



Photo by Leah Gordon

US soldiers look on as Haitians demonstrate in front of the National Palace

Problems not solved by US presence

THERE has been so little news in the mainstream media you could be forgiven for thinking that, with the return of President Aristide, all Haiti's problems are over. Unfortunately this is not so. The US-dominated multinational force is failing to achieve its UN-mandated task of establishing "a secure and stable environment".

Human rights violations carried out by the Haitian military and paramilitary gangs continue, although at a reduced rate. For example, in the Artibonite region the local Justice and Peace Commission receives almost daily reports of murders, beatings, arrests and threats. Elsewhere, among many reported cases are those of the deputy mayor of Mirebalais, known for his defence of human rights, who was found decapitated on 5 November, and of a woman in Fort-Liberté shot dead by a paramilitary attaché on 10 December. In the capital armed gangs are attacking homes and stores, and there is shooting at night in the poor areas where residents are again discovering corpses in the streets at daybreak.

The US troops in Haiti, now reduced in number to some 6,000, have shown themselves reluctant to intervene to protect members of the public—in many places quite the reverse is reported. Members of the elite US Special Forces are working in tandem with remnants of the Haitian military and FRAPH to harass and illegally arrest democratic activists.

Human rights groups have also criticised the US for its role in the re-deployment of known human rights abusers. A vetting committee composed of Haitian army officers and organised by the US military and embassy had, by the end of November, considered the cases of 1,350 sol-

diers and officers, and rejected only 150 of them. Some well-known killers and torturers have simply been reassigned to different units.

Plans to reduce the 7,000-strong Haitian military to 1,500 and to create a separate police force to eventually number some 5,000 have barely begun. The US-led multinational force has moved to deploy an interim police force composed of 'recycled' members of the existing Haitian force and new recruits from among the refugees at Guantánamo. This too has been criticised for being the same thugs in a different uniform.

Nor is there any good news about the economy that was devastated by the UN embargo and has shown few signs of recovery. Millions of dollars of international aid money have been promised but very little has actually made its way to Haitian state coffers. By mid-December the only financial aid to have materialised was \$82m. to be used to pay off the interest accruing from previous loans.

Under pressure from the US, Aristide has appointed a prime minister, Smarck Michel, who is considered sympathetic to the business class. He in turn has formed a cabinet that includes people who supported the coup, including one, the Public Works minister, who was a minister in the first illegal post-coup regime.

Many Haitians who felt the mere presence of a constitutional government would be sufficient to induce improvements in their way of life are growing disillusioned, but others have responded by organising to make their demands known. (see overleaf).

Grass roots organisation— Haiti's hope for the future

On February 7 1986 the dictator Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier fled from Haiti. Five years later to the day the country's first freely elected President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, took office. Both events were made possible by the mobilisation of Haiti's popular, grassroots organisations, and it is these groups again that hold the key to opening up the new situation for the benefit of the poor majority. As Haitians prepare to openly celebrate this double anniversary for the first time, following the demise of the military regime, CHARLES ARTHUR considers the prospects for Haiti's popular movement.

Demonstrations, strikes and road-blocks contributed to the fall of Baby Doc and ushered in a period when hundreds of grassroots organisations were formed or emerged from clandestinity. Progressive Catholic

Aristide—it was also meant to destroy Haiti's popular organisations.

The brutal terror unleashed by the Haitian military, Macoutes and FRAPH during the coup years claimed the lives of over 5,000 people. The murder of many leaders, activists and organisers from the popular organisations is the most obvious loss they have suffered. Organisational structures and networks collapsed as thousands of other activists fled the repression by boat or left their homes to hide in different areas of the country. Those who remained to carry on 'underground' were hampered by a pervasive military and attaché presence which restricted meetings and communications.

A sense of despair was only heightened by Aristide's essentially passive strategy of waiting for

the international community to act. Yet now, with the fall of the coup regime, the popular organisations have the chance to rebuild and resume their place at the forefront of the struggle for real democracy. In recent weeks, from Mare Rouge in the far north-west to Les Cayes in the south, there have been meetings and demonstrations. However two major obstacles to a successful regeneration can be identified.

