

Military calls Clinton's bluff

Will the invasion of Haiti happen? Does anyone know? Does Clinton know? As we go to press, sources in Washington say it will be in mid-September at the earliest. The passing of the United Nations resolution authorising an invasion certainly increases the pressure on the Haitian military, and perhaps brings the restoration of President Aristide and democracy a step closer.

If a US-led invasion does go ahead, the whole nature of the Haitian crisis will change. The questions of the duration of the occupation, of an amnesty for the human rights violators in the military, of UN assistance to the Aristide government, of new elections, and a lot more besides, will come to the fore.

However a number of factors suggest that the current impasse may continue for some time yet. US public opinion remains opposed to military action. The Republican Party leadership, gung ho about waging war to protect oil interests in Kuwait, doesn't give a damn about the murder and rape of the Haitian people.

Then there's the drop in the number of refugees fleeing Haiti by boat. When there were hundreds leaving each day back in June and July the Clinton administration was motivated to do something, but the problem is over for now at least. The decrease has no doubt got a lot to do with the fact that would-be refugees face indefinite internment in the overcrowded and unsanitary camps at the US base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. It probably also has something to do with the US Embassy in

Port-au-Prince relaying detailed information to the Haitian military on the whereabouts of boats and refugees preparing to leave.

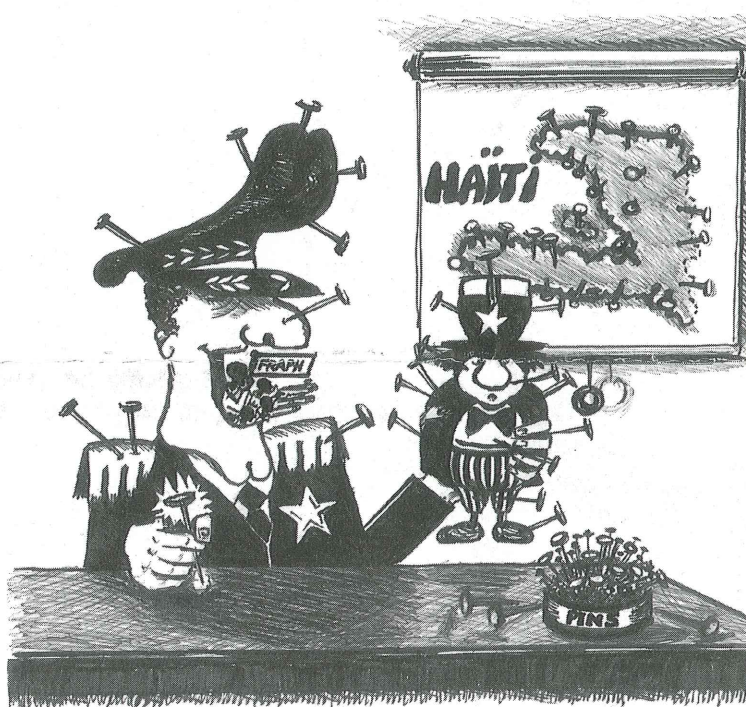
More than anything, what's maintaining the current deadly deadlock is the confidence on the part of the Haitian military that they can front out the threats and even solidify their position.

The idea that there would be serious military resistance to an invasion is just so much bunkum. But CNN and the other news networks lap up the staged demonstrations of armed volunteers practising on the capital's streets and broadcast the images back to the US where they bolster the right wing's anti-intervention case.

The Haitian military don't believe that the US, still less the international community, possess any determination to restore Aristide as President. The word 'bluff' has now entered the Creole language and the US and the UN have a serious credibility problem. The military and their allies believe they can stare down the international community until Aristide's term, which expires in February 1996, expires or becomes meaningless.

A worrying scenario is that General Cedras may voluntarily step down and be replaced by someone in his own likeness.

He has already declared he will resign next January. This would take the wind out of the sails of any invasion plan, and so maintain the military's, and



Haiti's military prepares for US invasion

Cartoon by Alex Milner

the de facto government's, control. The rumour mill in Port-au-Prince has it that such a plan has already been prepared for when and if the prospect of invasion becomes a reality.

The illegal government is also planning to hold elections by the end of the year which, although they would not be internationally recognised, would further cloud the issue.

De facto President Jonassaint may also be hoping to get the sanctions eased by highlighting the increasing hunger of poor Haitians. One diplomatic source in Port-au-Prince said the military "expect the impact will be so dreadful in terms of the country's poor that the American people will be revolted, particularly because

the military and their allies will appear to be unaffected." In July the de facto authorities began preventing the import of food shipments destined for delivery to the aid agencies which are feeding over a million Haitians each day.

As the United Nations prepare to send yet another representative to Haiti to issue yet another ultimatum, it is the Haitian people who continue to suffer the consequences of voting for the candidate of their choice.

