Trade Union World Briefing

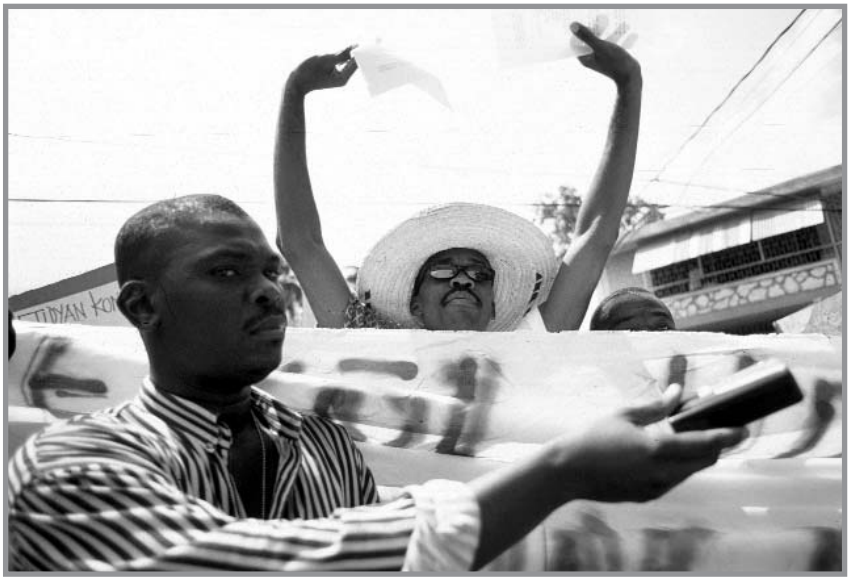
INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS | **ICFTU** | MAY 2003 | Nº3

Haiti: spiralling out of control

Some 16 years after the fall of the dictatorship, the authoritarian excesses of the Lavalas party's regime continue to jeopardise the development of the poorest country in the Americas. Socio-economic indicators in the red, political crisis, a massive increase in the number of people working in the informal economy, repression of human and union rights, child labour and a freeze on international aid are just some of the problems facing the country. Haiti remains marginalised while the rest of the world seems largely indifferent to its plight.
A prime example of a country that has been on the losing end of economic globalisation, Haiti is also one of the worst spots on the world map of union rights' violations.
Personal accounts and report.

A typical day in the trade union battle in Port-au-Prince

Thursday, 20 March 2003. It's action stations at the social sciences faculty. A demonstration is due to start at 9 a.m. but the organisers, the education' unions and the students' organisations are putting the finishing touches to their banners – and there is certainly plenty to demonstrate about: a medical student killed some weeks earlier, a teacher trade union member in prison for several months with two others forced into exile and, more generally, an education system with no resources, students who know they have no future in Haiti, teachers calling for better working conditions, a party in power viewed as corrupt, anti-democratic and violent, and a president called every name under the sun.



Demonstration in Port-au-Prince on 20 March organised by students and teachers.

9.30 a.m.: The march starts. Around 2,000 demonstrators are present. A good number according to the organisers, because students, trade unionists, human rights' activists and everyday citizens have been taking to the streets and striking in droves since the start of the year. There have been protests at the high cost of living (the cost of fuel doubled in a matter of weeks, which led to an increase in the price of essential products and services), the lack of security at the university hospital, and at the government in general, as well as for a new social contract. And almost every time clashes break out. This very day, we will learn that members of the Peasant Movement of Papaye (MPP), meeting in Hinche in the Central Plateau, were attacked by government supporters while police at the scene did nothing to intervene. Four days earlier

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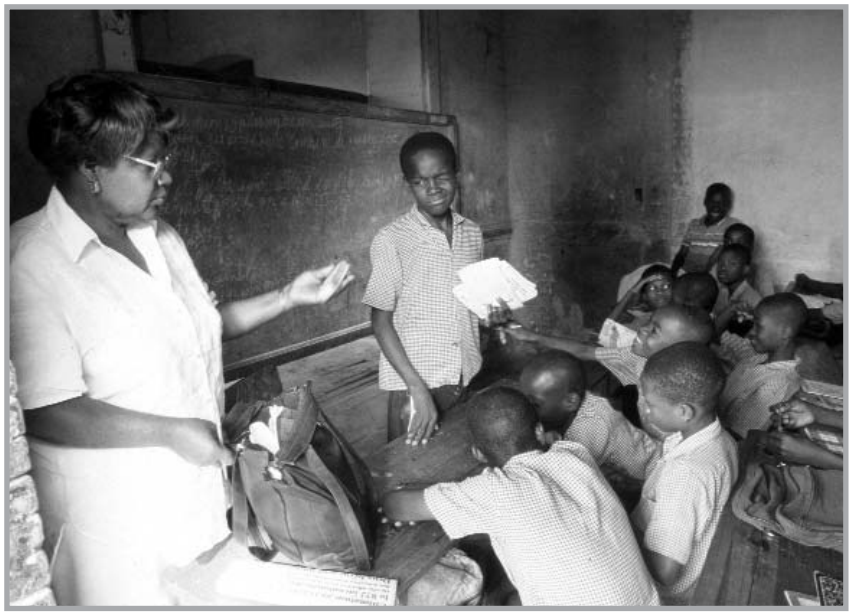
it was the "Caravan of Hope" that was the target of stones thrown by *chimeres* (1). Set up by a coalition of 184 organisations from civil society, including a significant number of trade unions, the Caravan had previously visited two towns under proper police guard in order to present to the people the Social Contract, a "reflection paper designed to meet the challenge of the historic obstacles which have prevented national unity and blocked the country's development". However, on the third outing to Cayes, a town in the south, participants were threatened and attacked by government supporters.

Several members of the family of Eric Pierre, a student killed on 7 January in circumstances that have yet to be clarified, are participating in the demonstration. One of his brothers, a student leader, has been in hiding since the murder and no longer attends university classes. "It was me who should have died," he explained. "There was a mistake, the *chimeres* were targeting me, not my brother. The day of the funeral, shots were fired in the direction of our house. They are trying to intimidate us. Everything is upside down in this country. We demand justice and it's us who are threatened."