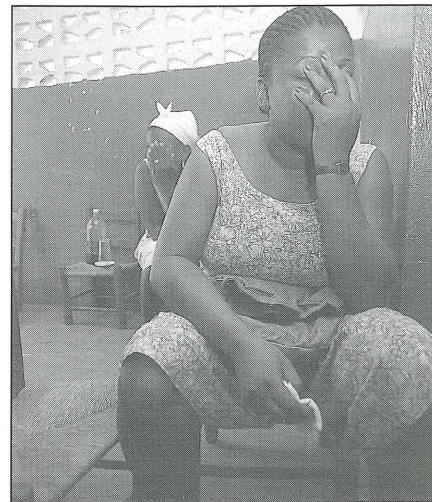
Firstly, there is the expectation that Aristide will make everything all right—that now he is back in the Presidential Palace, with US support and with millions of dollars of international aid money, he will be able to give everybody what they want. Aristide as a 'Messiah figure' not only encourages inactivity but also makes it difficult for the progressive organisations to mobilise around important issues such as the US military presence or the structural adjustment plan which Aristide apparently endorses.

Secondly, the US Agency for International Development and other US agencies have allocated massive amounts of aid to counter progressive nationalist and revolutionary movements in Haiti. This tactic, known as 'democracy enhancement' is more subtle than the CIA's promotion of FRAPH as a counterweight to the pro-Aristide Lavalas coalition. The money will be used to buy off local leaders and officials, and to fund stooge organisations and groups with no commitment to participatory democracy. These co-opted and 'ghost' organisations will be used to attract voters to US-favoured candidates in the upcoming elections, and to divide and confuse the popular camp.

As if these new problems were not enough to contend with, members of the popular organisations continue to be targeted by Haitian soldiers, and attaches. However two months since the restoration of formal democracy, numerous grassroots organisations have shown that they are alive and starting to kick.

The Ti Legliz (Little Church) movement of progressive Catholic base communities played an important role during the coup years helping victims of repression who had to go into hiding, and documenting human rights abuses. The experience of these years can be expected to have reinforced members' belief in the theology of liberation and to have deepened the split with the hierarchy which failed to condemn the violence.

Some leading members of the Ti Legliz appear to



Women at a rape crisis centre run by the women's group, Solidarite Fanm Ayisyen (SOFA)

have complete faith in Aristide's ability to provide solutions. Others though are preaching that there can be no reconciliation without justice, and one, Father Yvon Massak, said he would tell his congregation that the US forces are supporting FRAPH in order to destabilise the Aristide government. And, on 16 December, a mass sponsored by the Ti Legliz groups of St Jean Bosco, Aristide's former church, turned into a demonstration to government ministries and the National Palace to demand that criminals of the coup d'état be judged, that food prices be lowered, and that ministers with 'criminal' histories be ousted.

Women's organisations have taken up the issue of justice for those who suffered from the military and attachés' use of rape as a common method of torture and repression. On November 26 members of the women's group, Solidarite Fanm Ayisyen (SOFA),

marched to the Ministry of Justice to demand justice and reparation for all women victims of the coup d'état and for the disarmament of the paramilitaries. SOFA also demanded that the new Minister for Women's Affairs come up with programmes to help rape victims.

In November union members from Electricité d'Haiti occupied the new director's office and overcame the intervention of US troops to win their demand that he be replaced. The workers opposed the appointment of the new director, claiming he was corrupt and that he refused to fire attachés and other military supporters added to the payroll during the coup years. In spite of the efforts of US troops to end the workers' action, the government was obliged to make a new appointment.

New issues came to the fore when Haitian environmental groups joined with Greenpeace on December 2 to demand that the US troops in Haiti take back to the US the toxic ash from Philadelphia that was dumped on the beach at Gonaïves in 1987. Thousands of tons were dumped after General Namphy's regime accepted the import of what was termed 'fertiliser'. The beach is a virtual no-go area because of the toxicity of the ash. The Collective for the Protection of the Environment and Alternative Development, and the Federation for the Restoration of the Natural Environment also demanded that the US troops remove all toxic waste generated during the occupation and that Haiti sign anti-toxic waste agreements.

The heat of mobilisation was turned up higher in late December when thousands responded to a call by various working class organisations to demonstrate in Port-au-Prince to demand the complete and immediate abolition of the Haitian army.

These signs of renewed activity bode well for the coming year. Only time will tell how successfully the grassroots organisations can recover and meet the challenges ahead.

(Sources include: Haiti Info, IPS and other news agencies.)

USAID and other US agencies have allocated massive amounts of aid to counter progressive movements in Haiti



Demonstration in Grand-Goâve called by the grassroots organisation, Konbit Komilfo

