



Police or 'police' – Uniformed men carry out operations in Port-au-Prince and other cities, but no one can ever be quite sure who they are. When rebel gangs overran police stations at the beginning of 2004, they seized not only weapons but also police uniforms. Since then, the former rebels have taken on responsibility for 'security' in many parts of the country, mounting patrols and operating roadblocks, often in full view of the UN 'peacekeepers'.

Gunning down the poor

Many of the poorer districts of Port-au-Prince – the sprawling capital that is home to around two million people – continue to experience violent and murderous clashes. Over 400 people have been killed in the last five months. Police and UN patrols have exchanged fire with gunmen amidst the maze of narrow streets and alleyways that criss-cross the residential 'downtown' areas. The police and interim government representatives blame armed pro-Aristide gangs – known as *chimères* – who, they say, attack the police and UN troops when they are on patrol. On the other hand, spokespeople for Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas party, and some residents interviewed by the local media, say that police enter districts, shoot at anything that moves, and then arrest people for

no apparent reason. If local people are shooting at the police and the UN, it is to defend themselves from what are perceived as unprovoked attacks on communities traditionally loyal to former president Aristide.

The reality of the situation is further obscured by the allegation that some killings are the work of former soldiers dressed in police uniforms, while other incidents apparently involve former policemen who had been dismissed by the authorities and have subsequently turned their weapons against the interim government. Add to this mix, the activities of rival gangs fighting for control of certain districts, and the suggestion that some gang leaders are being paid by political and/or business leaders – André Apaid has admitted his relationship with Labanyè Robinson, a gang leader in the Boston section

of Cité Soleil – and a clear picture is hard to discern.

A recent editorial in the Haitian periodical, "Workers' Voice" offered the following interpretation: "While claiming to be waging war on the *chimères*, the police are taking it out on the poor. The principal victims of the *chimères* are the inhabitants of the poor neighbourhoods such as Bel Air, Solino, Cité Soleil, Village de Dieu... The population is caught in the crossfire be-

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tween the *chimères* who extort and repress them, and the police who shoot at them or, at best, arrest them." The editorial went on to note that the police leadership, and some so-called political leaders, perceive the *chimères* and the entire population of certain districts as one and the same thing, with certain elements even suggesting a final solution: "to set fire to these neighbourhoods in order to eliminate all the people that still live there."

Such a view of Haiti's poor – seeing them as a troublesome sector that needs to be 'controlled', rather than as the 85% of the population that remains excluded and effectively disenfranchised – presumably accounts for the tragic events of 28 February, when police opened fire on a peaceful pro-Aristide demonstration in Bel-Air, killing four people.

Report on a massacre

Independent human rights investigator, JUDY DACRUZ, reports on events at Rue Saint Martin in Bel Air/Delmas 2, Port-au-Prince, on 25 February, 2005

At least five persons were confirmed killed this morning after police raided Rue St Martin, located in the neighbourhoods of Bel Air and Delmas 2, despite the presence of UN force's Brazilian troops that were nearby to back up the operation.

According to residents, there was no clash between armed groups and the police at the time of the raid. Those killed included a mad man, a football trainer man who has been training children from the neighbourhood for several years, and a street seller who is described by his relatives as being slightly mentally handicapped.

After police left, the bodies of those killed lay lying in the street or in the alleys, as families and residents in shock reacted with anger and despair.

The population angrily blamed the authorities and the UN force (Minustah) for allowing the killings to take place and not protecting residents of poor neighbourhoods. In a spontaneous demonstration that took place after the police left, many asked for the resignation of interim Prime Minister Latortue shouting: "Twop san koule, fok Latoti ale" (Too much blood is being shed, Latortue must go).



Man lying dead in the street after an unprovoked attack by police in Rue Saint Martin, Port-au-Prince

One year after Aristide

An odd assortment of groups and social sectors came together in the anti-Aristide movement at the end of 2003 and early 2004. One year after the departure of the president and the collapse of his Fanmi Lavalas government, CHARLES ARTHUR looks at how these disparate forces have fared

The former soldiers

The clear winners, having secured one of their main demands to be paid ten years of back pay. On 28 December, the interim government announced it had taken the first steps to pay all 6,000 estimated members of the army that was demobilised in 1995. The payments will be made in instalments over the coming months, and will amount to a staggering total of US\$29 million. The government also pledged to pay the former soldiers' pensions and help them find jobs. Their other main ambition – to have the disbanded Army re-instated – is well on the way to becoming a reality, too. In de facto

control of most urban areas outside Port-au-Prince, and with no prospect of a disarmament campaign in sight, the former soldiers are well-placed to demand official recognition from the new government to be elected at the end of this year. Several hundred former soldiers have also been incorporated into the police force.

