

## Editorial

### The Tragedy of Haiti

On January 12, an earthquake of magnitude 7.3 on the Richter scale struck Haiti, with an epicentre close to the capital city of Port-au-Prince. That city and the nearby city of Jacmel were essentially levelled. Over 200,000 people were killed, 500,000 injured and more than one million people left homeless. Over three million people have been severely affected by the earthquake, left with little food or water. The scope of the devastation rivals that of the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean, while being concentrated in one small, impoverished country as opposed to that disaster which was spread out over 14 countries.

The earthquake that hit Haiti, while powerful, is actually a scale of magnitude or two smaller than the most powerful earthquakes that have occurred over the past few decades. The massive destruction and loss of lives is not primarily a result of the magnitude of the earthquake, but rather of the crushing poverty

of the country – the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere – and of the colonial and neo-colonial legacy of the nation.

Haiti has the honour of being the first independent nation in Latin America and the first independent post-colonial black nation in the world, having declared its independence from France in 1804. However, that honour came with a huge price tag, as the world's big powers of the day – France, Britain and the United States – imposed a crippling embargo on the island nation. The embargo was only lifted in 1825 when Haiti agreed to pay 150 million francs in reparations to France for its losses of property and slaves. That debt weighed heavily on the Haitian economy for over a century, continuing until 1947.

The United States took control of Haiti's national bank in 1911 and invaded the country in 1915 to protect American financial interests. The occupation

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### What is the Issue With Iran?

There has been considerable attention given to Iran recently especially as regards its ongoing plans for the development of nuclear power. The content of this attention in the media has been the allegation that Iran is attempting to develop a nuclear weapon and must be diverted from this course through a U.S. led program of sanctions and the threat of military attack.

It is worth considering what is behind all of the breast beating from U.S., European and Middle Eastern leaders. It cannot be said that Iran's nuclear program represents much of a danger to its neighbours or anyone else in the world. Iran claims that it is developing facilities to enrich uranium for use as fuel for the production of nuclear energy. It has a right to develop a nuclear industry just as other countries have done since the advent of nuclear power reactors in the mid-twentieth century. Iran

unlike the other nuclear nations in the Middle East and South Asia is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty ("NNPT") and its nuclear program is regularly inspected by the International Atomic Energy Agency ("IAEA"). The NNPT and the IAEA inspections are intended to keep the possession on nuclear weapons within the hands of a select group of major powers and their allies. The treaty has provisions to prevent any fissionable materials, highly enriched uranium or plutonium, from being diverted from power generation into the production nuclear arms. Iran allows the IAEA to carry out regular inspections of its nuclear facilities. These inspections up till now have found that Iran's nuclear program is in compliance with the non-proliferation treaty and has found no evidence that Iran

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continued until 1934 during which time the U.S. not only stole at least 40 percent of the country's wealth, but also took measures which resulted in the concentration of the population in the slums of Port-au-Prince. The destruction of Haitian agriculture through the flooding of the country with cheap, subsidized American products during the 1970s and 1980s drove even more of the peasants into Port-au-Prince desperately seeking a livelihood. This concentration of the population in the capital city, coupled with substandard housing, are the main factors contributing to the extremely high death rate in the recent earthquake.

If the death and destruction resulting from the earthquake were not enough of a tragedy, the people of Haiti are now facing a second disaster in the form of imperialist "aid". Within hours of the disaster, the U.S. began to pour over 20,000 marines into the country, occupying the Toussaint Louverture international airport and forcing emergency medical aid and food to be routed through the Dominican Republic, delaying its arrival by three crucial days. Aid stockpiled in U.S.-controlled areas sat undistributed for days and weeks under the hoax of the need to establish "security". Despite numerous reports from aid workers that the situation remained calm and orderly, the Western media spread false rumours of widespread looting and rioting in order to justify the military occupation of the country.

Cuba, itself the victim of a brutal U.S. economic embargo, was the first country to provide medical assistance and material aid. It followed a policy of immediately handing over its relief supplies to the Haitian people who organized themselves to distribute the supplies to the most needy. Over 400 Cuban doctors were already working in the poorest district of Haiti and another 30 doctors were dispatched there within hours of the disaster. They immediately went to the areas that were the hardest hit and helped the Haitian people set up field hospitals.