Photos by Leah Gordon

RESOURCES

BOOKS

The Uses of Haiti —Paul Farmer (1994) "...a wealth of information, interpretation and analysis" of recent US policy in Haiti. One of the most readable and useful books yet. £13.00
The Rainy Season —Amy Wilentz (1989) Excellent account of the period 1986-88 and the popular struggle against 'Duvalierism without Duvalier'. £10.00
The Haiti Files: Decoding the Crisis —James Ridgeway (ed) (1994) A comprehensive collection of articles which blows the lid on the current crisis. £10.25
In the Parish of the Poor —Jean-Bertrand Aristide (1990) In the form of a letter to his colleagues in the Latin American Church, Aristide tells the long and bitter story of Haiti's recent history. £10.25
The Black Jacobins —CLR James (1938) The quintessential account

of Toussaint L'Ouverture and the successful slave revolution. "A masterpiece of historical scholarship, astute political analysis and narrative excitement." £12.50
Aristide: an Autobiography (1992) "The most profound and moving explanation to date of the emergence of Jean-Bertrand Aristide as a historic figure in a historic land." £12.50

REPORTS

Rape in Haiti. A Weapon of Terror (July 1994) Human Rights Watch/National Coalition for Haitian Refugees £4.00
Fugitives From Injustice: The Crisis of Internal Displacement in Haiti (August 1994) Human Rights Watch/National Coalition for Haitian Refugees £4.00
No Port in a Storm. The Misguided Use of In-Country Refugee Processing in Haiti (September 1993) Human Rights Watch/National Coalition for

Haitian Refugees £4.00
 All prices include post and packing. Cheques to be made payable to Haiti Support Group.

VISUAL DISPLAY AND SLIDES

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Quarters light up Haiti's darkest place

Leah Gordon

atch of scrub land in Port-au-Prince lies near the slums of La Cité Soleil. This vacant lot near exceptional but for a long, low, ing set a few hundred yards from the main road. It is neither particularly active nor exceptionally ugly—This is Fort Dimanche, Papa Doc's political prison and torture

his reign of terror thousands of prisoners' walls. Even military officers would not throw up at the sight of the torture victims inside. Under the leadership of Madame Max, an unassuming woman who was the sor-general of the Tontons Macoutes, the executions took place. The bodies were laid outside in the morning as Papa Doc apparently enjoyed watching the execution squads the order to

once described Fort Dimanche as the darkest places in all of Haiti. The prison sits like a black hole, "sucking up what pieces of life and throwing them down into its swallowing gorge. It feeds on the blood of the Haitian people and its excesses of cruelty leave the land in mourning."

was built in 1926 during the occupation of Haiti and was existing in Papa Doc's era. Its geographical position, close to the slums and the unrest, is probably the reason for its popularity with the forces of repression. Fort Dimanche was also the focus of anger and demonstrations as it was a symbol of the army, the police, the routes, of repression itself.

In 1986 a peaceful demonstration to commemorate a massacre twenty three years ago marched to Fort Dimanche. As thousands of people gathered to remember the victims who perished there, the dictatorship, troops opened fire, killing people and injuring many more. A man who was working for Radio Soleil and was broadcasting live from the prison, narrowly escaped with his life when the prison was open only to the public until the presidential inauguration.

chets to clear the scrub and the cut wood was being collected to be turned into charcoal. Rectangular outlines of new dwellings were being marked with posts and string. Parts of Fort Dimanche itself were being dismantled brick by brick, and then transported in hand-pulled wagons to the new sites in the ever-decreasing shadow of the dreaded building.

Nothing was being wasted. The iron bars from cell windows lay neatly in a pile to be sold as scrap metal. Even human skulls, the last remains of victims whose

shall we call it," a girl shouted out, laughing, "Cité Titid or Cité Kok Kalite," referring to Aristide and his election slogan.

No one would have dared to undertake such a symbolic land occupation in the capital during the coup years. Sadly this fabulous monument of hope and a new start in Haiti may not last. Evans Paul, the mayor of Port-au-Prince, is trying to put a halt to illegal building and squatting in the city. More significantly the land is owned by the Mevs, one of the richest of all the elite families, and in November the Village Voice re-



Photo by Leah Gordon

Dismantling Fort Dimanche

bodies had been dumped outside the prison walls, were being collected in a sack to be sold to voodoo priests. "We are from Cité Soleil and there is no more space to live there," said a young man, his face covered with a scarf as protection from the dust. "We are tired of waiting for miracles. We will build our own homes here."

Some families had already set up their living quarters inside the prison, their beds and possessions laid out in the old cells. Children swam and bathed in a massive water tank behind the Fort. Everyone working on this project seemed immensely proud of their new phoenix rising from the ashes of such an abysmal place. "What

ported that they plan to transform the area into an industrial park. The centerpiece of the development will be a coal-fired power station built by a Florida company and supplied by US coal. The project is now possible due to the structural adjustment plan that encourages the privatisation of state-run industries, including the electricity company.

There is also talk of turning the prison building into a memorial museum for all the Duvaliers' victims, but for now the people are deciding what is the most important use for it. Aristide once said that "the light of life does not shine on Fort Dimanche"—but now the light of life is shining from it.