
Labor And Trade: Exploitation Of Haitian Workers

With a growth of 1.20% Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in The Republic of Haiti for the previous year 2017, the CIA world factbook has declared Haiti the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. In line with this, Haitians have become desperate for any source of income they can find. This has in turn led to many of them being subjected to exploitation by factory owners through unfair wages. According to thoughtco, 'Exploitation occurs when one social group is able to take for itself what is produced by another group.' In Haiti, there are large groups of men who are extorted to the Dominican Republic and forced to work in sugarcane fields to produce sugar. As of now there is an estimated number of 200,000 Haitians who have been extorted to the Dominican Republic in search for a better life but have unfortunately fallen victims to this extortion and exploitation. This has been ongoing for a long period of time and has created a vicious cycle of debt that is difficult to escape from.

The workers are restricted to strict boundaries set by their employers, keeping them under full control without any flexibility. This has led to an increasing problem of exploitation of Haitians to supply labor for the demand of goods in Developing and Developed countries worldwide. This is seen most prominently in Port-au-prince, the capital of Haiti from which men and women are channeled to work in the Dominican Republic. They are brought there with the promise of being paid well and having a stable income, however in reality they are ill-treated and are housed in run down cabins called 'bateyes' where basic necessities such as running water, electricity or even toilets are not provided. These bateyes have now become forms of communities inhabited by real family units and even house children.

Looking closer, we are able to learn that the workers do not earn any money 'we work and do not earn any money, we work for nothing - Junior 22 year old Haitian worker Junior defines the job as 'slaves in freedom' as they are free to resign from the job whenever they want however are drowning in debts at the shops within the compound where they are to get their primary goods from at inflated prices to constantly keep them in debt. In the past, there was a history of trading workers between the Dominican Republic and Haiti done through the governments which lasted for about 35 years. However as the demand for the trade died down so did the demand for the workers.

Now in current day the sugar plantations have been sold to private owners leading to the demand for these lowly skilled workers to have increased yet again. However the recruitment is being done through taking advantage of the migratory patterns of Haitians and hence leading to them being exploited. This exploitation does not revolve solely around the lack of wages but also delves into the safety of the workers as they are sent to work without proper safety equipment. The privatization of this industry has increased the level of exploitation and led to working and living conditions as compared to the past. Methods have been taken by the workers to free themselves from this exploitation. Some workers have returned to the 'main urban seaside' to look for jobs in the urban sector of the Dominican Republic. This has worked in some cases up till recently where the acquisition of citizenship by birth 'ius soli' was 'retroactively eliminated' all the way back to 1929. This meant that Haitians that had gained citizenship through ius soli were now subjected to deportation. This has made the bateyes a relatively safer place for Haitian migrants however they are still subjected to being easily

exploitable labor. This is not exclusive to the Sugar plantations but also can be seen in the garment industry. In Haiti, garment factories are the most important effort being taken to bring the country back to its former glory post the earthquake in 2010. However, in these garment factories workers are being paid less than what they should be in order to keep garment prices low. In particular, a report by the worker rights consortium that examined 5 of the 24 factories in Haiti noted that the 'workers are being denied nearly a third of their income.'

One of the main offenders is seen to be Caracol Industrial Park that supplies its clothing to retailers such as GAP, Target and Walmart. These offenders hide behind difficult to meet quotas allowing them to deny the workers of their rightful pay along with overtime. Workers who are lawfully meant to be paid 300 Haitian gourdes per day are only being paid 200 gourdes per day which in turn means that they are paid overtime on the 200 gourdes rate and not on the 300 gourdes rate. The report also revealed that workers would need to overwork themselves (more than 48 hours per week) to be paid enough to hit the benchmark of 300 gourdes per day that factories must pay them. This is not the first time that this issue has been discovered as this report by the Worker Rights Consortium was a follow up on a report by Better work done in April of 2013.