On the other hand, the U.S. responded by preventing supplies from reaching the quake victims for several days and insisted that all distribution of aid should be carried out by American NGOs. Many Haitians complained that the international aid controlled by the U.S. was ending up in the hands of wealthy Haitians who were reselling it on the black market. It took almost a week to even deliver water to most of the victims and more than a month after the quake only 270,000, or about a quarter of the

homeless, have received basic shelter. Many of the NGOs controlling the distribution of relief supplies are the same NGOs that helped finance and organize the U.S.-led coup against President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004. Since then they have also played a dirty role in stripping the Haitian state and the Haitian people of any control over the basic infrastructure of the society, paving the way for the privatization of the few remaining public services in Haiti. The January 25 international conference of "donor" states which was held in Montreal, adopted a "plan of action" to rebuild Haiti that placed the main emphasis on the "private sector". With security in the hands of U.S. marines, its economy in the hands of the "private sector" and its social services in the hands of foreign corporations disguised as aid organizations, Haiti will become the new poster child for neo-liberalism and neo-colonialism.

For years, many people have been asking why the Americans and other imperialist powers would bother themselves with a tiny, impoverished country such as Haiti. The answer to that question is now becoming clear. Haiti is rapidly becoming the newest U.S. military base in the Caribbean. Situated very close to Cuba, it could be used to launch an invasion of that country, as well as against other U.S. targets in the region, such as Venezuela. The complete neo-liberalization of the Haitian economy also serves as a blueprint for imperialist designs on the rest of the Caribbean and Latin America. In addition, Haiti is still being punished for its audacity of achieving independence and the abolition of slavery two centuries ago. As is the case with Cuba, the imperialists will never reconcile themselves to those Haitians who aspire for independence, sovereignty and the right to choose their own course in life.

The imperialists are very quick to capitalize on every disaster – natural or man-made – to advance their hegemonic aims. It took the U.S. imperialists mere hours after the earthquake struck to begin their current military invasion and occupation of Haiti, while it took the same military several days to respond to the destruction of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. It is quite possible that the decision to occupy the country was taken months ago, with the U.S. administration merely waiting for an appropriate pretext to carry it out. The tragedy of Haiti is a legacy of colonialism and imperialism. There is little doubt that the death and destruction caused by a natural disaster is only the beginning of the current tragedy afflicting the long-suffering Haitian people.

# Winnipeg Events to Mark Israeli Apartheid Week

For the first time in its six-year history, Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) will be marked in Winnipeg from March 8-12 with series of meetings, panel discussions and lectures.

The objective of Israeli Apartheid Week is to draw attention to the racist and discriminatory policies and practices of the Israeli state against the Palestinian people, as well as to promote the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign (BDS) against Israel. Since the first Israeli Apartheid Week was held six years ago, organizers in cities across North America have been subject to coordinated intimidation campaigns aimed at shutting their activities down. Some university campuses have banned IAW material or events on the pretext that they were anti-Semitic, with pro-Zionist forces arguing that even the use of the term "Israeli apartheid" is an act of anti-Semitism.

The Winnipeg IAW organizers are confronting this intimidation head on, holding two public events that put the pro-Zionist claims to the test. On Tuesday, March 9, a meeting under the title "Is There a New Anti-Semitism?" will be held at the Millennium Library. The following day a public meeting will be held on whether the topic of Israel as an apartheid state is a legitimate subject of discussion. The featured speaker at both events will be Mordecai Briemberg, a well-known peace activist and broadcaster who is a founding member of the Canada-Palestine Support Network (Vancouver).

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is pursuing a nuclear weapons program. Iran has also said repeatedly that it is not interested in becoming a nuclear armed state and that it has no nuclear weapons program. It should be noted that India, Israel and Pakistan all possess nuclear weapons and unlike Iran none of these countries are signatories of the NNPT.

In the face of evidence of Iran's compliance with its treaty obligations, Iran has been subjected to an endless chorus of accusations claiming that it is secretly developing a nuclear bomb and must be stopped from doing so. The accusations come principally from politicians in the U.S. and Israel with support from leading politicians from England, France and Germany. The aim of this campaign is to isolate Iran and paint it as an enemy of peace and security and a threat to the entire world. The attempt to make

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Originally, the latter was to be held as a debate, with Briemberg arguing the legitimacy of raising the question of apartheid and a local pro-Zionist lobbyist arguing against. However, the pro-Zionist lobby decided that engaging in the debate would be giving the topic legitimacy and instead targeted their energies on shutting down free speech by writing the presidents of both the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg asking them to stop IAW activities on their campuses, arguing they pose a threat to the security of Jewish students.

