

Haiti hangs tough in face of U.S. threats

by Carlos Wesley

Despite a crippling economic embargo and the threat of an invasion, the tiny black nation of Haiti has for almost four months refused to accept the return to power of its former dictator, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, or to appoint communist René Théodore as prime minister. Both have been demanded by the Bush administration, by the Organization of American States (OAS), which some describe as the "U.S. Colonial Office," and by France, from which Haiti won its freedom in the late 18th century to become the first independent republic in the western hemisphere, after the United States.

The Haitian Senate is expected to vote soon to abstain from any further negotiations with the OAS regarding the restoration of Aristide to the presidency, from which he was ousted in a military coup last Sept. 30. Diplomatic negotiations are the sole purview of the Executive branch, according to the Senate. The resolution means that the OAS will be forced to extend *de facto* recognition to the government of Provisional President Joseph Nerette and incumbent Prime Minister Jean-Jacques Honorat, Haiti's best-known human rights activist.

The OAS has refused to recognize Nerette and Honorat, who were elected by the Haitian Parliament to replace the Aristide regime, claiming that they were "puppets of the military." But, "unless all parties involved are allowed to sit down at the negotiating table, there can be no negotiated solution," said a diplomat in Port-au-Prince, in an implicit criticism of the OAS stance. "That means Aristide, the current government, Parliament, the political parties, and the Army." Aristide's refusal to deal with Gen. Raoul Cedras, the commander of the Armed Forces, "is crazy," said the source.

An OAS-sponsored negotiating session in Washington between Aristide and Haitian political leaders failed to come off as scheduled on Jan. 18, when Aristide insisted that the Haitian military be completely dismantled and its leaders exiled or imprisoned, as a precondition for the appointment of Communist Party boss Théodore, handpicked as compromise prime minister by the Bush administration to pave the way for Aristide's restoration. "Not even if God the Father were prime minister, could democracy return to Haiti," said Aristide, a suspended priest of the Marxist Theology of Liberation current in the Catholic Church. "Neither history nor the OAS, myself, 95% of the Haitian population, or the international community can afford to become accomplices

of a criminal," said Aristide in Washington, referring to General Cedras.

Aristide's intransigence makes it virtually impossible that a compromise allowing him to return can be reached. Théodore, a Moscow-educated mathematics teacher, pulled out of the negotiations. General Cedras is serving a three year stint by a constitutional act of Parliament, said Théodore, "and neither the President nor the prime minister can annul an act of Parliament which is recognized by the international community."

Théodore, who was tapped earlier for the prime ministership in talks presided over by the U.S. envoy to the OAS, Luigi Einaudi, also insisted that he would not participate in Washington-sponsored negotiations until the embargo was lifted. President Nerette and Prime Minister Honorat have both told *EIR* that the embargo constitutes genocide against Haiti, one of the world's poorest nations. Most Haitians are forced to live on an income equivalent to about \$35 *per year*.

In a report to the OAS Permanent Council, OAS Secretary General João Baena Soares claimed that the embargo has failed to starve Haiti into submission. "We must come to the conclusion," said Soares, that "it is not possible to implement the embargo."

Breaking the consensus

There are some cracks developing in the consensus against Haiti. Some Caribbean nations are asking that the embargo be lifted. The Vatican implicitly recognized Haiti's post-Aristide government by appointing a new papal nuncio. The last time Haiti had a papal nuncio there was in January 1991, just before a pro-Aristide mob burned-down Port-au-Prince's old cathedral, lynched scores of people, ransacked the Vatican mission, beat the nuncio's secretary nearly to death, and made the nuncio himself run naked through the streets. Suriname has also implicitly recognized the Nerette government and, surprisingly, so has the United Arab Emirates.

Haiti's refusal to buckle, has renewed calls for a U.S.-backed invasion. U.S. Rep. Robert Torricelli (D-N.J.), who has been demanding military action against Haiti while favoring kid-gloves treatment for Cuba's Fidel Castro, traveled in mid-January to the Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti. Also in the delegation was Rep. Charles Rangel, the Harlem Democrat, who, along with Jesse Jackson, former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark, and the U.S.-installed President of Panama, Guillermo "Porky" Endara, are calling for using foreign military forces to put "Papa" Aristide back in power.

Democratic senator and presidential contender Bob Kerrey has denounced supposed Bush administration "silence" and urged U.S. action. This election year has made Bush cautious, since an invasion of Haiti could bring a flood of refugees to Florida, which holds its presidential primary in March.