As José Mérilien, coordinator of the National Union of Student Teachers (UNNOH) said, "assassins are walking the streets in broad daylight". Small in stature but a great orator, José attracts the microphones of the reporters covering the demonstration. In 2002, his open criticism of the authorities got him into a great deal of trouble. "The government has no money to change the education system," he shouts. "They have money to attack us, to burn rubber (ed. reference to lynchings using burning tyres for which the chimeres were held responsible)."



Class in an old family home in Port-au-Prince housing two different schools, each using the double vacation system with lessons held in the morning or the afternoon depending on the class.

The day is getting hotter and hotter. On the roadside, stalls have been sensibly folded away. In contrast, people selling packets of fresh water are doing a roaring trade. The students leading the procession redouble their efforts; there is no time to admire the view or rather to bemoan the remains of the gingerbread architecture, the villas with the elegant balustrades and iron or wooden gingerbread-style features. Many of these old family homes now inappropriately house educational establishments. There is rotten panelling, no bathrooms or running water and the work and study conditions are appalling. Two schools sometimes share the building, each using a system of double vacation (part of the classes held in the morning, the rest in the afternoon).

A "striker" forced into exile

Pepe Jean Getro, General Secretary of the High School Teachers' Union (GIEL) in exile in Santo Domingo

"On 20 June 2002, police officers arrested me and beat me to a pulp. Their only explanation was that I was a union member, a "striker" who turned people working in schools against the government. On 23 September at the Cabaret school, the principal, the town mayor and two chimeres (pro-Aristide street thugs) burst in while I was giving a social sciences lesson. I only survived thanks to a police superintendent who recognised me and intervened. They stated categorically that wherever I went they would kill me unless I left the country. When I didn't leave, they concocted some story about me organising a coup d'état and a warrant was issued for my arrest. And when they couldn't find me, they arrested my cousin instead! My lawyer had to intervene to get my cousin freed. They couldn't very well hold him hostage.

The school principal resents me because I said that I was against corporal punishment. But he still practises it despite a law banning it. Pupils have to spend hours on their knees in the blazing sun. Others are whipped because they don't want to come out to applaud President Aristide. As a charismatic leader, Aristide always needs crowds to cheer him on. It's his policy! The President has complete control over education. Pupils, parents and teachers all have to say yes to everything the government does. If they refuse, they lay themselves open to all kinds of trouble." In September, together with some pupils and teachers we tried to overturn the decision by the principal to expel some students because they asked him to show them the accounts for a project to build a library, which parents had had to finance but which never actually came about

In an attempt to gain more publicity, private schools have given themselves the most pompous names. According to the UNDP, around 75% of young people in education attend private schools. As a result, in Haiti families bear more of the financial burden of education (3.2% of household budgets) than the State (2% of GDP). With regard to the national education and training plan, the UNDP notes that "there is little control over teachers' qualifications, the content of training and the certificates awarded by the schools. As a result, only 10% of teachers of core subjects are recorded as having attained the required level while only a minority of private schools apply the official curriculum."

Jean Lavaud Frederick, the general secretary of the National Teachers' Confederation of Haiti (CNEH), is an angry man. "In 1997, the Préval government made us promises but we are still waiting. We are due 64 months in arrears on the 32% salary increase. The ministry goes on about budgetary problems. We pay taxes but see no benefits. There is no health insurance, just a meagre pension. There's no continuing education and the infrastructure is a disaster. Consider that in core subjects, a teacher only earns the equivalent of USD 53 per month. The maximum is USD 130 but only a minority are paid this, barely 2% of teachers." Together with his colleagues from the UNNOH, FENATEC, CONEH and GIEL, the other teachers unions, Jean has tried to see how a Haitian teacher lives taking into account the daily outgoings of a family of five (2). This study has produced a document full of figures where in all the examples, the calculations have a negative balance. Jean fumes: "Teachers have to be resourceful. Since they can no longer afford to pay 100 gourdes for a return journey each day, they stays off two or three times a week. They try to find private or informal work." This is what these public letter-writers, for example, are doing lined up on the pavement in the very centre of Port-au-Prince. In Haiti, this occupation is not likely to disappear quickly. The literacy rate is no more than 47% for men and 41% for women.

12 midday: After marching down the capital's main thoroughfares, the protestors arrive in front of the presidential palace. Suddenly, the law enforcement officers find the abuse hurled at President Aristide intolerable and they begin to use tear gas to break up the crowd. Taking advantage of the confusion, young people who appear to be students set upon isolated demonstrators. They are *chimeres*! But the police are powerless; they have their hands full with the students. Several are beaten. It is then the turn of some overly curious journalists who the police even manhandle against the railings of the French embassy.

12.30 p.m.: A press briefing is organised. The trade union leaders criticise the police violence and the complacency of the law enforcement officers towards the chimeres but admit in private that the situation would certainly have been worse had there not been a mission of the Organisation of American States (OAS) in Haiti. (3)

2.30 p.m.: Meeting of the Haiti Trade Union Coordination Group (CSH). The wide selection of organisations, headquarters, federations and confederations causes havoc in a country where only 4.5% to 6% of its working population is employed in the formal sector, i.e. around 110,000 people, including public sector employees. Yet trade unionism reflects reality in Haiti: the same divisions are present (religious, town/country, etc.). There are enormous organisational difficulties, the means of communication are limited, travel complicated and expensive and the labour market splintered. With the exception of a few traditionally more structured sectors such as education, well-established organisations are rare. Since its creation in 1997, the Coordination Group has made a point of trying to speak with a single voice. However, the task is extremely difficult,especialy as the trade union movement is divided and weakened. As one former trade unionist explains, "There are hundreds of organisations but it is very difficult for them to have an office or hold a congress. Workers only meet together occasionally, they are afraid. The government has created phoney organisations and officials let themselves be drawn into the game."