In response to B'Nai B'rith's appeal, IAW organizers wrote to each president noting that IAW events "...do not target Israeli citizens or Jewish people, they are about the Israeli state and its apartheid practices. IAW is an anti-racist event, opposed to anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and all forms of racism. We plan to announce this fact at the beginning of every IAW event on campus, as we do not wish to have our events used to promote any form of racism. We do not threaten the safety of any students, Jewish or otherwise."

## **Israeli Apartheid Week March 8-12**

Monday, March 8, 2:00 p.m.  
"Women & Apartheid"  
224 University Centre, U of M

Tuesday, March 9, 2:00 p.m.  
"Israel as an Apartheid State"  
217 University Centre (GSA Lounge), U of M

Tuesday, March 9, 7:00 p.m.  
"Is There A New Anti-Semitism?"  
Carol Shields Auditorium  
Millennium Library

Wednesday, March 10, 12:30 p.m.  
"Is the Topic of Israel, as an Apartheid State,  
a Legitimate Subject of Discussion on  
Canadian University Campuses?"  
Concourse Lounge, University College, U of M

Thursday, March 11, 7:00 p.m.  
Evening of Entertainment & Solidarity  
Degree's Diner , 3rd Floor, University Centre, U of M

Friday, March 12, 2:00 p.m.  
"Canadian Apartheid & Indigenous Solidarity"  
224 University Centre, U of M

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Iran into one of the world's greatest enemies is strikingly similar to the political and public relations onslaught used to prepare conditions for the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The current campaign against Iran has the same objective as did the 2002-2003 hysteria against Iraq. The aim is to vilify and isolate the state of Iran and create the conditions for a military attack on Iran or other measures to bring about the overthrow of the regime in its regime and its replacement with one more agreeable to the U.S.

The campaign of vilification of Iran on the question of its nuclear intentions even on the surface is laughable. Even if Iran were developing nuclear weapons what would be the practical implications of that fact? Many countries possess nuclear weapons. Only one country, the U.S., has actually used them. The reason nuclear weapons have not been used in any of the many conflicts since the Second World War is that their use threatens the user as much as the intended victim. It is an article of faith among both historians and war planners that the greatest deterrent to the use of nuclear weapons are nuclear weapons themselves. It is a very dangerous business to pick fights with nuclear armed nations as they are in a position to retaliate in a very damaging fashion. The threat posed by a potentially nuclear armed Iran is not that it might use its nuclear weapons in an aggressive manner. The consequences for Iran to use nuclear weapons, for example against Israel, would be the annihilation of its cities in retaliation. Iran is not suicidal. Nor does it have a recent history of aggression. The wars it has fought in the modern period have been forced upon it. The 1980 to 1988 Iraq-Iran war was instigated by Iraq with the support of the U.S. The real concern of the U.S. and other similarly aggressive powers is that a nuclear armed Iran would be far less subject to great power bullying.

Iran clearly does not pose an aggressive threat against its neighbours through the use of nuclear weapons. The campaign against it therefore is an indication of something else. The most likely explanation is that Iran has become a significant presence in the region in opposition to U.S. and western interests. There are probably three elements to this Iranian influence that bother the U.S. and its allies. First there is the fact that Iran is a large

producer of oil and natural gas and has been marketing these products to its neighbours in Asia, principally China. The U.S. does not want to see an alliance between Iran and China that will strengthen both those parties at the relative expense of the U.S. Second, Iran has close ties with the Shiite dominated government of Iraq. There are also significant Shiite minorities in many Arab states surrounding the Persian Gulf. Those regimes are unpopular and unrepresentative. There is therefore significant potential for sectarian instability in this oil producing region. The U.S. considers Shiite Iran to be a threat to its long term domination of the Middle East. Third, Iran is a major irritation to the U.S. as regards its client state of Israel. Iran is the principle provider of arms and political assistance to Hezbollah in Lebanon, to Hamas in Gaza and to the state of Syria. As such Iran interferes with Israeli hegemony in the region. Both the U.S. and Israel would like to remove Iranian influence in the Arab Middle East by any means necessary.

The current hysteria about Iran's nuclear ambitions therefore should be seen through the prism of Middle Eastern power politics rather than as something that has arisen as a result of a possible threat Iran poses to the world through its possession of nuclear weapons. The nuclear weapons issue is simply a convenient issue on which to try and undermine the Iranian state through the use of military threats and economic and political sanctions.

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