



# BATAY OUVRIYE

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## ON THE ORDEALS HAITIAN WORKERS' ARE BEING SUBJECTED TO IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

*"If Dessalines were here, Fernandez would not be here!"*

*"If Dessalines were here, MINUSTAH would not be here!"*

Demonstrators' chant in front of the National Palace during the Dominican Head of State's visit, 12/12/2005

Throughout 2005, Haitian workers and small merchants in the Dominican Republic were subjected to the worst horrors. Thousands and thousands of deportees, under completely illegal and inhuman conditions in which the putrid smell of racism invariably leaked, black-skinned Dominicans sometimes rounded up as part of the same group! Hundreds and hundreds assassinated, burnt alive, pursued and summarily expelled, in Santo Domingo, Santiago, Mao, Barahona, Higuey... Their houses set on fire, their personal belongings stolen... even Haitian students in this neighbor country were ill-treated. All this under the eyes of the police and the local authorities, as well as those of the central authorities who were totally aware of these crimes but chose to deny the facts calling them, at best, "isolated incidents". The level of the conflict heightened one notch when the Dominican president himself complicated the situation by blurting out, referring to the Haitian immigrant workers, that "è pa fuera que van! ('Haitians: Out!')". The high clergy of the Catholic Church also played its partition, endorsing the criminal acts, and even proceeded to organize the expulsion of a priest loyal to the Haitian cause, Father Ruquoy.

Topping it all, the dominant media dedicated themselves to systematic ideological offensives orchestrated by the extreme right. On the airwaves of various radio stations, songs reminiscent of the 1937 massacres were retransmitted in cycles. And the most renowned newspapers (El Nacional, Listin Diario, Hoy, Caribe...) flaunted articles and editorials (!) in which chauvinism, blatant racism and the most flagrant archaism competed only with the absolute stupidity of their arguments.

**The Dominican ruling classes are in disarray.** They're demanding laws to regulate emigration. They're pondering the "enormous problem" of the Haitian presence. They wish to amend their Constitution so it can address the question of jus soli, going so far as to refer to a "human conglomerate" – a euphemism for the Republic of Haiti. They're even quoting 'polls' revealing the so-called "Dominican worry", that "foreign policy should be more radical" faced with what they're – now – calling an "invasion"... The idea behind all of this, of course, is to create a cover-up shielding them from human rights organizations' condemnations, as well as those of similar high-level international institutions, or from articles in the American media simply describing the graphic reality going on, in order to "protect their tourist image"... There we are! The actual crimes leave them perfectly indifferent - their "image" is their unique concrete worry<sup>ii</sup>.

The Dominican dominant classes are entangled, too, because Haitian labor, despite all, remains important, necessary, and essential for their economy. Haitian labor is needed for the sugar cane harvest and the production of agricultural staples such as tobacco and rice. It's also largely employed in the construction industry and often engages in small trade such as that of second-hand clothing. All these activities are based on the cheap labor of the so-called "illegal" Haitian immigrant workers, but also affect the "race to the bottom" wages of the Dominican working class, crucial for the Dominican ruling classes' historic accumulation of wealth at the very least cost. And, in fact, it is this very contradiction which is eating at them.

Very few alternate stands were taken. However, those formulated supported and thanked Father Ruquoy for his commitment and, in a lucid, straightforward way, openly replaced the question in a social context, criticizing the Dominican government's overall policy towards workers (Haitian as well as Dominican), pointing out that the Dominican workers should very much question why they, neither, have never obtained adequate services from these authorities, instead of protesting the fact that a few Haitians had in some circumstances benefited of minimum healthcare or housing by luck. These progressive stands also denounced the fact that the Dominican left has maintained, at the very least, a perturbing silence on the subject<sup>iii</sup>. Dominican immigrants in New York, however, mobilized to vigorously protest in front of their consulate in the United States, fully aware of immigrant workers' plights. They were immediately supported by Haitian progressive groups, as immigrants also. News and denunciations of the killings were spread nationally and internationally thanks to the protests of support and solidarity groups such as the Haitian GARR, PAPDA, ICKL and Batay Ouvriye... -; the Dominican Jesuit Service for Refugees and Migrants, Movimiento de las Mujeres Dominicano Haitianas and Foro por la Preservación de la Paz y la Amistad Dominico Haitianas... -; and, of bi-national coordination – the "Pon" (Bridge) Center.