"To organise trade unions, you need contributions. To receive contributions, you need work and for that, you have to

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Health under threat

Rose-Belle Bernard, Executive Secretary of the Haiti Nurses' Union (SPI)

"Since 21 November 2002, the university hospital in Port-au-Prince has been targeted by chimeres. That day, an unknown armed man burst into the emergency department and killed a patient. On 10 January, chimeres who had been injured in clashes with demonstrators (following the rise in the price of fuel) demanded to be treated regardless of the triage rules applied to emergency cases. There were bursts of gunfire in the corridors and a police helicopter circled over the hospital for a long time. The staff, patients, everybody was in a real panic. We went on strike to protest against these acts of banditry. Ever since then, doctors and nurses have been persecuted on the grounds that we support the opposition, while we are calling for steps to be taken to ensure our safety and the arrest of our attackers. Today, as members of the SPI, we are threatened and we have to keep a low profile. Several doctors are in the same situation. And all this is going on while the healthcare sector in Haiti is in real crisis: structural adjustment programmes have had a very damaging effect. Because of a shortage of money, public nursing training schools have had to close. At the same time, privately run schools have flourished despite the fact they offer inadequate training. We desperately need qualified staff as well as equipment and medicines. Sometimes you think you'll be able to manage with a patient who is in a bad way, but because of the lack of resources, you can't. Sometimes you finish treating someone, go to wash your hands and find that there's no water left – that even happens in the university hospital! The poor hygiene means that nosocomial infections are commonplace. This isn't wartime but to look at the conditions in which we work you might be forgiven for thinking it was."

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have an economic policy that attracts investors," says one trade union official from a CSH member organisation despondently. "Instead, buildings which a few years ago housed flourishing businesses are now used as warehouses for United Nations aid!" "We are like wild animals being hunted down everywhere", said another. It is certainly difficult to assert yourself when the authorities and employers leave no room for independent trade unions. Since 1997, the tripartite commission has collapsed and total chaos has ensued. For Paul Saint Preux, the deputy general secretary of the CSH, "trade unionism in Haiti is going through a phase of reconstruction; the socio-economic and especially the political difficulties are enormous. They still do not allow us to work as most trade unions in the world do."

5 p.m.: Representatives of farm workers' organisations, women's networks, workers in the building sector, in education, general secretaries, etc. – almost everyone had the opportunity to speak. All unanimously called for external support and trade union training, but the willingness and activism are clear. There are many projects and while the link with inherently trade union activities is not always clear, they meet the basic needs. Next Sunday, Gina George and her colleagues from the National Women's Network (RENAFANM) are going to transform the CSH headquarters into an eye clinic for a few hours. Practitioners and ophthalmology students have agreed to examine 200 network members free of charge. "Some of the women taking our literacy course make no progress," explains Gina, one of the network's coordinators. "At first our instructors thought the women did not want to learn or were tired after a tough day at work. However, we realised they were unable to see properly. We are going to be receiving several hundred free pairs of old glasses from abroad and, under the guidance of the ophthalmologists, we will soon be able to distribute them to these women."

6 p.m.: A cramped house not far from the CSH. It is a protestant church, which also serves as a teaching centre and premises for the hauliers' union. Zamor, its head, is keen to introduce the other leaders of the trade union. Aware that they work in risky profession in terms of infection with HIV/Aids, they want to set up education and prevention units. However, they do not know how to go about this and are seeking advice. They then take some tools and mahogany balls from a recess. Zamor explains that this is part of a reintegration pilot project. They want to personally test the feasibility of a craft workshop for manufacturing wooden planispheres. They still know little of how to sell the merchandise but believe that it could be an interesting activity for the many drivers who have had accidents and are unable to drive again and are often forced to live by their wits.

6.30 p.m. Night falls fast in the tropics. It is the signal to go. We quickly take our leave. The assassins may well have walked the streets in broad daylight but they still prefer to do their dirty work after dark. ●

(1) Members of the popular organisations (OPs), which are pro-Aristide and use violence, believed amongst the general population to be the successors to the Tontons Macoutes.

(2) In Haiti, each working person is, on average, responsible for eight other dependents.

(3) This mission and several other previous missions have evaluated the progress made in applying OAS Resolution 822 (end of the climate of violence and insecurity, formation of a Provisional Electoral Council with a view to holding legitimate elections in 2003).

Graffiti criticising President Aristide in Cap Haitien.

Textile sector: for a few gourds more…

Out of a working population of more than 4 million, only slightly more than 100,000 workers are employed in the formal economy: of these, approximately one quarter work in assembly plants. But this sector could soon be pulling in thousands more if Disney, Gap and other US brands continue to place orders and if the political climate improves.

"Haiti: land of opportunities". This is the inspiring slogan that greets visitors to the website of the Manufacturer's Association of Haiti (ADIH). The site explains to potential investors why doing business in Haiti is such an attractive proposition: competitive wages, skilled workforce that is disciplined and productive, tax incentives, broad production quotas, close proximity to the United States, access to the European market via the Cotonou Agreement, and more. In order to judge the comparative benefits on the basis of actual evidence, investors might also like to put questions directly to a former worker. Léa, for example, spent 15 years working in the textile factories of Port-au-Prince, and she knows a thing or two about the sector: the break-neck pace, excessive flexibility, appalling sanitary conditions and bosses who make off with the takings before the taxman authorities gets hold of them. She remembers the gradual introduction of the "unit" system on the industrial park, a stroke of genius taken from Asia by an American businessman. Female workers are grouped together in units of about 15: each unit is autonomous and is responsible for all aspects of manufacturing clothing, from cutting out the pattern to final inspection. A minimum production quota is set for workers to receive a basic wage of approximately USD 1.5 per day. By exceeding this quota, workers can double their income.

It would seem that everyone is a winner: bosses avoid using several intermediaries and workers earn more. But for many of the women, the initial enthusiasm has quickly waned. The working environment has deteriorated, harassment between workers has become commonplace, each of them blaming poor results on the others. Today, at 35, Léa feels worn out. She has not worked for several weeks now and doubts she will find work in the near future. Known as an active member of the Batay Ouvriye Union Federation, no factory on the park wants anything to do with her now.

