

Clinton keeps Bush's policy on Haiti

by Carlos Wesley

President Bill Clinton will essentially continue, with some cosmetic changes, George Bush's racist policy of denying asylum to black refugees from Haiti. During the campaign, Clinton had denounced as "cruel" Bush's policy of interdicting Haitian refugees on the high seas and sending back to Haiti without a hearing on their claims for asylum—a gross violation of international law. Clinton had pledged to overturn that policy.

However, allegedly because of fears that waves of dark-skinned Haitian boat people will flood the United States come Inauguration Day, Clinton let it be known that one of his first official acts would be to issue an Executive Order that will supposedly make it easier for Haitians to request asylum from inside Haiti, from the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, or from refugee camps in unnamed third countries. But they will still be barred from coming to the United States to press their claims for asylum.

Ousted Haitian dictator Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who lives in luxurious exile in Washington, D.C., was pressed into service to tape an appeal asking Haitians to stay home. In the message, which the Voice of America began airing on Jan. 11, Aristide said that Clinton, along with the U.N. and the Organization of American States (OAS), was committed to restoring him as President of Haiti.

A similar call by Aristide over a year ago, after Bush ignited the mass exodus by imposing a murderous embargo against the island nation on Oct. 30, 1991, apparently fell on deaf ears since tens of thousands of Haitians have braved the seas since then in an attempt to escape certain starvation under the embargo, including nearly 400 men, women, and children who died when the Haitian freighter *Virgin Mirach* went down off the Bahamas sometime around Christmas.

U.S. speaks with forked tongue

While the embargo was imposed to punish Haiti for overthrowing Aristide, Haitians are being denied asylum on the basis that they are "economic," not "political" refugees, a policy Clinton will continue. It should be obvious that the way to stop the flood of refugees would be to lift the embargo and provide economic assistance to compensate for the destruction it has wrought. But Clinton will not lift the embargo for *political reasons*, because it would be seen "as rewarding Haiti's military-backed government," according to the Jan. 9 *New York Times*. In fact, in typical Catch-22 fashion, the

chokehold on Haiti's population will be tightened, to help them "return to democracy."

As we went to press, scores of Haitian refugees detained at the U.S. Immigration Service's Krome Detention Center in Miami, Florida were on a hunger strike to protest the discriminatory nature of U.S. policy. The strike began on New Year's eve after a group of Cubans who hijacked a plane to Miami, were processed and granted asylum after spending little more than 24 hours at Krome, while most Haitians have been detained for months, and some have been kept there for years.

"The Haitian immigrants don't speak English, are mainly illiterate, have no employable skills to speak of and are riddled with sundry diseases," claimed a *Washington Times* columnist on Jan. 12. Government officials exhibit the same racist outlook. "I have established that Haitians have one less chromosome, that of compromise and consensus, and on the other hand, one additional chromosome, that of conflict and dissension," Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America Robert Gelbard said last year, according to columnists Evans and Novak.

In developing his policy toward Haiti, Clinton coordinated with the outgoing administration to an unprecedented degree. Following consultations in Little Rock, Arkansas between Clinton and his nominees for secretary of state and defense, Warren Christopher and Les Aspin; designated National Security aide Anthony Lake; and Brian Attwood, from the transition team, Christopher traveled to Washington to meet with Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger on Jan. 6. "The incoming administration and this administration share the goal of restoring democracy to Haiti," read a statement released by Christopher and Eagleburger following the meeting.

That should mean the restoration of Aristide to the Haitian presidency, from which he was overthrown in a coup on Sept. 30, 1991 because of his penchant for mob rule, including his advocacy of "necklacing" his opponents—a method of murder in which the victim's arms are chopped off, and a tire filled with gasoline is placed around his neck and set ablaze.

But the statement by Eagleburger and Christopher put the United States behind the U.N. mission to Haiti led by former Argentine Foreign Minister Dante Caputo. The plan is to make Haiti a trusteeship of the OAS and the U.N. on the excuse that Haiti, which was the second nation in the Western Hemisphere to gain its independence, is, like Somalia, not a "viable" nation. Aristide would be President in name only, allowed to return to Haiti only after an extended transition period.

According to the Jan. 13 *Washington Post*, Haiti's military leadership has agreed with the U.N. to recognize Aristide as President. "In exchange, under a complicated deal . . . [Aristide will] agree not to return immediately, according to sources."