Hugo Chavez, the Venezuelan President, in charge of his country's oil and much coveted preferential prices, in a recent visit to the Dominican Republic, openly took up the cause of the Haitian immigrant workers<sup>iv</sup>. Leonel Fernandez, the Dominican President, strongly pressured by the concerns of the extreme-right electorate supporting his rule<sup>v</sup>, then accepted an invitation to Haiti for a display of a gentleman reconciliation, seeking thus to quiet the international opinion, in particular those of the Western tourists on the one hand, and those of the Venezuelan leaders on the other hand, in the interest of the Dominican dominant classes. Fernandez' demagogic speech was met with a demonstration which precipitated his hurried departure. This demonstration was nonetheless marked with great confusion, linking the causes of the recent killings to the present lack of a "Haitian army" or merely to a supposed "xenophobia" of the "Dominican people". Some demonstrators went so far as to promote a spirit of revenge against Dominican workers in Haiti.

So, we need to understand more clearly. Above all, better know to better understand. Further: with a view toward the construction of a serious, profound, adequate, and definite response of the peoples and real progressives of both countries, which should serve as a precedent for further actions, so as to resolve.

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The main element we need to focus on (which is quite manifest, although obscured by the ideological muck of these hawkish times), once revealed, renders the entire structure obvious: this first capital point it is that, amidst these infernal horrors, **only the people, the toiling masses** have been plagued: cane-cutters, poor merchants, small farmers, craftsmen, unemployed, homeless, workers...! And if some students happened to be harassed, we should

clearly perceive that they weren't submitted to the horrors inflicted upon the workers. Further: no Haitian capitalist investing or vacationing on the neighboring land, no macoute having taken asylum there with his Dominican counterparts, no middle-class technocrat... is worried in the Dominican Republic; for them to be ill-treated is definitely out of the question. Therefore, the whole thing boils down, above all, to an economic basis, a class basis.

It is common knowledge that Haitian emigration dates back to the late XIXth - early XXth century sugar-cane workers' wave towards Cuba and the Dominican Republic... The horrors of the "bateys" are widely known, in which the "Ingenios azucareros" owners' barbaric practices hardly surpassed the direct slavery of previous centuries! Who has forgotten the 1937 Massacre in which between 10,000 to 30,000 thousand (according to the sources) poor immigrant workers were humiliated, tracked and assassinated with bayonets by the Dominican army and a militia set up for this purpose, following the orders of their central command? All, however, don't realize that the Dominican army in 1962, then under President Balaguer's orders, set fire with napalm (!!) on a whole community of Haitian and Dominican nationals who were demanding the land for those who worked it. **Napalm!** Aided by the American army, the Dominican forces sought to exterminate this "workers' movement" marked by a syncretic culture, 'Liborismo'. This occurred at Palma Sola<sup>vi</sup>, in the province of San Juan de la Maguana, just beyond the Central Plateau. Thousands of rebels, Haitian and Dominican workers, were burnt alive, from the airbase.

Racism within the Dominican people finally has come to exist. For some, it's the fruit of a long, deep propaganda orchestrated by the dominant classes for whom their national heroes should throne in the center of the Independence Plaza in immaculate white! Fruit of a tumultuous and pathetic schizophrenia, in which the refusal to see one's real self is only heightened, ad infinitum, by the black-skinned presence of the Haitian workers. This racism / anti-Haitianism mirror, organized and propelled by these same dominant classes has finally bore fruit. But only momentarily. Is it not this sibling people that massively voted **Peña Gomez**? And were it not for Balaguer's maneuvers (acknowledged, because why, otherwise, would he have agreed to resign two years before his term?) this Black, of Haitian descent and **known as such**, would have been carried to the Supreme State Power **by the Dominican people itself!**

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So we need to seek the explanation elsewhere. For one should recall – or know - that in the specific case of the Dominican Republic, the traffic of Haitian workers was finally regulated **through government contracts!** Indeed, already under the Estimé administration, the outlines of this contract were drafted, though it is actually under President Magloire that this process was definitely established. It would later be systematically applied by the Duvaliers, father and son. **So it is a well established traffic!** Today, such contracts are no longer in force, but the networks continue to exist. Proof: recent deportees to Ouanaminthe were immediately re-channeled across the border by certain leading citizens of this town, through their notorious links with the borderline control, particularly the Dominican army itself, which pockets exorbitant fees.

