

# After the January 12, 2010 Haiti earthquake

**Batay Ouvriye**

April 24, 2010

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As everyone knows, many, many persons have died or disappeared, many have lost limbs, many houses have been destroyed, and many have been left homeless. Many who were working lost their lives, many workers perished at work in their factories, street vendors, public sector employees, store employees, students, people in the streets and in popular neighborhoods... What a huge blow!

Therefore, it's important to stay level headed, to address the real problems, to think well, together, so that we can uncover the real solutions.

In doing so, we should be clear about:

- Some of the perils we are facing;
- What we need to do to confront this challenge, and from which class interest.

## **Some of the perils we are facing**

In this general context, in the context of the still present ruling class plan for limitless exploitation, beyond all the "humanitarian aid" they are talking about, the people's misery is bound to worsen even more. For example, some of the assembly plants have reopened, but they have increased the work quotas, because they claim they have to make up for time lost. Some of the businesses and local factories are also claiming not to be able to pay the recently adjusted 200 gourdes (\$5) daily minimum wage.

Using "humanitarian aid" as a pretext, the imperialists have launched a major military invasion. Haiti has a real need of humanitarian assistance because we do not have the resources to deal with this catastrophe. But what we really need is solidarity. The world today does not allow for this solidarity to play a major role, but it exists nonetheless, as in the efforts of our class comrades who have mobilized to help us with true solidarity. This mobilization stems from the political positions that these political organizations have taken, that show a clear understanding of what is happening, an understanding that they are in the process of deepening even further.

This "humanitarian aid" is focused on finding survivors, sending doctors, medical supplies, water and food. But that is only a cover. In reality, the goal of the aid is to maintain and strengthen the domination. The Americans have shown up accompanied by a military force that is unmatched and unchallenged. They have a force of over 16 thousand soldiers, on land or aboard an aircraft carrier

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and other navy ships. They are carrying heavy weapons and equipment for war, ready for aerial assaults. They are patrolling day and night, and under the cover of security, they are monitoring and controlling all the meetings in popular neighborhoods.

At the same time, this “aid” coincides with the geopolitical objectives of the imperialists, controlling Haiti and the region, while affirming their role and increasing the population’s dependency. We already were under occupation; this now establishes a complete tutelage. We should not be fooled by the Prime Minister’s statement that “we have lost a little bit of our sovereignty”. No! This administration has abdicated all of its power!

We must proclaim that this domination has already failed! This domination has already brought us into this current state of decay. We should ask ourselves: whose interest is this “reconstruction” going to serve? What class interests does it promote? And we must be clear; this “reconstruction” they are talking about is going to be on our backs! Firstly, it is being planned with misery-wages and the continuing pillage of the country’s remaining resources. And then, it is being propped up by a puppet state, a client-state set up to serve imperialism and to put in place Free Trade Zones, low wages, repression and corruption. This reinforced military presence is only going to consolidate this domination and shore up the role that the weakened Haitian state is not able to play.

They would like us to believe that reconstruction is a technical matter, a good-will enterprise. But we know that it is geared to guarantee their project of low wage assembly exploitation and domination that they already were trying to implement before the January 12 earthquake. In reality, Préval was already playing the role of Dartiguenave (a Haitian president installed by US marines in 1915 to give legitimacy to the US occupation of Haiti), and he is showing his capacity to outdo him.

On top of that, they are waging a brainwashing propaganda operation. It’s a campaign of ideological mystification on a national and international stage. This represents a grave danger: the popular masses in Haiti are being mystified along with others abroad who have a real desire to be in solidarity with the Haitian people.

This question of “aid” is not new, but with this catastrophic earthquake, it is so strong that it has covered up the fact that they are precisely the ones who have put us in this dire situation; they, meaning the imperialists and the treacherous, ruthless dominant classes, along with their reactionary state. They are morally responsible for the extent of the damage resulting from the earthquake, compounding their vested interest and their plans in the short and long run. This is what they are attempting to do with their “aid”. It’s not that they love us all of a sudden.

On the other hand, the politicians heading the Haitian state have stumbled on better conditions to guarantee the “continuity” they were seeking, meaning the continuing and deepening development their criminal mafia state enterprise. Knowing some of the contradictions between the imperialists

and this mafia project, what are the arrangements being agreed upon? In whose interest precisely? Those are very serious questions.