The Gonaives rebels

The formerly pro-Lavalas neighbourhood organisation, that changed sides in late 2003 after the murder of its leader and joined forces with former soldiers and other armed opposition groups, still

wields significant political power in the city of Gonaives. One leader, Winter Etienne, was appointed director of the Gonaives port authority by the interim government, a position with lucrative opportunities for contraband and corruption that undoubtedly helped with the funds needed to sustain the group's momentum. Its ambition to have a national presence led it to form a political party, the Front de Reconstruction Nationale (FRN), headed by the former insurgent leader, Guy Philippe. The FRN plans to contest the forthcoming elections, and in January Guy Philippe was one of a number of party leaders who welcomed Prime Minister Latortue's suggestion that the international community should allocate funds to help political parties participate in the electoral process.

The private sector

The country's main businesses – mainly involved in importing food and consumer goods, and in assembly production – have continued to prosper. Even if foreign investment is still deterred by the po-



They were similarly angry at the Minustah force and accused them of assisting the police in these and other killings that have been taking place for several months now. They described how Minustah's troops stood by as police raided Rue St Martin and side alleys, indiscriminately killing several persons.

The relationship of residents with Minustah military troops in these poor neighbourhoods has significantly deteriorated, as residents are increasingly accusing them of collaborating with authorities in the violations being carried out against them. Operations conducted by police in the past months in popular neighbourhoods have resulted in scores of killings carried out in complete impunity, and arbitrary arrests that have sometimes resulted in the death or disappearances of many in police custody. In addition, Minustah military troops have increasingly been carrying out numerous arrests on their own, further antagonising their relationship with the local population.



Dead man found with hands wired behind his back. La Saline, Port-au-Prince

litical instability and violence, this sector's political influence continues to grow. It has a big say in the direction taken by the interim government, and benefited directly from the tax holiday granted to businesses that suffered material losses during the tumultuous days at the end of February 2004. Leaders such as André Apaid and Reginald Boulos now occupy the power behind the throne, and will continue to pull strings for the foreseeable future. For those importers fearful of the competition represented by Haiti's membership of CARICOM, the ruptured relations between Latortue and the other Caribbean leaders, has been welcome news. Meanwhile, commercial and political links with the Dominican Republic continue to grow.

The 'opposition' parties

With new elections coming in which the participation of the Fanmi Lavalas party is highly unlikely, the political parties which failed to attract enough voters in previous elections are optimistically eyeing seats in the Parliament. The prospect of international funding for political parties taking part in the election adds to the 'bean-feast' mentality. However, the traditional parties show no signs of developing programmes that might attract a mass following, and are threatened by the increasing con-

rol over the country exerted by the private sector, and by the appearance of scores of new political parties.

The students

Students at the State University were at the forefront of the demonstrations against the Aristide government in early 2004, but in interviews with their spokespeople over the last year, there is a clear consensus on the failure of the transition. Most student leaders speak of their feeling of disappointment and of a growing disillusion with the interim government and the traditional political parties. Particular sources of complaint are the continuation of corrupt practices and the failure to address any of the problems experienced by the country's poor majority.

The non-governmental organisations

The hopes that this influential middle-class sector had that the removal of Aristide would be followed by economic development and political advances have been cruelly dashed. Some remain mute in the face of the ever-worsening situation afflicting the very people on whose behalf they are supposed to work. Others organisations remain locked in the anti-Aristide mindset, and remain loyal to the interim government even

as it lurches from one corruption scandal and human rights outrage to another. The Group of 184 under the leadership of the sweatshop bosses, André Apaid and Charles Henri Baker, is also still able to count on the support of some NGOs. A small group bravely stick to the line that neither Aristide nor the traditional parties nor the private sector can resolve the country's problems, and are instead trying to revive the progressive sector.