The situation is paradoxical: in the face of quasi-existential organisational difficulties in the informal economy in which the vast majority of the working population are employed, unions are finding themselves on familiar ground when it comes to protecting workers in the secondary sector and, even more so, those employed in assembly plants. However, the existence of this vast pool of workers is crushing all efforts at mobilisation. Almost all the personal accounts one hears follow the same lines: "Working conditions in the industry are atrocious, but even that's better than nothing at all." People are frightened. Giving the slightest hint of making any demands can mean losing your job. In spite of this, when a group of workers become so exasperated that they still protest and demand a wage increase or make some other legitimate demand, the response is so disproportionate that it simply heightens their fear. Everyone in Haiti remembers the events of Guacimal (see later article).

In February, President Aristide announced that the basic wage would rise from HTG 36 to HTG 70, but in practical terms, most workers (1) are already earning this amount, which remains a pathetic sum bearing in mind the increase in the dollar exchange rate: some 20 years ago, USD 1 was equivalent to HTG 5, while today the dollar is worth HTG 50. Nevertheless, Haiti's economy has never been so dependent on imports. During the 1980s and 1990s, structural adjustment programmes liberalised the country's economy, but by equipping Haiti with one of the most commercially open systems in the world, these programmes led to the collapse of the manufacturing sector. At present, basic items must be imported from abroad. In reality, although the 60% to 80% of the population living below the poverty line still manage to feed themselves, this is primarily thanks to international aid, itself partly under embargo since the 2001 elections, and money transfers from the Haitian community abroad.

In the face of Haiti's stagnation and increasing informal employment, experts from UN agencies are finding it difficult to come up with creative solutions in developing measures to combat poverty. As such, the assembly sector continues to be viewed as a promising solution in the fight against unemployment, regardless of its well-documented shortcomings in terms of respecting basic working standards. In the same vein, according to an ILO expert working in Haiti, "There is no way to create thousands of jobs at present given the government's opposition to change." Rather more surprisingly, he adds "Not only this, there is also an acute shortage of skilled workers." ●

Key figures

- GNP per inhabitant: 1,467 $
- GNP growth (1990-2000): -2.7%
- Population below the poverty threshold: 65%
- Life expectancy: 52.6 years
- Illiteracy: 50.2%
- Level of malnutrition: 56%
- Human development indicator: 146 (By comparison, the development indicator for the neighbouring Dominican Republic is 94)
- Jobs in export business: 25,000 (80% in the textiles sector)
- Informal economy: rural sector 86% - urban sector 67%

Source: UNDP

(1) However, on 22 April workers at the Brasserie du Nord factory were reported to have been severely beaten for demanding an increase in their measly wage of HTG 33 a day (less than USD 1).

A free – and fertile – zone

The creation by Dominican investors of an free trade zone on Haitian territory (at Ouanaminthe, just opposite Dajabon) is the latest example of the economic imbalance between the two countries. Since 18 March, Dominican civil engineers have begun to clear the land on the Maribahoux plain. Resistance is building up, though, and they are working under the protection of the Haitian national police. Interview with Gaston Etienne, agricultural engineer in Ouanaminthe and member of the Pitobert Defence Committee.

● What are the characteristics of the Maribahoux plain?

It's an agricultural area, particularly Nan Kakawo and Pitobert, the two sites selected for the project. It is also one of the country's last remaining areas with high agricultural potential. With a few adaptations, it could ensure that the whole of the north-east region was self-sufficient in terms of rice, beans and maize. The ground water is six feet deep. For as long as we can remember we have been calling for state assistance for peasants, a good irrigation system along with technical training to boost national production.

● Who will be the main victims of the free trade zone?

There are three categories of victims: owners, those who rent out their land, and the tenant farmers who work on the two halves system (1). In most cases, we are talking about small-scale farms no bigger than 1.29 ha (a carreau). Those who have a deed of ownership may claim compensation but what about the others? At present, a compulsory purchase order has been placed on 54 farmers, 14 of whom have agreed to sell. You can understand their decision. Some of them aren't expecting anything anymore: they're too old, too isolated. But they truly are attached to their land – you should have seen the feeling of helplessness of these people here when the tractors began to destroy their crops. One lady whose garden is adjacent to the building site couldn't bear the situation: her heart just stopped there and then.

● How are the local authorities reacting to your protests?

We are under pressure. On 6 May, Joseph Viladoin, one of our colleagues on the Committee was arrested at his home. He's currently being held at Fort Liberté on two charges. The police say that they found illicit substances at his house, specifically cocaine. In actual fact these were basic chemicals he uses in his workshop where he makes cabinets! They also suspect him of hiding in the cornfields on 18 May and shooting at tractors from the Dominican Republic when they came to destroy the crops.

● When did the authorities tell you about the project?

They never told us! It was members of the Batay Ouvriye Union Federation, and also unionists from the Dominican Republic who made us aware of the situation in 2000. Last year, President Aristide came to Cap Haitien for a commemoration ceremony and together with President Mejía, they laid the first stone for the free trade zone in Ouanaminthe. Nobody ever told us anything about the project. Aristide said that the zone would be "the first fruit of the marriage between Haiti and the Dominican Republic". But at no point did the government see fit to offer any explanations or answer any of the people's questions. The M group, the Dominican investor, turned up one day and told us informally about the project, and the authorities haven't told us anything about the idea behind it, its purpose or the benefits it will bring. We have tried to convince politicians. The new law on free trade zones does take into account what we have said to them: the text specifies that farming areas are to be exempt. But the authorities couldn't care less.

● Doesn't this free trade zone form part of a much broader project?

Yes, the Hispaniola Fund, whereby the entire north–south border between the two countries is being transformed into free trade zones. Last year at the Americas' Summit, an agreement was signed between the Haitian, Dominican and United States' authorities to convert the bilateral debt of both Haiti and the Dominican Republic into an investment fund.

● What is the general feeling of the population, particularly amongst young people? From their point of view, the prospect of a job must be an attractive one?

