

But experts say . . .

MAY 2008

Kathy Emery

www.educationanddemocracy.org

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — . . . Saint Louis Meriska's children ate two spoonfuls of rice apiece as their only meal recently and then went without any food the following day. . . . [A]s it roils developing nations, the spike in commodity prices — the biggest since the Nixon administration — has pitted the globe's poorer south against the relatively wealthy north, adding to demands for reform of rich nations' farm and environmental policies. But experts say there are few quick fixes to a crisis tied to so many factors, from strong demand for food from emerging economies like China's to rising oil prices to the diversion of food resources to make biofuels. . . . Real solutions will take years. Haiti, its agriculture industry in shambles, needs to better feed itself. Outside investment is the key, although that requires stability, not the sort of widespread looting and violence that the Haitian food riots have fostered.

New York Times, April 18, 2008

“But experts say . . .” occurs at the very beginning of the *NY Times* article. “Outside investment is the key . . .” occurs at the very end of the article. That these two ideas are bookends is not a coincidence. Expert policy analysts along with the entire academic establishment have always been in service of “outside investment” (corporations), which requires the imposition of “stability” (U.S. military intervention). That the *NY Times* recommends corporate investment as the solution to Haiti's food crisis ignores that such “investment” and its accompanying military support has been a cause of Haiti's poverty to begin with.

Let me explain what I mean with a brief history of imperialism. European colonial powers (England, Italy, Holland, Belgium, France and Germany) had divided up Indonesia, Africa and India among themselves by 1900. The United States, until this time, had been preoccupied with clearing out the Native Americans between the East and West coasts of the North American continent. After 1900, the U.S., having gained military control of its continent, turned its attention to competing with Europe for control of raw materials in South America. For that is what imperialism has been all about-- at gunpoint, forcing the peoples of “third world” countries to extract raw materials (copper, aluminum, iron, gold, diamonds) or produce food (bananas, rice, cattle, sugar) for subsistence wages. That is why the United States at 5 percent of the world's population has been able to end up consuming (depending on your source) 25 to 30 percent of the world's resources.

Imperialism has been justified by Euro-American authors (“white man's burden”), social scientists (“survival of the fittest”) and the newspaper reporters (“outside investment is the key”). Imperialism, over the last 100 years has created an interdependent economic and political structure that is a vicious circle. Outside investment, protected by outside force (or more commonly now, surrogate dictators), has so impoverished the countries from which they extract wealth that the starving people are beginning to threaten the stability of that extraction. So more investment, force and extraction are necessary? This unsustainable pattern is being further stressed by the fact that we are running out of resources to extract. Human history has not shown that we can solve our problems before they cause great harm. Perhaps the world economy must collapse and millions must die before we come to our senses. Or, I hope, we can begin to organize “people power” to stop the greed and fear that continues to blind editors, writers, policy analysts, and, most of all, politicians and business leaders.