the people of Haiti do not support the LaTortue coup government, which they consider as illegitimate and imposed by outside powers....They applaud the action of Caricom in withholding recognition of the coup regime....And they fervently desire the return of their legitimate president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, whom they have twice elected to office by overwhelming majorities [in fair, high-turnout elections], only to see his government overthrown by foreign powers in concert with Haitian paramilitary death squads.

Since our delegation left Haiti, the repression has continued unabated, with the arrest and imprisonment of Lavalas community leader, grandmother and well-known singer Annette Auguste (So' Anne) [in the middle of the night, in violation of Haiti's Constitution], and now the arrest and imprisonment of Haiti's legitimate Prime Minister Yvon Neptune. We were also saddened to learn that a large contingent of French troops as well as U.N.

troops had stormed into the small rural town of Milot and raided the home of the mayor, Moises Jean Charles [again, illegally, in the middle of the night]. This is the same mayor that we had just interviewed. Not finding the mayor at home, the foreign occupation troops arrested his wife. Where is democracy, when popularly elected officials must flee for their lives, and the rule of law is replaced by the rule of the gun?

This is the experience of our delegation. That is why we strongly support Caricom in its decision not to recognize the LaTortue regime in any way, and to continue to press for respect for the Haitian Constitution and the return of the democratically elected government of President Aristide.

Attached is the Initial Report of the findings of the international Labor/Religious fact-finding delegation to Haiti, dated May 4, 2004, including the names of the nine delegates from the U.S. and Canada who took part in the delegation.

Respectfully,

David Welsh  
Delegate, San Francisco Labor Council  
For the Labor/Religious Delegation to Haiti

**An Initial Statement on the Current Situation of Workers, the Labor Movement, and Human Rights in Haiti - Tuesday, May 4th, 2004**  
**From: The International Labor/Religious/Community Fact-Finding Delegation to Haiti (April 26-May 2nd) initiated by the San Francisco Labor Council**

A nine-member international labor/religious/community fact-finding delegation has just returned from a week spent in Haiti. Its objective was to assess and report on the current situation of Haitian workers, the Haitian labor movement, and the state of human rights in that country. Within this mandate, particular attention was given to understanding the new realities following the coup d'etat that deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide on 29 February 2004. The brief statement, which follows, is an initial report on our findings.

The delegation's work focused on interviews with Haitian trade unionists and workers, as well as political leaders and activists. Part of this time was spent attending the National Congress of the CTH (the Confederation of Haitian Workers), the largest labor federation in Haiti composed of 11 different union federations. Based on these interviews and discussions, we can report that the labor movement is in significant crisis, brought on in large part by the decade-long economic and political destabilization campaign orchestrated in Washington. The crisis has become much worse since 29 February, with the campaign of violence by the US-backed opposition that preceded and followed the coup. Facing a massive problem of unemployment (estimated at some 70% in the formal economy), the turmoil and economic difficulties of recent years has only been worsened with the change of government.

The coup regime was formed by a coalition of the unelected political opposition; the governments of France and the United States; former Haitian military and paramilitary death squads (including FRAPH); and the Haitian business elite - particularly the "Group 184", led by Andre Apaid. Mr. Apaid, a US citizen who is known by Haitian workers as the single most notorious owner of Haitian sweatshop factories, has been a virulent opponent of unions organizing in his factories. The delegation heard reports of extremely dire working conditions in the Apaid-owned sweatshops, with little or no access to safe drinking water, and wages at the legal minimum of 70 Haitian gourdes (approximately US\$1.80) per day - or less. Those workers courageous enough to attempt the organization of trade unions face dismissal. Clearly, Mr. Apaid and his clique are no supporters of Haiti's workers or their labor movement.

The coup also led to serious attacks on Haiti's trade unions. The delegation heard reports from one union, the FTPH (Federation of Public Transport Workers of Haiti), of criminal attacks on over 100 of the buses that they had purchased for use in the bus cooperative operated by the union. These attacks involved the torching and destruction of the union co-op's buses, yet went unreported in the North American media, despite having taken place in the days immediately following the 29 February coup d'etat (the peak period of international media presence). Given their timing, and the fact that the union bus cooperative's success had been viewed as a positive symbol of social advances under the Aristide government, such attacks were seen by the union as acts of political reprisal by supporters of the coup. No arrests have been made in association with these attacks.