The people in this area are extremely concerned and those hoping that the creation of this free trade zone will ensure a better future for them are certainly in the minority. Many are struggling to accept the fact that the state is getting rid of a part of its national territory in this way. They are shocked that they have been kept in the dark. And they are also convinced that there will be nothing in it for them. The people living here have worked in the free trade zones of Santiago, they know that such areas bring exploitation and instability, that the companies relocate very quickly and leave behind filthy shantytowns. Given everything the region already has to deal with in terms of illegal trafficking, these are explosive conditions. ●

(1) Half of the harvest is retained by the tenant farmer, the other half going to the owner as 'rent'.

All manner of trafficking along the infamous Massacre River (Rio Massacre)

The border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic has a bad reputation: contraband, human trafficking, deportation of migrant workers on a massive scale, murders.... We take a look at Dajabon and the surrounding areas.

Dajabon in the Dominican Republic. Every Monday and Friday, the Dominican authorities open up the border post and allow in Haitians for the market, which has grown at a staggering rate since the economic embargo was imposed in the early 1990s. Thousands of "congos" (a pejorative term used by the Dominicans to refer to Haitians) come to sell *pèpè* (secondhand clothes) and other contraband goods that have found their way into Haiti. In the other direction, Haitians buy farm produce in the Dominican Republic that they can no longer find in sufficient quantities in their own country.

The presence of soldiers, *cobradores* (guards) and customs officers gives the impression that this is all legal, but in the eyes of the several NGOs that have made the border into their battlefield,

this market is clearly lawless area. "The Haitian buyers and sellers who visit the border markets have to pay a string of taxes, often imposed by civil servants or soldiers and for which there is no legal basis. At the market in Dajabon, for example, a vendor may be forced to pay customs taxes several times over for the same product. The market is auctioned off every year to a farmer who is responsible for collecting the taxes from the vendors occupying the space reserved for the market. To this end he hires groups of people who charge whatever they like. If the vendors refuse to pay, goods –often to a higher value than the sum demanded – are quite simply seized." (1)

The market in Dajabon is not alone in being a source of conflict and of human rights violations. Every day, this arbitrary terror maintains its grip all along the border with acts of torture, demands for ransom, massive deportations and all kinds of trafficking. Among those expelled are an increasing number of workers who have been settled in the Dominican Republic for many years, or indeed who were born there, most of whom live in neighbourhoods known as bateys, hundreds of depressing encampments spread throughout the country inhabited by *braceros* (sugar cane cutters) and their families. The "procedure" works like this: "Typically, the Dominican authorities will arrest deportees, without any formal caution, in the bateys or in public places, if they suspect they are of Haitian origin. They are then immediately placed in custody and deported soon after. Approximately 10% of deportees claim that they have been beaten or physically abused by the Dominican authorities. The deportees arrive in Haiti without any of their possessions and completely impoverished by the deportation process. Many of these men have become separated from their wives and some 16% from their children who remain in the Dominican Republic."(2)

Market day at the Dajabon border post. The 'congos' (Haitians) import the food they can no longer produce at home.

Some of the deportees have no choice but to settle in the border region

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"Women and children too"

Colette Lespinasse, Director of the Support group for Refugees and Repatriated Persons (GARR)

"People often migrate to the Dominican Republic on their own initiative but it can also be organised by recruitment scouts (*buscones*) in collaboration with employers and soldiers in the Dominican Republic. Smugglers go to impoverished rural areas and make false promises to the people there. Sometimes they operate as travel agencies: the transport is organised and hiding places are set up close to the border. They wait until they have gathered a substantial group and then they cross the border. Migration is no longer the reserve of men going to work as cane cutters (braceros) on sugar cane plantations: more and more of those migrating head for other sectors such as the construction industry and the service sector. There are also many women and children.
At the time of the mass deportations in 2000, we were surprised to be taking in very young, unaccompanied children. They told us that they had been living in Santo Domingo, that they used to work on the streets and that almost all of them used to sleep in the same place. These children came from the same areas of Haiti. That started us thinking. We realised that there must be trafficking going on there since it would be impossible for a child of 5 or 10 to travel a distance of 500 km, especially without being stopped at checkpoint. We brought this to light and a joint report by UNICEF and the IOM confirmed that trafficking was taking place. The most staggering aspect of this is that the children were not kidnapped, but were smuggled out of the country with the consent or assistance of their parents: this seems to be an extension of the practise in Haiti of putting children into domestic service, these parents perhaps thinking that their children would be better fed and educated in the Dominican Republic. There are a lot of children living at all the border points where there is economic activity, begging for money, or working as shoe-shiners or porters. They say they can even send some money back home to their families. But this doesn't make their situation any less critical: they don't go to school and are extremely vulnerable."

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thereby destabilising it further. At the border post of Malpasse further to the south, there are no Haitian authorities supervising the area, a situation that has transformed this no man's land into a shantytown inhabited by scores of begging children. On 12 January this year, the Haitian government intervened: it razed homes and small shops in the community to the ground. The people living here were often forced to (illegally) produce and sell charcoal just to survive.

It would seem that the number of people deported from the Dominican Republic is on the increase following several massive waves of deportations over the past few months, waves. According to human rights' organisations, these waves almost always coincide with specific events: political crisis and the threat of a coup d'état in Haiti, an election campaign and an increasing build-up of xenophobia in the Dominican Republic, changeover of the cane cutters (*braceros*) before the *zafra* (sugar cane harvest) to ensure a younger and less militant workforce, and so forth. These NGOs point out that despite a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the two countries in 1999, the convoys unload their human cargo after the border is closed and at makeshift crossing points. Most of the illegal crossings in the opposite direction are also made at night. The migrants themselves face real risks in the form of all manner of trafficking (arms, drugs, etc.) and the heightened presence of Dominican soldiers. Killings occur frequently, but police enquiries and legal proceedings less so.

"Recently, a Haitian women was killed close to Dajabon for a papaya," says Xavier. "A Dominican farmer, convinced that the girl had stolen the fruit, wanted to take his revenge by making her eat several whole papayas still in their skins. When the girl's mother intervened, he took out his gun and killed her with a shot to the back. When the local radio station reported the incident, several listeners expressed their indignation on air. Not, though, at the murder, but at the fact that the authorities had dared to arrest an upstanding Dominican peasant."