As we all know, these politicians, after maneuvering to get and stay in power, have never been defenders of the interests of the popular masses. They have always been lackeys of imperialism, serving the bourgeoisie, or they were simply absent. Today, this absence is even more evident, it is even more critical. Truly, there has been complete disorganization of the Haitian state. We should be clear that the way the aid is proceeding; it is precisely promoting the dismantling of the state. Nothing is being done by the Haitian state to organize in any way. In doing for us, the imperialists have taken our place. And by doing so, they have increased the incapacity of the state, thereby deepening this crisis even further.

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This “aid”, the aggressiveness of the Americans, is also involved in the struggle between imperialist powers. Certainly, American hegemony helps to subdue some of these contradictions, but this should not distract us. We need to be fully aware of them and vigilant about them. It is another danger facing us. They are on top of us, battling amongst themselves. In our current line we need to take this into account, to confront this great challenge in front of us.

### **What we need to do to confront this challenge, and from which class interest**

Since the historic period that was initiated by the departure of Jean-Claude Duvalier, this challenge was already very high for the popular masses and the working class. With these recent events, the situation has worsened, and this challenge is even greater. We must summon our strength to confront and surmount this challenge.

We have highlighted several important dangers. In confronting them, we must rapidly and thoroughly develop our understanding, to be able to deal with them properly. Currently, with the earthquake’s impact on the popular masses, this won’t be easy, but we must strive to identify the best way to move forward. We need to combine our understanding of the situation with the need to confront it: we need to find the correct mix of agitation and information campaign. We must agitate, but in way enhance our camp’s understanding of the situation. This must be done in the best manner, so that the whole people’s camp understands this reality, takes on this understanding, and from this understanding, stemming from the interests of the popular masses, build its capacity to confront this reality.

We must use our militancy in the midst of the popular masses, the presence of laborers and workers who already have this consciousness, the presence of all real progressives, to advance in this direction. We must not have a wait and see attitude, or an attitude of helplessness that will prevent us from moving forward. Our enemy is counting on our discouragement, it is counting on us to wait and see, it is betting on our dependency towards them, a dependency that will only deepen if we allow this process to surge out of our control. We must live on, that is true, we must

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survive, but our life is always a struggle, and today ever more so. Our strategy at this time must give great importance to the struggle against the aforementioned dangers. We must use all the means at our disposal to further the understanding of what is really taking place, through our direct practice in the popular neighborhoods that are still standing, in the occupied public places, in the factories that have reopened, in the media, amongst our friends and families... everywhere, we must make people aware of and denounce this impending danger for all the popular masses in Haiti.

As mentioned before, a lot of negative things are being planned and are taking place. To confront them, we must start from the interests of the popular camp, base ourselves on the interests of workers, in a positive way. We must transform the negative into positive. To do this, once again we must put forth the interests of laborers and workers. This must start from an understanding of how this catastrophe is affecting their interests; this involves calculating the material, economic and political consequences of the earthquake. Rapidly, we must manifest our role in this matter at all levels, on the political scene.

We must build maximum solidarity within our camp, the people's camp. We are the ones who have been shouldering this entire country for all time, and we need to build and maximize solidarity amongst ourselves. This means that we must take initiatives in Haiti and abroad, starting from our working class interests. We must be able to receive the solidarity from all our comrades, our friends, and our allies. We must organize to do this. Once again, we must differentiate this solidarity from the "aid" they are dumping on us. Certainly, we are not dreaming, the solidarity cannot match the "aid", but it is fundamental. We must work for it in a spirit of struggle along with the task of building the popular camp. This popular camp is our only way out of this disaster and the ruin of this social formation. It is the only way for humanity to climb out of its hole.