The general living conditions of Haitian workers and the general population have drastically worsened since the coup of 29 February. The delegation heard that the price of rice has jumped dramatically, as much as doubling. Other vital foodstuffs have seen even more serious price inflation. Several witnesses testified that whereas before the coup, Haitians were able to eat at least once per day, the cost of food has reduced this to as little as 3 meals per week. Even those Haitians fortunate enough to have a job are barely subsisting.

As for human rights, things are even more serious. The coup which deposed President Aristide has led to a serious wave of attacks and persecutions of supporters of President Aristide and his Fanmi Lavalas Party. The delegation heard testimony from an elected member of Parliament for the Fanmi Lavalas who is living in hiding, having been driven out of his town under gunfire. Other political leaders and known activists have also been forced into hiding, living underground, fearing the death threats and violence directed at supporters of the ousted government. Despite its obvious popularity, the Fanmi Lavalas movement is not currently able to have political demonstrations or otherwise take open political action due to the threat of attack. The coup regime, supported by an international military coalition led by the US, France and Canada, has not provided security for those currently most at risk. The names of Lavalas supporters - and even those suspected of being Lavalas supporters - are being read off on right-wing radio stations as an implicit threat. Neither the coup regime nor its international backers have taken action to contain what many Haitians refer to as an anti-Lavalas "witch hunt" that continues to this day.

Based on six days of interviews, meetings, recorded testimony, and on-site examinations, the International Labor/Religious/Community Fact-Finding Delegation has collected extensive material to compile and report. We wanted to provide this brief summary as soon as possible for immediate use. A more detailed written report will soon be published and circulated which will contain a more detailed overview of our findings.

## **Participants**

\* Reverend Dr. Kwame O. Abayomi, is the Baltimore City Council 6th District Representative and Senior Minister of Unity United Methodist Church in Baltimore.

\* Dave Welsh, a San Francisco Labor Council delegate, was for many years Executive Vice President of Golden Gate Branch #214 of the Letter Carriers Union. He has been active in Haiti support work since 1991, and speaks French. He was part of a Pastors for Peace delegation to Haiti in 1997.

\* Johnnie Stevens is an activist with the International Action Center. He represented Ramsey Clark on a recent delegation that met with Jean-Bertrand Aristide in the Central African Republic, where the Haitian President had been taken after his abduction. Their meeting paved the way for press interviews with Aristide, and his return to the Caribbean region. He also attended the World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa, and is a co-founder of Labor for Reparations.

\* Sharon Black Ceci, a Registered Nurse, is Labor Coordinator for the Haiti Commission of Inquiry. She is a shop steward with United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Local #27, and was a founding member of the All Peoples Congress, a community organization in the Baltimore area.

\* Charlie Hinton is a member of the Printers Union (GCIU) and a member of a worker-owned cooperative, the union printing company Inkworks in the San Francisco Bay Area. He is a long-time solidarity movement activist and member of the Haiti Action Committee.

\* Sister Maureen Duignan is a Franciscan nun who runs the East Bay Sanctuary Covenant, which has a long history (as does Sr. Maureen) of solidarity and sanctuary work with Central American and other refugees, from the 1980s to the present. Sister Maureen has been to Haiti a number of times and speaks French.

\* Michael Zinzun is director of the Los Angeles-based Coalition Against Police Abuse (CAPA), which he co-founded in 1975. He was also a founding member of Police Watch and Communities in Support of the Gang Truce, and recently attended Haiti's Bicentennial celebrations in

Port-au-Prince. As a result of his activism around police issues, he suffered a police beating which left him blind in one eye.

\* Kevin Skerrett is Research Officer for the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), Canada's largest union. He has done significant research on the international trade union movement, and speaks French.

\* Dr. Adrienne Aron is a clinical psychologist who works with victims of political repression. She has worked in the solidarity movement for many years, and served as an election monitor in Haiti during the 2000 elections there.