The market in Dajabon is a source of conflict and of human rights violations.

In addition to the anti-Haitian prejudices whose roots can be traced back to the closely interwoven history of the two countries (3), the shortcomings in terms of respecting the human rights of Haitians in the Dominican Republic and, more specifically, in the border region, can be attributed to Haiti's political instability and the ever widening economic gulf between the two countries. In the east, the Dominican Republic is experiencing the highest rate of economic growth in the Americas, while in the west Haiti is the poorest country in the hemisphere. The two may well both be classed as 'developing countries', but the contrast between them is becoming increasingly apparent on the border. ●

(1) Evaluation by the GARR of the human rights situation on the Haitian-Dominican border in 2002.

(2)"Unwelcome guests", International Human Rights Law Clinic, Boalt Hall School of Law, University of California, 2002.

(3) Referring partly to the occupation of Dominican territory by the recently established Republic of Haiti in the 18th century, but primarily to the racist ideology of the dictator Trujillo, who set the "blacks" (Haitians) against the "whites" (Dominicans). In 1937, he had more than 20,000 Haitian migrants massacred. In the 1950s, in collaboration with Duvalier, he established a hiring system similar to the slave trade for workers on sugar cane plantations.

The hoe or the machete

The basic claim of farmers can be summed up in two statistics: while 65% of Haiti's population lives in the countryside, only 20% of public expenditure is channelled into rural areas.

"Papaye (Hinche, Haiti), 21 March 2003 (AlterPresse)—- On the afternoon of Thursday 20 March 2003, more than thirty Lavalas bandits, covered by a special unit of the of the Haiti national police and carrying firearms (shotguns, 9 mm and 22 mm revolvers and Uzi submachine guns), clubs and whips severely beat several members and supporters of the Peasant Movement of Papaye (MPP) ..." Since the elections in 2001, such news reports detailing incidents where farmers taking part in demonstrations are attacked by pro-Aristide armed gangs while the police do nothing to intervene or fail to attend have become a regular occurrence in Haiti. The most dramatic case goes back to the case of *Guacimal (1)*, a family business working orange and lemon plantations and exporting bitter orange essential oil extracts destined for the liqueurs market to be used in drinks such as *Cointreau* and *Grand Marnier*.

On 27 May in Saint Raphaël, a protest movement of members of the Saint-Raphaël Guacimal Workers' Union (SOGS) supported by a group of Batay Ouvriye trade unionists was brutally quelled by men armed with machetes and firearms and surrounded by local politicians. Two farmers were massacred and several others injured. The houses of two trade union members were razed to the ground. Some 11 people, including two journalists and seven trade unionists

from Batay Ouvriye, were arrested and imprisoned in Port-au-Prince. Despite a report from National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR) condemning the local politicians and despite a stirring international campaign, the authorities will only release those held in dribs and drabs; the last two trade union members were not freed until 2 December.

In Saint Raphaël, agricultural workers wanted to reassert their right to cultivate land used for citrus fruit orchards to grow food in the off-season, in accordance with an agreement reached during the purchase of the land in 1958 by the Novella family that runs *Guacimal*. However, for some years, the security guards had falsely claimed part of the harvests. In 2000, the workers created a trade union with the help of Batay Ouvriye. Despite the hostility shown by Guacimal and its reluctance to negotiate with the SOGS, some wage demands were met. However, in May 2002, the workers' desire to put an end the tenant farming system, organised arbitrarily by security guards and supervisors for their benefit, led to a showdown. (2)

Repression of farmers' organisations and the abandonment of rural areas by the elites that hold political and economic power have been a common thread throughout Haiti's history (3). As such, many writers immerse themselves in the 'special nature of Haiti' to establish the link between past and present. Like others before him, the writer André Corten believes, for example, that the age-old resistance of farmers to the major retailers and exporters of coffee has made the former suicidal. He recalls the practice of marronage, a term used to describe the action of slaves escaping from plantations and taking refuge in the colony's inaccessible wooded mountains, and which, following independence, has been common survival behaviour (4). This powerful cultural trait within Haitian society would explain the very high proportion of people living in rural areas (around 65% compared to an average of 25% in other Latin American countries) and also the population's distrust of the State, which has historically been highly repressive and non-existent in the context of supplying public services.

In the Haitian countryside, nothing has really changed since the 19th century. In many cases, the power relationship continues to be dictated by tenant farming, where land (often of poorer quality) is rented against 30 to 50% of the harvest. Knowing that it is difficult to ascertain exactly how much has been harvested, negotiations on the share due to the owner are often turned to the latter's advantage. It is difficult to discern whether individuals are tenant farmers or smallholders (moreover, farmers would have considerable difficulty providing proof of their status: deeds of ownership are as rare as birth, marriage and death certificates). In both cases, the same archaic tools are used to farm extremely small plots of land, often on a slope, with poor accessibility and damaged by erosion.

Each year, many thousands of peasants leave the deprived countryside to try their luck as boat people (40 died on 15 March), workers suffering from discrimination in the Dominican Republic or new residents in the shantytowns of Port-au-Prince.

And as if structural constraints were not enough, farmers are also faced with economic problems: disease affecting their crops or livestock, drought and cyclones – all hazards that are worsened by the political context and poor governance. For while people can do nothing about the lack of rain, the same cannot be said for landslides, burnt crops and land which has become infertile due to desperate farming of the land, linked itself to the State's lack of action. The same applies to the insects that devastate crops and cause anguish to many others besides farmers alone; to the lack of openings for agricultural products competing with imports and contraband; and to the drop in the price of coffee, which has laid bare the weaknesses of authorities in organising a sector which sustains 200,000 people. While nothing has really changed in terms of the basic problems facing rural society, it can however be seen that farmers – agricultural work-

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ers, tenant farmers or smallholders – through their organisations have gained an increasingly keen sense of the constraints associated with globalisation and also of the structural changes which a modern State, even one without major resources, should be able to bring about. ●

(1) Guacimal previously produced for the Cointreau brand, which claims that it has not sourced from Haiti since 2002.
(2) In 2003, Guacimal finally decided to ban tenant farming on its plantations, but the perpetrators of the two crimes and acts of violence on 27 May are still free.
(3) A recent example that bears mentioning is that of the knife massacre in July 1987 of 200 farmers from Jean-Rabel, in the north of the country.
(4) "Misère, religion et politique en Haiti" (Poverty, religion and politics in Haiti), André Corten, Karhala, 2001.