Although we are well aware of the problems associated with the "aid", although we know all the deviations it can provoke, we must find away to make it worthwhile for us in the popular camp. There again, as always, we must work so that this leads to the building and development of autonomous popular mass organizations. For example, when they come to distribute "aid" in an area, we must build autonomous committees to receive this aid and distribute it in the most effective manner. We must struggle against all those who collaborate to steal or to channel the aid to their cliques and to make a racket out of the aid. Our committees must be honest, responsible, collective and transparent: that's the only way we will be able to surmount these difficulties. The committees should build coordination between themselves, in a dynamic manner, avoiding unprincipled collaboration and, struggling against the mendacity, opportunism, and corruption of committees tied to the government or those that have been set up by career opportunists to take advantage of this situation. Our committees must stand strong, be serious, honest, combative, and dynamic. They must be combative, not only because of everything we have previously mentioned, but also because we will have to confront some elements, sometimes organized, who are dominated by negative ideologies stemming from the dominant classes (gangs, thieves,

opportunists, etc...). Most of all, we will have to confront the offensive of the ruling classes and their project of misery-wage exploitation. Our aid reception committees must develop the ability to transform themselves into committees of struggle against this project, whether vigilance brigades (“Brigad Vijilans” that first sprung up in 1986 out of the popular resistance movement around the time of Duvalier’s ouster) against gangs, rapists and extortionists, or as we progress, resistance committees, organizing popular resistance against all the maneuvers of imperialism, the dominant classes and their reactionary state, like relocating us to far away “camps” for homeless (rumored to be as far as Croix-des-Bouquets!), without any adequate planning (even less, any planning that would correspond to our own interests), without any care for our needs and the problems of our lives..., without any consideration for where we work, without any schools, not to mention universities.

In the case of the areas that have been most devastated, particularly in Port-au-Prince, we must take note of all these dangers that we have already identified, reflect upon them in an organized manner, to define how to concretely deal with them within today’s struggles. In the context of the coordination efforts we are setting up, even if this is a coordination to “receive, organize and distribute” the aid, we must already centralize our reflections and the lessons we have learned, refine them at different levels and return them, in a more advanced form, in the midst of the struggle, to all the localities that initiated these reflections and throughout the popular camp in general. This way, our internal practice will be more dynamic so that as we gain in strength and combativeness, we will be able to build our structures to better deal with the enemy.

The ruling classes and their reactionary state are pushing the logic that since Port-au-Prince is destroyed, the whole country is destroyed. We must not be fooled by this line. This logic not only stems from the incapacity of an incompetent stunted state that is without any national vision, but it also reflects their desire to centralize everything around themselves. In reality, this incapacity is compounded by their need to keep themselves in power in the capital, using the tanks of the MINUSTAH, police repression, and now, using the US army and its aircraft carrier, loaded with planes ready to bomb us. We must not be taken in by this stunted and repressive conception. We must develop our struggles throughout the entire country. We take this struggle to other areas of Haiti. Our militants and class-conscious workers who migrate and return to their families in other areas must take this orientation of struggle and mobilization everywhere they go. On top of that, we must keep up our struggles throughout the Haitian social formation. And again, today, we must invade the political scene, take hold of it, take it over, transform it and make it ours.

Accordingly, all our demands must be brought, as much as possible must be brought once again to the forefront. We must demand a just agrarian reform! The reason we have had to leave our homes in the countryside and pile up in the slums is because big landowners have grabbed all the land. We have no way to survive since the earthquake. Land must be redistributed! All state employees must have job security! We must have adequate schools for our children! The universities must be restored to dispense “a free and quality education”, as they have done in the past. We must take

this struggle for a free and quality university education and transform this mobilization into a movement for a different kind of university that is directly tied to the needs of the popular masses and the needs of the country! A university that is different from the inept, dominated, and alienated university that is the product of its current directors. We must take advantage of the fact that the whole world is watching to denounce the repressive makout-like practices of these directors who allowed and encouraged the police and the MINUSTAH to illegally enter the university as they please to repress students who were engaged in protests!

Above all, everyone must be able to work! All those who need to work must be able to find work! Those who are preparing to work must have clear future! The question of work must be solved in a clear manner. Industrial and farm labor, both tied to the university, to schools, must be integrated in the general administration of what needs to be done as part of a comprehensive development plan, stemming from the interests of laborers and workers, under workers control.

We already know that this current state cannot and does not want to carry out such a program. It is not our state; it is not a worker's state. On the contrary, it is the state of the bourgeoisie, it is against working people, and it is against the popular masses! Everything we have already mentioned and that we all know makes this very clear. This state is not here to implement our interests, our objectives as working people and the interests of the popular masses as a whole. If we want to realize our own interests, we have no other choice, we need another state. We need our own state.