This trade (we should almost say ` **slave trade** ', for all those knowing the living conditions in the bateys), involving Haitian governmental institutions and extending all the way to the Dominican sugar-cane capitalists, is rooted in the Haitian social formation's decay in the rural world. Robbed, tracked and dispossessed of their means of production, land in particular, in thousands of ways, Haitian small farmers have no alternative but to sell their labor. And when they are not being employed as farm laborers, they naturally gather towards more developed centers of capitalist production where they can obtain wages. Considering the Haitian local bourgeoisie's chronic weakness, our towns don't offer adequate structures. So, these proletarians travel abroad: to Cuba, initially, to the Dominican Republic, later; presently, towards the Bahamas, Guyana, Miami...

Thus expelled from their places of origin by current ruling policies, ill-received or not at all welcomed in these towns, they become commodities in the bourgeois society's project, hardly even 'free' since they've been negotiated by the State. Only thus can one understand why, despite the bateys' inhuman conditions, constant massacres and torments, as well as individual horrors, **never have the various Haitian governments ever really protested**, and even less mobilized to demand anything.

Once in these centers of exploitation, the workers, not only need to yield maximum efficiency (which basically means almost total physical elimination) but must also obey another implacable logic: they have to become illegal as soon as possible (if they weren't already). Various mechanisms get to work towards this end, requiring workers to remain longer than the term of the contract (debts contracted, lacking administrative papers...). Thus rendered illegal, this labor then becomes cheaper yet. Illegal, and condemned to remain so. The impediments facing those who already meet the legal requisites and wish to formalize their status are simply impossible to overcome. Even babies born in the Dominican Republic and who, according to the Constitution itself, are entitled to citizenship rights, are kept from obtaining them. **This is because illegal status is by far the capitalists' most profitable way of keeping wages low and labor cheap! This has been the main logic behind the Dominican Republic's treatment of Haitian workers. It is this logic that has allowed the Dominican ruling classes' massive accumulation of capital during the second half of the twentieth century.**

This "treatment" goes from **massacres** to contained acts of repression, and from the latter, multiplied ad infinitum, to **permanent repression** (with whole hosts of armed guards with rifles carrying out the bateys 'surveillance' and the construction companies owners themselves calling immigration when they refuse to pay the workers). Added to this are cultural stereotypes whereby even the poorest Dominicans mock Haitian behavior, making fun of their clothes, color and even odor... constantly.

However, these continually reduced wages also affect the Dominican workers, dragging to the bottom all relations with the employers and thus preventing workers from demanding better wages. This **compressive logic** manages to limit, to some extent, even the impoverished middle classes and certain better-off categories of technicians. **It is the whole ruling Dominican economic structure that rests on this first relation with the "illegal-barbarians", and which, from this point on, extends towards all the dominated classes.** The Dominican worker in general hasn't yet realized this.

But there's more. The average wages of the Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic can't vary much either since their slightest increase would also affect those in vigor in Haiti. Were the Haitian workers able to be effortlessly legalized and obtain better wages (thus leveling with and later, naturally joining with the Dominican workers so as to, conjointly, begin conferring greater value to their labor...), this would constitute an example of a much too easy success that would unreservedly seduce Haiti's labor force towards these lands. And also begin demanding higher wages there too. A whole new cycle from which both bourgeoisies would suffer!

Much better for them, then, on the contrary, is to comfort one another and resolutely mobilize to defend their partner in distress, as was the case at the Free Trade Zone in Ouanaminthe when the Haitian bourgeoisie unreservedly supported their associates, **their class...** despite the Dominican investors' obvious abuses, calling their army onto Haitian soil to abuse the workers who were merely defending their legal rights, and even going so far as to drag an eight-month pregnant woman in the mud...! At hand, then, is not a question of "country": capitalist globalization has made this backward nation into a post-modern one!

Later, when a court in Fort-Liberté, faced with overly evident proof, ruled in favor of the workers who had brought forward formal complaints, the Boniface-Latortue central government itself

intervened, shamelessly asserting that this verdict should be blocked because it could "shy away investors" (that is, "international" and, more specifically, "foreign" investors)!

*"If Dessalines were here... Latortue wouldn't!"* – should have been added to the Monday December 12<sup>th</sup> demonstration. As well as words of clarification in direction of the confused protesters: that indeed the "Haitian army" was 'there' throughout the previous years, but always in the role - its role - of guardians of the ruling order, that is to repress the workers exploited by the ruling classes. It was precisely members of this army, in fact, that carried out the very first repression against the Ouanaminthe mobilized workers, through a detachment of their so-called 'rebels' quartered in the town at the time.