The end of the road

For several days, the sky has been lined with clouds, the rains are approaching and for Caristin, the prospect of an adequate harvest once again grows faint. With little money, he has been unable to buy the good seed and manure needed to fertilise the overworked land. Caristin's empty gaze wanders across the arrogantly beautiful countryside. On the one side, the pine forest, one of the last vestiges of the now small wood that had once covered the area. On the other, dozens of tiny, plots of land scattered amongst the hills.
Caristin has made up his mind. In a few days, he will leave, doubtless with one or other of his neighbours. No need to contact a smuggler. They can manage by themselves. Most men here have migrated at one time or another. At the age of 38, he himself had spent a total of 10 years on the Dominican coffee and banana plantations. It was enough to weary him and make him want to return home for good to his country. But the ground is far too barren.

300,000 children working in domestic service

It is one of the worst forms of child labour in existence and is thought to affect one child in six in Haiti: the practice of putting girls and boys into domestic service is now becoming more common due to the drop in the standard of living. However, it is giving rise to controversy rather than real debate.

In February 2003, a short documentary from the French television channel France 2 condemned the sordid existence of *restavèks* (a Creole term derived from the French "rester avec" (stay with)), Haitian 'child slaves' abandoned by their parents and physically and sometimes sexually abused by their masters. The report was later strongly criticised by both the authorities, who used the opportunity to blame the freeze on international aid for hindering efforts to effectively combat child labour, and, in particular, by the real players in this fight. In the eyes of child rights activists, everyday social workers and academics active in the field or in research, the report showed nothing of the activities - which although still limited, do exist – geared towards preventing this practice or monitoring child victims. They also condemn the "sensationalist" nature of the report and the errors contained in it.

In this context, Jean Lherisson, coordinator of a study on the reasons for domestic service in Haiti (1) asks: "Should the question posed not focus rather on the disarray of these families in the face of the economic, social and political evolution of their country? In the study we carried out, we dealt instead with the issue of the reasons underpinning this practice: official positions, Haitian laws, the misery and institutional void in this country which are certainly growing ever more acute. It is however rubbish to claim, as the report did, that we are a people who have preserved a mentality of slavery. Having said this, despite the urgency, there has still been no real debate on the issue of child labour in Haiti."

Aside from the controversy surrounding this report, the limitations of this type of exercise and the inevitably simplistic images and commentaries which result, there is certainly no denying that child labour is a very common practice in Haiti and that even the worst forms of exploitation of child workers are used with alarming regularity. The forced labour, and physical and sexual violence suffered by the young victims, all paint a very sober picture of the situation which affects one child in 10 if the statistics on restavèks alone are to be believed. There are indeed other situations: trafficked children (often to the Dominican Republic), living on the streets or working in the fields. The only piece of "good news" is that the considerably lower number of jobs in the secondary sector, coupled with a very high rate of unemployment, is currently preventing child labour in the formal economy.

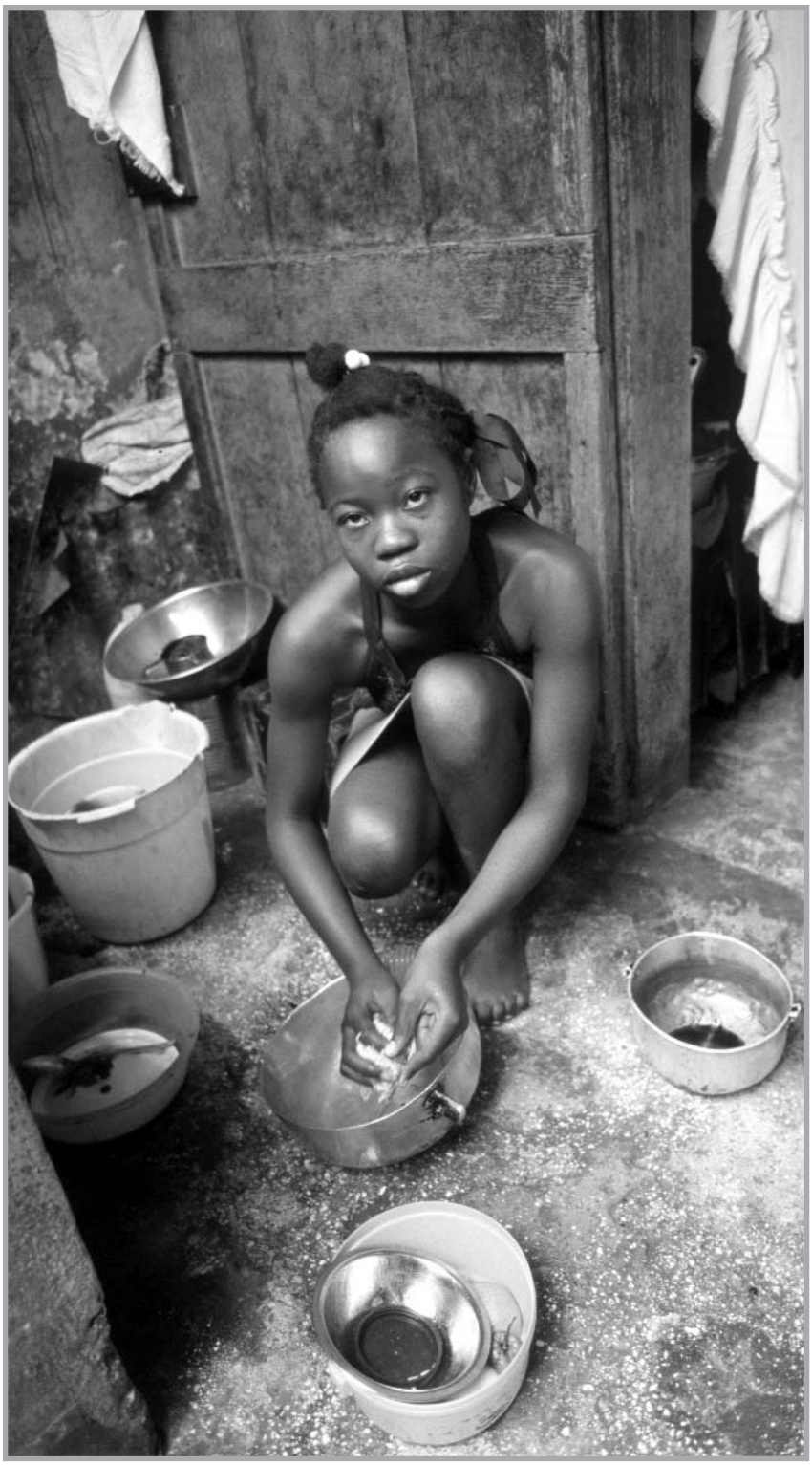
Combating this scourge means tackling the causes and roots of the problem. There is no real reason to believe that Haitian parents are any worse than other parents. All too often in commentaries, parents are viewed as accomplices because they "know" what is going on. This is in contrast, for example, to the trafficking of children in West Africa where intermediaries exploit the situation of poor rural communities. If there seems to be one difference with Haiti in respect of children working in domestic service, it is the social status of the recipient families who are barely better off than the