The media

The National Association of Haitian Media (Association Nationale des Médias Haïtiens, ANMH) – a grouping of media owners including most of the established radio stations – took an openly anti-Fanmi Lavalas position, and has continued in much the same vein, broadcasting propaganda instead of news. The quality of media output continues to decline, with increasing reliance on international news wires, and hardly any investigative reporting taking place at all. The few radio stations prepared to give voice to dissenting opinion are experiencing harassment, and, in some cases, direct repression. In areas outside the capital where illegal armed groups and former members of the disbanded Haitian army are the de facto security forces, journalists who report what they see suffer intimidation and threats.

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Campaign news

Cautious optimism about resolution of Grupo M/Levi's dispute

Supporters of the Sokowa union at the free trade zone in Ouanaminthe, north-east Haiti, are cautiously optimistic following a 5 February agreement negotiated with the Grupo M company that runs the CODEVI free trade zone.

In June 2004, over 350 workers – including all known leaders of the newly formed workers' union, Sokowa – were fired from the FTZ's two factories where around 1,000 workers were employed to assemble Levis jeans and t-shirts for export. After seven months of endurance and determination on the part of the union, supported by a vigorous international campaign to put pressure on Grupo M and Levis, an agreement has finally been reached.

The workers' organisation, Batay Ouvriye, whose representative sat in on the mediated negotiations, describes the agreement as "progress, a step forward", but warns that the workers must

remain vigilant so that the "sentences written on paper are fully applied". Batay Ouvriye believes that "the struggle will be hardest after the agreement is signed."

According to the document, signed after two days of talks, the CODEVI/Grupo M bosses accepted the immediate re-instatement of five union leaders, and the progressive re-hiring of the 150 or so other people who still want to return to work in the factory.

Equally important is the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the Sokowa union, and of its full rights under Haitian law.

A month after the agreement was signed, the five union leaders have been reinstated, but a shortage of orders from Levi's means that rather than taking back the sacked workers, Grupo M/Codevi is laying off still more of them!

The Haiti Support Group's Charles Arthur says Sokowa can't celebrate while more workers are

losing their jobs, and in any case is waiting to see the agreement implemented in practice, but added, "If this turns out to be a victory, we must recognise the value of the tremendous support and solidarity provided by people from many parts of the world. Great efforts have been made, both to provide funds, and to mount an effective campaign in support of the Sokowa union over those extremely difficult six months."

Referring to one aspect of the international solidarity campaign in support of Sokowa, Arthur said, "Considering the large numbers of workers fired back in June, and the length of time it took before the management agreed to negotiate, we're pretty sure the union would have 'gone under' if it were not for the support it has had from people in Britain – especially from No Sweat, the Labour Start campaign, and the Battersea and Wandsworth trade union council."

Media freedom under attack

At the end of January, the Haiti Support Group wrote to representatives of international freedom of expression bodies to raise the alarm about the situation of journalists in Haiti, and to call for immediate action to protect them from further attacks and threats.

The letters drew attention in particular to the interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue's public criticism of the Reuters correspondent in Haiti, Guyler Delva. On January 23, Latortue's office issued a statement describing the content of a recent wire report filed by Delva as "a shameful machination" and accusing Delva of providing "disinformation" about Haiti and of preaching to "his own political clique".

In letters to Ambeyi Ligabo, the UN's Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and to Eduardo Bertoni, the OAS Special Rapporteur on free expression, the Haiti Support Group wrote that Latortue's comments were "especially irresponsible and reckless at a time when journalists in Haiti face extreme danger from elements prepared to use violence to suppress the free exchange of information."

On 14 January, radio reporter Abdias Jean was covering a police operation in the Village de Dieu sector of Port-au-Prince when he was allegedly killed by police because he had witnessed earlier extrajudicial executions carried out by them. On the

same day, in another part of the capital, Claude Bernard Serant and Jonel Juste, two reporters from the newspaper, Le Nouvelliste, were beaten up and their lives were threatened by people claiming to support the former government.

Guy Delva is also head of the Association of Haitian Journalists, and has given outstanding service to the defence of press freedom over recent years. The Haiti Support Group has worked in support of the free exchange of ideas and information in Haiti for over a decade, and remains concerned that hard won freedoms are being rapidly eroded in Haiti, even while a United Nations stabilisation mission is present in the country.