The logic is thus laid out and the plot exposed: **what we are witnessing is a basic scheme of exploitation greatly benefiting the ruling classes of these two countries, their bourgeoisies in particular, and in which the two States play, together and in a coordinated way, a role of shameless ferocious repression and complicity, that have become common knowledge.**

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But: why now? Why now are all these deportations and horrible abuses against the Haitian workers happening again?

Formerly, the first destination of the Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic was the sugarcane fields, the bateys. There followed a period in which these same workers were also directed towards the tobacco fields, and later, those of rice, tomatos, beans... so, always in agriculture. There, they found a local peasantry in proletarianization and in transit towards the cities. So "space" existed, so to speak, and the contradictions between workers were not really acute, even if they did exist to a certain extent. Repression against "illegal Haitians" was then almost exclusively carried out directly by dominant structures (armed forces, militia).

Beginning in the 1960's with the Balaguer administration's projects of infrastructure and urbanization in the big cities, however, the "illegal" workers and their cheap labor quickly grew to become a godsend for this capitalist sector also. Gradually, Haitian migration came to occupy these jobs and in the 80's and 90's, according to the most conservative figures, Haitian labor accounted for 80% of the workforce on all construction sites! This migration naturally included the small trades of all kinds and so the so-called "informal" economy developed tremendously. Small-scale sidewalk merchants followed, now on every street corner in Santiago, Santo Domingo and most major cities... At the same time, with the Haitian social formation's decay becoming worse and worse, a real flow of Haitian immigrants gushed in, whose numbers and functions (as we said) have radically changed today. This decay also affecting various strata of the Haitian middle classes, and with the educational services also dying out, the universities, craft industry centers and small marketplaces (especially, of second-hand clothing) also followed suit towards the neighboring land. All these activities are urban. **The Haitian migration thus suddenly found itself in direct contradiction with the Dominican workers who then became increasingly hostile<sup>vii</sup>.** Furthermore, these more recent immigrants also required health services, housing and basic education, provided by the city... thus adding to the dominant governments' increasingly chronic deficiencies towards their "own population". Lastly, parallel effects such as mendicancy and illnesses managed to smear the Dominican dominant classes' "tourist image". All over, the contradiction had become antagonistic!

In the context of the imperialist offensive and its promoted unbounded project of exploitation and neo-liberal domination, contradictions within the Dominican social formation have recently greatly sharpened. Contrary to the rightist propaganda which would have us believe the Dominican Republic has seen a period of accelerated growth, it is actually the capitalists and

basically the ruling classes only who have accumulated in such a shameless way, naturally at the expense of the workers and the population (the people), in general. The proof is the last strikes held at the end of President Mejía's mandate, which were actively supported by nearly 100 % of the people of the entire country! This reflects the fact that the ditch widens. For, indeed, with the Dominican government's incapacity to establish the slightest balance, the workers are increasingly impoverished and the population ever more lacks services. In fact: the Dominican Republic is in crisis! And this is precisely what the most recent attacks against the Haitian workers also seek to hide. Scapegoats, then, they are blamed for all evils.

This method - always employed whenever this neighboring country's dominant classes need to gather around a specific political party for elections, or to mark a real offensive for the exploitation of workers or for the dispossession of peasants in view of a specific project - thus becomes **vital** today, considering the depths of this social formation's crisis, and which is heightened even more by the fortune-holders' lavish enrichment. The Baninter bank scandal<sup>viii</sup> which completely revealed the ins and outs of this advancing gigantic fraud, shows this very clearly, just as it also reveals the very high level alliances, the most daring and vile maneuvers: the Dominican dominant classes' rotting.

So, it is in the context and due to this country's ruling classes' bankruptcy that the most recent and fatal attacks against the Haitian workers are once again occurring today. But this process also occurs, and just as much, because of the total failure in Haiti as well. "*If Dessalines were here...*" is a chant that says it all. And it is one which any patriot should hold on to, if only for one moment. "*If Dessalines were here...*" means precisely... that he is no longer is no longer here!