Evans Paul, the mayor of Port-au-Prince, emerged from hiding after another attempt on his life to say, "If the vote of the people is not respected, how can people ever be expected to vote again." ■

from common crime to human rights violation

rape

by Anne McConnell

"Why did you go to vote?", are the words

yelled at his victim by a member of FRAPH, the military's death squad organisation, as he rapes her. The women's group, Kay Fanm (Women's House), in a recent report presented to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights state, "The number of rapes continues to increase every month. Many prisoners, illegally arrested, are forced to have sexual intercourse in exchange for their release. More and more frequent are cases of collective rape..."

Violence against women is not new. What is new is the use of specifically sexual violence perpetrated by agents of the de

women, and run by women.

Hence the formation of groups such as Kay Fanm, Solidarite Fanm Ayisyen (SOFA), and Seksyon Fanm within the Centre de Recherche et D'Action pour le Developpement. They have been involved in vocational skills training and basic health care, but, more importantly, in education programmes raising awareness among the female population regarding the role of women within society.

Women are the so-called 'poto mitan', meaning central pole or focal point for the Haitian household and all that goes with its upkeep. They have provided a crucial stability within a very unstable environment for generations. This has been largely taken for granted. Similarly the contribution of women in the political struggle—a constant reality in Haiti since independence—has remained largely unacknowledged. The difference today is that their po-



Crossing a bridge over the Artibonite river. In the countryside women have an even harder time than in the capital. The chefs de section (local military bosses) have persecuted women's organisations

facto government against women. Traditionally in Haitian society 'women and politics don't mix'. The now commonplace phenomenon of gang rape as a tool of political repression brings to the fore in a most tragic way the discrimination against women endemic within Haitian society.

The Lavalas movement, which brought Aristide to power in 1990, had not reckoned with the consequences of growing political awareness among women. In the euphoria which marked the period 1986-88 'even women' were finding a voice! In the proliferation of grassroots organisations which came into being following the overthrow of the Duvalier dynasty, groups were founded for

political activity has become increasingly overt and vocal.

Kay Fanm reports, "(traditionally) women are educated to be ashamed of the forms of violence directed specifically against them. Many victims have had a hard time saying they were raped. They prefer to keep silent."

Sexuality in Haiti is an area rife with taboo and therefore women are a prime target for exploitation.

Groups such as Kay Fanm are doing the all-important work of documenting and recording instances of rape and other forms of violence directed specifically at women. Needless to say, like many of the grassroots groups, their activities have been greatly curtailed since the coup. How-



The number of female headed households—especially in Port-au-Prince's slum areas—has increased significantly, as tens of thousands of men have been forced into hiding or have been assassinated

ever it is thanks to their existence and others like them that at least a minimum of support is being provided to victims in the form of group counselling and medical aid.

The call to "Liberte, egalite, fraternite" of 1789 provided a catalyst to the 'free coloureds' to oust the 'grand blancs'. The white French promulgators of the 'rights of man', welcomed their St Domingue 'brothers' into the new world order as equals. But they did not anticipate the final consequences of such a call to freedom—namely independence. As we know it was with great reluctance that France finally recognised the independent Republic of Haiti. Significantly 1986 marked the

beginning of Haiti's real independence from the legacy of colonialism. The liberation of women must be a part of this process.

As Claudette Werleigh, Haiti's Minister for Foreign Affairs, points out, the question is not, "Do Haitian women participate in politics? We know they do! The real issue is fighting all sexist discrimination and struggling for equal opportunities..."

So as with any social

Photos by Leah Gordon

upheaval where the whole fabric of the society is put into question, the skeletons in the cupboard will out! The phenomenon of rape as a tool of political oppression is a symptom of the delinquent regime which holds power in Haiti today. Ironically however the transition of rape from status of 'common crime' to human rights violation has put the spotlight on the issue of women's rights in a way unprecedented in the history of Haiti. If the suffering of women for the sake of change and democracy alongside their tortured brothers is not to be in vain, this issue must be addressed. ■

"The policeman beat me and called me Lavalas. He then began pulling at my clothes, and I started to scream even louder. He told me to shut up and threatened to kill my children. I was then dragged into a corner of the house and he continued to beat me and rape me. I felt humiliated and feared he would kill me and my children anyway....Several minutes later my husband walked in and they immediately handcuffed him and took him away." The twenty-eight year old was at home when police and soldiers arrived to arrest her husband, a member of the pro-Aristide party, the FNCD. August 6 1992. from "Rape in Haiti: A Weapon of Terror" - Human Rights Watch/NCHR, July 1994

"Seven armed civilians stopped us. They surrounded us. One guy hit me with the butt of his gun and told me to lie down. They called us Lavalas, said we had money and asked why we were out on the street so late at night. There was a blackout. Then, the one who had hit me with the butt of his gun grabbed me by the collar, threw me down, and raped me. Three of the men raped me and four raped my friend." The seventeen year old and her friend were leaving a Port-au-Prince party in mid-September 1993. From "Rape in Haiti: A Weapon of Terror" Human Rights Watch/NCHR, July 1994

**BOUKMAN EKSPERYANS
IN BRITAIN**

A raging success!

