

# Haitians starved in name of democracy

by Carlos Wesley

A worldwide economic embargo led by the United States has been imposed against Haiti. The choke-hold is supposedly to force a return of democracy and the restoration of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, ousted as President by a military coup on Sept. 30. But, its immediate effect will be to starve to death an already starving population, and create the conditions for the Bush administration, working through yes-men such as Presidents Carlos Andrés Pérez of Venezuela and Carlos Menem of Argentina, to use the crisis to replace national sovereignty and national armies everywhere in the hemisphere with multinational "collective security" forces, nominally run by the Organization of American States (OAS), to collect debt on behalf of supranational bodies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

"Whatever you could say about Aristide's government," said an unnamed Haitian economist cited by UPI, "they undertook negotiations with the International Monetary Fund for the signing of a stand-by agreement for \$21 million, and loans from bilateral and multilateral partners were estimated at \$511 million for current fiscal year. Now all of this has vanished. That's why serious people have to demand the reinstatement of Aristide." According to UPI, the economist said that unless Aristide was restored to power to get the embargo lifted, Haiti would have no U.S. dollars to pay for its imports, "nor to pay interest on its foreign debt."

The IMF accord negotiated by Aristide would have finished off impoverished Haiti. Little of promised international aid ever reached Haiti—35-40% of it was to cover salaries and expenses for foreign bureaucrats administering the aid programs, experts say. And, despite all the pronouncements in support of democracy and of Aristide, the Bush administration and its allies did nothing to help shore up democracy before Aristide's ouster. As of the day of the coup, which coincided with the end of the U.S. 1991 fiscal year, the United States had not even bothered to give Aristide's government \$66 million due it—fully 77% of the U.S. aid earmarked for Haiti last year!

Most of Haiti's over 6 million people earn less than \$50 a year. More than 80% of the population is illiterate; 75% lives below the poverty level established by the World Bank, which is itself ridiculously low. Only one-third of the land is arable. The population is dependent on wood for almost all

its energy needs, which has led to the destruction of all forests in the country. Deforestation will now worsen since Venezuela, which supplies Haiti with most of its petroleum products, has stopped shipping oil as part of the embargo, as has Mexico, in a break with its "Estrada Doctrine" of recognizing only nations, not governments.

## A human rights government

To replace Aristide, Haiti's elected Congress named Supreme Court Justice Joseph Nerette as provisional President. On Oct. 11, Nerette named Haiti's best-known human rights activist, Jean-Jacques Honorat, as prime minister. Honorat has sterling credentials in the struggle for human rights. He fought against the brutal Duvalier dictatorship that ruled Haiti for almost 30 years. In 1980, he was forced into exile by the Duvalier regime. This year, Honorat was named as a recipient of the first International Human Rights Award of the American Bar Association.

After Aristide assumed office in February, Honorat accused him of being undemocratic and "more brutal than the Duvaliers." Aristide advocates "necklacing," the practice of burning alive political opponents by putting a burning tire filled with gasoline around their necks.

To prevent an invasion and to get the embargo lifted, Honorat said he would be willing to engage in negotiations with the OAS for Aristide's return to power, "under specific conditions."

But U.S. Ambassador Alvin Adams denounced the new government as a "travesty" and said that the United States will seize the assets of anyone helping Haiti to evade the economic embargo or providing financial assistance to the new government. Adams said that the "United States intends to copy its 1989 embargo against Panama, during which it blocked the accounts of individuals who backed Gen. Manuel Noriega," according to the Oct. 12 *Boston Globe*. "Certain people need to get this message," Adams said. The U.S., of course, followed up its blockade of Panama with an invasion.

As was the case with rich Panamanians during the 1989 embargo, most rich Haitians are expected to wait out the storm in Miami, while the poor majority starves to death back home. Adams's threat is seen as primarily aimed against the Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, and whose government Aristide has been attacking since he took office.

Armando Duran, the foreign minister of Venezuela, where Aristide went to live following his overthrow, met on Oct. 15 with Dominican President Joaquin Balaguer, the only Ibero-American head of state to publicly oppose the military intervention into Haiti advocated by Bush's allies, Venezuela's Pérez and Argentina's Menem. According to sources, the meeting was to warn Balaguer that no one can go against the new world order. If his country breaks the blockade against Haiti, Balaguer was told, it, too, will have its oil cut off.