As we can clearly see, this involves struggle! This question of "reconstruction" they are talking about is part of a concrete national political context. The ruling classes and imperialism have their own agenda and are working to consolidate their own political plan. They have no interest in a real reconstruction that would be in our interest, in the interest of the popular masses. Their leadership, for over 200 years, has created this disaster. We must frame the reconstruction of the country in a different way, stemming from our interests, the interests of the popular masses, and the interests of working people. This has never been done! And today, this is the only solution.

We must have a strategic and tactical line to guide us to this goal. We must start from our current demands and strive for more long-term objectives, as part of a precise strategic and tactical line. For example, if we want to achieve workers control as mentioned previously, to start with, are we going to accept the miserly 125 gourdes (\$3) daily assembly sector wage, or the meager 200 gourdes (\$5) daily minimum wage for all other workers? No! We have to strengthen our resolve, organize, and struggle! So that we can see a way out of this calamity that the earthquake has wrought unto us! For those of us who have a job, our salary is a beginning, a first step to start climbing out this misery. Even we accept that they help us today after this infernal disaster, we don't need to always have to be in this position, never having a salary that allows us to survive, forcing us to beg and seek help all the time, at the mercy of the capitalists and their state. It's the same for all our other demands. We must rise up and demand that our rights be respected! By engaging in struggle, we will start to organize to move our struggles forward.

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Workers and laborers who have a clearer understanding of this, militants and progressives, we must all encourage the popular masses as a whole to take up these demands, to engage in struggle, to get out of the idea that “others will do for us” while we wait and see, we must break from resignation and the belief that only the imperialists, the bourgeois and their lackeys are capable, can lead and achieve!

To start understanding clearly, the popular masses must ask themselves: in whose interest is this reconstruction? Whose logic is behind these plans?

For us, a real construction needs to be framed as part of a comprehensive strategy. But we cannot be absent from these struggles today and let the imperialists have free rein, along with their lackeys, to implement their plans, as they want, on our backs.

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In order to realize any of this, we must fight. This means that we must work to reinforce the progressive camp both inside and abroad (in the belly of the beast). We must reinforce the people’s camp. We must work together to make this happen, and it can only happen through the leadership of working people. That is the orientation of our struggles in Batay Ouvriye. Our struggles confronting this catastrophe must build and engage the entire people’s camp in the political scene. Our struggles to deal with this disaster must be integrated in our practice to take over the political scene in an autonomous manner, based on the interests of working people, and put forth, based on our fundamental struggles, all our demands, including our fundamental struggle for a new society, based on the interests of workers.

The struggle on the international level is also important. We must build as much solidarity as we can. All the progressive organizations, all the popular organizations, all the organizations that want to be part of the popular camp, must seek out as much solidarity as they can so that we can deal with our immediate survival needs. But foremost, this must also help us develop and strengthen our ranks, our own organization, in Haiti and in the belly of the beast, in all the beasts. This is worldwide worker solidarity. It is the solidarity of our comrades. It must spread everywhere: throughout Latin America, in Europe, in Africa, everywhere... even in the US! This has already started in a meaningful and solid manner. Comrades, workers, throughout the world have reached out to us and are sending us their solidarity and support in a serious way, that is also part of a process of rapprochement. Together and in solidarity with all our comrades, we are moving forward with determination in our struggles.

On our side, the people’s camp in Haiti, workers, laborers, progressives, the popular masses as a whole, we must move forward together, in Port-au-Prince as well throughout the rest of the country, as we take into account our enemy’s actions. Its ability to apply pressure and exercise repression has increased a lot, bolstered by the military presence of the forces that have invaded Haiti under the pretext of “humanitarian aid”. We must move forward to stay politically alive.

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**With perseverance and strength, we must denounce everywhere all that we are opposed to.  
With perseverance and strength, we must put forth everything we are fighting for (both in the short-term and the long-term).**

**With perseverance and strength, we must move forward!**

**With perseverance and strength, we must explain to everyone in our what we doing concretely.**

**While we are working to reinforce it in a well organized and structured manner.**

**With perseverance and strength, we must work for VICTORY!**

*Port-au-Prince, February 7, 2010*

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