As of now there have been no major steps taken to curb this issue however, Richard Lavallée the groups program manager had stated that there was an increase in the amount of workers earning 300 gourdes, yet no evidence was shown of this in reports conducted. This phenomena can be explained by Karl Marx's conflict theory which argues that society is not best understood as a complex system striving for equilibrium but rather as a competition. Society is made up of individuals competing for limited resources. Marx stated that the world could be divided into two parts, the Proletariat defined as the working class and the Bourgeoisie defined as the owners. In Haiti and The Dominican Republic, the factory owners render the Haitian workers helpless and as such they have no other option but to rely on their low paying unfair jobs to survive. This can be seen in Ms. Rositha Guerrier's statement that 'I am forced to live with debt' she was enticed with the promise of being paid 350 gourdes per day but ended up being exploited by being paid 200 gourdes per day. She also stated that 'instead of staying home and to do nothing, I prefer to work in these conditions.'

The factory owners (Bourgeoisie) capitalize on the fact that these workers (proletariat) have nowhere else to go and force them to work under whichever conditions that maximize the profit of the factory. Keeping these workers out of power is the fact that almost 59% of the country lives below the poverty line and their high susceptibility to diseases and risks requires them to get any and every source of income they can. This can also be explained through Maslow's Hierarchy of needs.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow's theory of self-actualization contends that individuals are motivated to fulfill their potential in life. Self-actualization is typically discussed in conjunction with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which posits that self-actualization sits at the top of a hierarchy above four lower needs.' Maslow's hierarchy explains why the Haitian workers continue to work in these unfavorable environments to satisfy the lowest tier in the hierarchy being the Physiological needs of food, warmth, water, rest etc. This means that the Haitian workers would rather work under these conditions than have no source of income at all as this would at least be able to provide them with some if not all of their physiological needs. Without these jobs, the Haitian workers quality of lives would deteriorate even more than they already have. This would render them incapable of caring for themselves and also their families.

Furthermore Maslow argues that all people would work towards achieving self-actualization, the highest tier in the hierarchy of needs and being able to satisfy a portion of the lowest tier would help the Haitian workers become one step closer to achieving their end goal hence binding them to their jobs. The bourgeois also dominates the proletariat by restricting the ways and places through which the proletariat can gain their income. Such as in the case of the workers in the Dominican Sugar Plantations, they are rewarded their wages based on weight however they are not able to gain access to the weights measured and it has been deemed that they are using corrupted practices and clientelism to determine the weights clocked in by the workers. Furthermore, the bourgeoisie dictates where the proletariat are to purchase their rations from by paying them in vouchers instead of money such that they are only able to patronize the shops inside the compounds in which goods are sold at a higher price. The Proletariat in current times have now started living in class consciousness and is now looking for ways to get out of these situations wherever they can. 'To have a class consciousness is to understand the social and economic characteristics of the class of which one is a member, and an understanding of the collective interests of their class within the given socio-economic and political orders.' This however means that they were living in a state of false consciousness which is harmful to themselves in the long run as they believe that they are an 'individual in competition with others of one's rank, rather than as part of a group with unified experiences, struggles, and interests.' Which in turn leads them to classify themselves as less than others and accept the reality that they are in instead of changing it.

Globalization has also proven to be a bane for developing countries through the exploitations of its resources by developed countries. Channeling cheap labor and an abundance of natural resources as factors of production, developed countries have long benefitted by improving their own economy at the expense of such exploited resources. It has also disempowered developing countries from in turn, developing their own industries, thereby hindering any possible increase in an increase in income and standards of living. However at the other end of the spectrum, globalization has benefitted the economy as it has reduced extreme poverty levels in Haiti to 24.7%. Yet, it still does not solve the problem of exploitation in Haiti and acts as a contributing factor to the reason why the Haitians are subjected to this treatment as it is a factor in the increase in the demand for such goods. Hence globalization makes the issue of exploitation worse.

In conclusion, Exploitation in Haiti is a pressing issue and clearly portrays the relationship between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie according to Karl Marx. Globalization acts as both a contributing factor whilst benefiting the economy on an external scale. As such further steps must be taken to curb this issue.