When one hears the trash coming from the Haitian government people, when one reflects upon the useless excuses of all the Haitians who, in one way or another, are ready to collaborate or endorse this "extroverted" project reaching its greatest heights, one realizes the extent of the problem, its extreme seriousness. Another way to understand the situation involves, naturally, dealing with the Haitian leaders' enormous disaster. One of the Dominican officials' main arguments is their address to their Haitian counterparts (and at the same time to the Haitian ruling classes in general) that, with respect to the organization of labor exploitation and the repression against it, in sum, the situation of domination's control, **they aren't doing enough!** The Haitian crisis and the popular component that accompanies it worry the neighbor. For sure! But what preoccupies it even more is this country's rulers' and dominant classes demonstrated inability to resolve this situation. This explains their repeated appeals to maintain the occupation and transform it towards direct tutelage

According to their plans, **the moment requires it.** The various reasons analyzed above cause the migration of Haitian workers to presently represent a formidable contradiction for the Dominican Republic. However, this country still needs this "illegal" and cheap labor force. On the other hand, its "commodity" price remains, in Haiti, so minuscule that logic dictates... to exploit it on the very Haitian territory. This project, which was developing for a long time, was recently put in execution by capitalist logic itself, which gradually introduced Dominican capital in Haiti (the Interamericana factories in Port-with-Prince, 'Crystal' water in Cap-Haitian...) but, especially Lavalas' ability (or, rather, cynicism) to scheme projects in the dark which render the Haitian social formation even more vulnerable: the free trade zones. The first of those planned on the border is already operational in Ouanaminthe. The imperialist "Interim Cooperation Framework" (CCI, in French) definitively places this orientation at the top of its commitments, while a whole political, economic and ideological "Haitian" armada accompanies it, even clearly expressing that "Haiti's development necessarily passes through Dominican capital". The various treaties presently being adopted by the United States and certain countries of Central America and the Caribbean, including the Dominican Republic (TLC, CAFTA-DR...) anticipate that, for the latter, Dominican capitalist production carried out in Haiti could also be included. So, Dominican

capitalist projections for the Haitian Northeast (with the consent, naturally, of the Haitian bourgeoisie, on the point of monopolizing political power at all levels) are large-scale!

Under such conditions, the Haitian labor supply is not only unwelcome in our neighboring land but, rather, available **right at home**, "offered" by the local bourgeoisie up to its most "scientific" ideological trenches (certainly including the most mystifying lies: 'creating jobs!', 'development', and even 'sacrificing oneself for the people'...) especially **under the control of international armed forces**. The moment for the most horrible exactions is thus ripe. This is what we are now witnessing.

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What government will be able to untangle this mess? What State will be able to become **independent** enough, so as to stand in defense of the people, of the workers?

The latter, fully comprehending this callous logic leading them **all** towards the abyss, should rather unite to **fight back!**

The SOCOWA comrades at the Ouanaminthe free trade zone and those of SITRAFMIN, in Santiago, understood this well: they met, set up a coordination of struggles and carried out joint mobilizations against the abuses of their common employer, Grupo M. Thus, they succeeded in gaining significant victories each, although too incomplete and perhaps also too temporary.

The Dominican and Haitian immigrants in New York have engaged in the same path. The most recent Dominican coordination's communiqués related to this situation demonstrate their perspicacity, as well as their courage and permanent vigilance.

Instead of tearing each other apart or thinking of acts of revenge, the popular sectors of both countries should resolutely begin to do as much. At the soonest.

Batay Ouvriye (Workers' Struggle), December 16, 2005

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<sup>i</sup> Tele Ginen Interview of two students forced to leave the Dominican Republic by Konpè Filo, December 2005.

<sup>ii</sup> Various views collected by the CEEH in a number of Dominican newspapers.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Konpè Filo Tele Ginen Interview, op.cit.

<sup>v</sup> Radio Melodie FM editorial, Wednesday Dec. 14<sup>th</sup>, 2005

<sup>vi</sup> See: Luis Francisco Lizardo Lasocé, *Palma Sola, La tragedia de un pueblo*, Ed. Manati, Sto Domingo, 2003.

<sup>vii</sup> This situation resembles that of the Bahamas in the early 80's, when Bahamian workers organized in gangs to nightly attack Haitian workers; the latter, in turn, also organized to counter-attack; but the relation of forces being different from that of the Dominican Republic, the confrontations subsided.

<sup>viii</sup> Narciso Isa Condé et Fernando Peña, *Las Entrañas de un poder gansterizado*, Ed. Tropical, Sto Domingo, 2003