

Noose tightens around Haiti

by Cynthia Rush

When Ibero-America's heads of state met in Guadalajara, Mexico last spring, they deliberately excluded Haiti from their invitation list, claiming that the island nation really wasn't part of the Ibero-American family. Today, however, these same heads of state are fully backing the Bush administration's war against 7 million predominantly black Haitians, in the name of defending "Ibero-American democracy," and reinstating the Pol Pot-like dictator Jean Bertrand Aristide.

They have even brought Cuban dictator Fidel Castro in on the negotiations to put Aristide back in power, with U.S. blessings. Contrary to Anglo-American propaganda, which shows Bush being "tough" on Cuba, Washington is dealing with Castro the same way it does with El Salvador and Nicaragua: negotiating with the communists to ensure that Anglo-American policy is implemented under a dual-power arrangement. In this case, it means bringing Aristide back as Haiti's "legitimate ruler" and proceeding with the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) malthusian dictates. On Oct. 23, the "Group of Three" Ibero-American Presidents—Mexico's Carlos Salinas de Gortari, Colombia's César Gaviria, and Venezuela's Carlos Andrés Pérez—invited Castro to a mini-summit in Cozumel, Mexico specifically to discuss the Haiti question.

The summit's final communiqué suggested the nature of the deal: It condemned the coup in Haiti and fully backed the sanctions of the Organization of American States (OAS) against the impoverished nation, while urging that Cuba be quickly accepted "back into the Latin American community." An Oct. 25 Reuters wire noted that the meeting could not have occurred without Washington's okay. One Mexican government source was quoted, "If there is no immediate reaction in the United States, you can imagine Washington knows what's going on."

The thuggish Aristide, whose dictatorial methods and incitement of mob violence against his opponents led to his ouster by the military on Sept. 30, is now galavanting around Europe, where heads of state are fawning over him as Haiti's salvation. With this kind of support, Aristide is demanding that the full weight of the Anglo-American establishment's economic and political power be used to reinstate him, even if the Haitian people have to be exterminated in the process. Asked if he were worried about whether the OAS economic sanctions would hurt the population, Aristide responded, "Don't worry . . . the Haitian people have been suffering for

centuries."

Few bother to hide the fact that Aristide is a crazed dictator who has used Haiti's backward, voodoo-based culture to mobilize lynch mobs on his behalf. Reuters reported on Oct. 23 that shortly after the Sept. 30 coup, his supporters lynched, mutilated, and ate the cadaver of one of his chief political rivals, Christian Democrat Sylvio Claude. Treading carefully, the *New York Times* admitted on Oct. 25 that Aristide tolerated "lynch mobs" and other "abuses." But, the liberal mouthpiece baldly implied, if Anglo-American policy is to be implemented, Aristide must be returned to power anyway.

A racist policy

While the OAS has nominally been directing the action against Haiti, the Bush administration is actually calling the shots. On Oct. 29, Bush signed an Executive Order banning most trade between the U.S. and Haiti, a move which Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Bernard Aronson admitted would "devastate" Haiti. Scheduled to go into effect on Nov. 5, the measure allegedly excludes exports of basic food staples, and donations "intended to relieve human suffering." If treatment of Iraq is any indication, Haitians can assume that these items will not be forthcoming. Haiti receives 65% of all its imports from the United States and exports 85% of all its goods to the U.S. market.

Fuel supplies on the island are about to be exhausted due to the oil cutoff from Venezuela and Mexico, and the government reportedly has almost no hard currency. Although the OAS sanctions were supposed to exclude "humanitarian assistance," agencies such as the World Health Organization and the U.S. Agency for International Development have announced that they are withdrawing from Haiti, and other U.N. agencies were expected to follow suit. The programs most affected, specialists say, are those which provide potable water, education in disease prevention, especially AIDS, and reforestation. This is being done to a nation in which 90% of the population is illiterate, where average per capita yearly income is \$50, and where only one-third of the land is arable.

A fact-finding mission sent by the French-based medical charity Doctors of the World reported Oct. 29 that "the embargo by European countries and the United States has worsened an already very troubling food and hygiene situation."

The threats and harsh measures taken thus far have pressured Aristide's opponents into agreeing to accept the presence of an OAS delegation to discuss the situation, although they are hedging on the ousted ruler's unconditional return. The OAS wants to send a 500-person civilian delegation to Port au Prince, plus a "security force" to protect it, while negotiations are occurring. Opposition to Aristide's return is especially strong among the Armed Forces, and the capital is said to be rife with rumors of a hard-line coup.