



What is happening in Haiti?

- Haiti, with almost 11 million residents, is the most populous nation in the Antilles. It occupies the western third of the island called *Hispaniola*, the rest being the Dominican Republic. This island is the second largest in the Caribbean (the largest being Cuba).
- Since mid-September, an intense wave of protests has cascaded across Haiti. Roughly five million people – half of Haiti's population – have participated in road blockades and marches. They demand the resignation of President Jovenel Moïse, reject any foreign intervention, and call for a resolution of the energy and economic crisis. Lack of fuel on the island is the spur. The protests have paralysed Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital, and other cities and towns. Government and commercial activity have ceased. Water and food cannot be easily distributed, which threatens to plunge the country into a grave humanitarian crisis.
- The government's response has been to send in the police. More than twenty people have been killed and hundreds of people have been injured over the past weeks. Paramilitary groups – organised criminal groups that are often linked to politicians – have taken hold of everyday life. Where the people have been active against the government, these groups have been instrumental in

intimidating and massacring them. Their mission is to shatter the popular confidence that has led to the protests.

- The 'international community' – namely the United States, France, Canada, the Organisation of American States, and the United Nations – has either called for more foreign intervention or has pretended that nothing is happening in Haiti. These countries – the so-called Core Group – want Moïse's government to remain in power, while simultaneously holding conversations with conservative and 'centrist' sections of the opposition.
- Social movements, leftist parties, and other progressive sections have formed a platform called the Patriotic Front. This Front calls for the resignation of the president, the prosecution of all those involved in the embezzlement of public funds and for the massacres, the creation of a three-year transition government, the creation of an emergency agenda that addresses the immediate needs of the people, fundamental reforms that revitalise the legitimacy of the electoral and political system that would lead to new elections, and the election of a constituent assembly to rebuild the nation.
- This current cycle of protests builds upon the general *strike* in July 2018, when 1.5 million Haitians took to the streets. They protested the government's attempt to increase the price of fuel – as dictated by the International Monetary Fund. Those protests resulted in the withdrawal by the government of several unpopular measures and the resignation of Prime Minister Jack Guy Lafontant.

Why are Haiti and the Caribbean so important?

- In 1804, Haiti's people threw off the imperialist slave owners and created the world's first black republic. The imperialist powers would not allow this social revolution to succeed. From the first years, they set out to annihilate it and to prevent its example

from spreading to other slavery states. Imposition of toxic debt by France (1825), an invasion by the United States (1915-1934), the establishment of the imperialist-backed Duvalier family dictatorship (1957-1986), and an international occupation by the United Nations (from 2004 to the present) has disrupted the ability of Haiti to drive its own historical agenda.

- The Caribbean is amongst the most important geopolitical areas on the planet. Currently, it is home to two radical political processes – the Cuban Revolution and the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela. The *attack* on Petrocaribe, one of the spurs of the Haitian crisis, is a result of the imperialist attack on both Venezuela and Cuba.
- Haiti is an island of great wealth with abundant resources of gold, copper, and bauxite (all estimated to value \$20 billion); it also has a labour force that has been routinely exploited through free trade zones by international firms that contract small-scale Haitian firms to manufacture textiles and assemble electronic goods for the North American market. Haiti has emerged as one of the key strategic points for the transfer of profits from drug trafficking.

What is the cause of the Haitian crisis?

- The key issue is fuel. The US sanctions against Venezuela wrecked Petrocaribe, the Venezuelan-Caribbean agreement from 2005 that brings cheap fuel into countries such as Haiti. The blockade of the Petrocaribe initiative and the IMF insistence that fuel subsidies be cut created six weeks of fuel shortages, a rise in fuel prices, an expansion of contraband fuel, and a paralysis in the transportation sector.
- Haiti has long struggled with poverty, inequality, unemployment, and food insecurity. This fuel crisis has now resulted in the devaluation of the currency (*gourde*), 18% inflation, and the freezing of public sector salaries.

- Haiti's economy was emptied out by the neoliberal policies put in place from the early 1980s. Agricultural production has been destroyed and small-scale manufacturing has wilted on the global commodity chain as industrial activity goes from one low wage area to another. Haiti does not have a national bourgeoisie: its bourgeoisie has been fully corrupted and marginalised by the interference of the 'international community'. Corruption has reached gargantuan heights: the Haitian bourgeoisie, state officials, and even the president are said to have participated in the embezzlement of \$2 billion from the public treasury - the equivalent of a quarter of the country's GDP.
- Haiti's political class has been completely discredited. Electoral fraud in 2010 brought the ultra-neoliberal Haitian Tèt Kale Party (PHTK) to power; Moïse's presidency has no credibility amongst most of the population.
- For over a century, Haiti's sovereignty has been obstructed. US occupation, military dictatorship backed by external actors, coup d'états, the international guardianship of the UN- all of this imposes a political and economic direction that is fundamentally against the interests of the Haitian people and favours external interests over national sovereignty. Reconstitution of Haiti's sovereignty is paramount.

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