families sending their children away. As Jean Lherisson explains, "In the past, domestic service was a practice that linked the peasants to the bourgeoisie and well-to-do middle classes. Today, this is no longer the case. In practice, the social transition only worsens the situation. As soon people have a few gourdes, demand rises and supply outstrips demand. People do not say "I am sending a slave there" but are rather seeking a better life for their child. Often, this is what is closest to the hearts of those sending the child."

In the working class areas of Port-au-Prince, people often use child servants to get by. Selling goods from a stall, or any other small activity, means leaving home for a few hours. Help is needed but with such low incomes, no-one can be paid. Given that 80% of the rural population live below the poverty line (compared to 65% of the urban population), the promise of board and lodgings and sometimes schooling or an apprenticeship in a profession is enough to convince many parents they are making the right choice. Jean Lerhisson sees a drawback in this: "Today, in the 21st century, the State no longer has effective control over its territory and population." The UNDP speaks of "erratic governance" (2) moving towards informalisation on all levels: education, health, the economy, security, institutions, registration of births, marriages and deaths and of course justice.

The forced labour, and physical and sexual violence suffered by the young victims, all paints to a very sober picture of the situation affecting one child in 10 if the statistics on restavèks alone are to be believed.

There is a law that sets the minimum working age. International agreements have been ratified (but not the two fundamental standards of the ILO on child labour) yet justice is not working and there is almost complete impunity. The authorities sometimes promote this informalisation. This was the case in the appeal by President Aristide in 2001 calling for a "zero tolerance" policy and which, in reality, encourages quick justice and lynching. Young people set about carrying out this dirty work and they are the authorities' chimeres. These are not the child soldiers of the Congo or Sierra Leone but the principle is the same. ●



Hundreds of thousands of Haitian children are used as child labour. One of the worst forms of child labour: the work of 'restavèks'.

(1) "Les fondements de la pratique de la domesticité des enfants en Haïti" (The basis for the practice of children in domestic service in Haiti) UNDP, ILO/IPEC, UNICEF, Save the Children, Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, 2002.

(2) "La bonne gouvernance, un défi majeur pour le développement durable humain en Haïti" (Good governance: a major challenge for sustainable human development in Haiti), UNDP, 2002.

Red card in the 2003 ICFTU Annual Survey

GLOBAL UNIONS RESPECT!

In the 2003 edition of its annual survey on trade union rights violations worldwide, the ICFTU, for wich respect for fundamental workers rights is a priority area for action again pointed the finger at the deterioration of human and trade union rights in Haiti, focusing on cases of intimidation, threats and physical assault.
In the year since its 2002 Annual Survey, the ICFTU has also written five times to President Aristide to denounce severely repressive measures against trade unionists. Before the 59th session of the UN's Committee on Human Rights last March, the ICFTU denounced the huge pressures inflicted on Haitian trade unionists. The ICFTU provides also financial support to Haitian trade unions

On 3 April 2000, Jean Dominique, the best known journalist in the country and director of Radio Haiti Inter, was shot down in the station's courtyard; the security guard also died in the attack. In early 2003, Dominique's widow, Michèle Montas, survived an assassination attempt but her bodyguard did not. Since she took refuge abroad, the radio station has stopped broadcasting.

Journalists are constantly risking their lives

Yolette Mengual, Executive Director of the National Press Workers' Union of Haiti (SNTPH)I

"The first blow was the murder of the Radio Haiti Inter journalist Jean Dominique on 3 April 2000. We all saw him as our leader. Since then, the situation has grown steadily worse. Later, on 3 December 2001, Brignol Lindor, the Information Director at Radio Echo was also assassinated in an act of cowardice and horrifically mutilated by those in the pay of the government. For three years and with absolute impunity, dozens of journalists have been threatened, beaten, arrested or forced to flee abroad. Several security officers have also been killed. Independent radio stations are particular targets since they broadcast information in a country that still has a high level of illiteracy. As a union, we are currently trying to compile a social list of the Haitian press to gain a picture of how living and working conditions of journalists, technicians, presenters and so on are changing. We are looking to negotiate with press employers, and to use that as an opportunity to talk to them about social dialogue: despite the fact that most of them are former journalists, they can sometimes be harsher than other bosses. Journalists have no support, they work in a precarious situation, they earn between USD 50 and USD 100 per month, they have no social protection – and all this while constantly risking their lives."

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