The first performance in London by the Haitian roots music band, Boukman Eksperyans, was a raging success. The concert, organised by the Haiti Support Group, attracted an enthusiastic crowd of several hundred. A British audience dancing on a Monday night—it was more like Haiti than Highbury!

The band enjoyed themselves despite anxieties caused by the US government's eleventh hour refusal to issue entry visas which forced them to cancel a 25-date tour. With all flights to Haiti suspended, the band were stuck in limbo until they were able to arrange to go to Jamaica where they are to begin recording their next album. Manager Dan Behrman later wrote to the Haiti Support Group to say,

"Everyone in your organisation did a superb job, we liked it very much...we were delighted and impressed by the way in which you handled everything."

While in London the band took the opportunity to explain the significance of roots music in the struggle against dictatorship in Haiti with interviews for Radio Five Live, BBC World Service, GLR, The Guardian, and

The European. Singer Marjorie told the World Service programme, Newshour, "You have to live in Haiti to feel the pressure but music helps people to have hope. We are not afraid to tell the truth in our music. We don't accept killing or stealing. The Haitian people have hope. They have the courage to fight against the 'machin enfenal' (the dictatorship)."

Guitarist Daniel added, "The music is our way of communication. When you're talking about justice, about love, for them (the military) it is like you're pointing a finger at them. Whenever you make someone think for one second, they feel threatened. They feel insecure with this music because it brings people together."

On the question of a US invasion the band's founder, Lolo, doubted that it would solve Haiti's problems. "The US will probably replace the guys in power with another set of puppets. When American troops occupied Haiti between 1915 and 1934 they achieved nothing, apart from helping to create the very institutions with which we have so many problems—the state and the army." ■

President uses TV to sell Haiti invasion

Closedown threat to Haiti media

Clinton condemns expulsion of Haiti human rights team

FROM JAMES BONE IN NEW YORK AND OUR FOREIGN STAFF
President Clinton said and we came back. He added that the...
represent the plans to the Sec... on Friday.

Haitian generals put on a show of force for foreign journalists

Maggie O'Kane
in Port-au-Prince

Yesterday's manoeuvres attracted the largest crowd since they began four days ago after the military ruler, Lieutenant

Port-au-Prince declares state of siege as N

Puppet president invokes voodoo gods to save Haiti



Poor wait for US invasion to topple military regime

Publish and be Damned

The only thing worse than no press at all is too much of it—an axiom surely borne out by coverage of Haiti in recent weeks. After months, even years, of ignoring the issue, Haiti was suddenly “hot” this summer.

However, much of the reporting bore the hallmarks of the worst excesses of the time of year—what the media label ‘the silly season’. The most obvious deficiency has been context. The fact that President Aristide was democratically elected by an overwhelming majority, improved the human rights situation immeasurably in just seven months of power, and began the long process of rebuilding Haiti, has been largely ignored in recent coverage.

Far more important to harness all the myths and stereotypes which, if repeated often enough, start to pass for facts. Consider this little gem from Peter Hitchens in the *Daily Express*. Aristide he says is an “anti-American rabble rouser who likes to threaten people with ‘necklacing’”. He goes on, “Haiti is the ultimate proof of the sad fact that some people are unable to govern themselves.” Poor Haiti, poor Hitchens.

Almost as ridiculous was the London *Evening Standard*’s well-intentioned but over-the-top report on August 4 which billed their man as “the first Western journalist to see the new killing fields at Titanyen.” This waste ground outside Port-au-Prince,

where death squad victims are occasionally left and where each week the city hospital morgue dumps unclaimed bodies, has been regularly visited by journalists for years.

Most of the journalists covering Haiti of late have given full reign to their laziness as well as their ignorance. If you venture no further than the Oloffson Hotel’s mahogany bar (carved incidentally out of the full-size billiard table the American GIs left behind when their last occupation ended in 1934), it’s not unnatural to conclude that everyone in Haiti is against an invasion.

Aubelin Jolicoeur, the Oloffson fixture and gossip-columnist portrayed as Petit Pierre in Graham Greene’s *The Comedians*, has done more for General Cedras’ public relations war than anyone actually in the military government. Anyone who has met him could detect his voice and political agenda in half the quotes used. One described President Aristide as a cross between “Idi Amin and the Singing Nun”, and another, the projected invasion as “Somalia Mark Two but with voodoo.”

The old journalistic hands knew better and showed it in getting out into Cite Soleil (the Port-au-Prince slum that remains an Aristide power base), and to the countryside. David Adams excelled himself in *The Times* outlining the scale and the nature of the resistance to military rule. He com-

pared Evans Paul (mayor of Port-au-Prince) and other Aristide grassroots activists to the 17th century “maroons”—slaves who escaped from the plantations to hide in the mountains from where they plotted the independence revolution.

Ed Vulliamy showed all his Bosnian experience in his first visit to Haiti for *The Observer*. Penetrating Cite Soleil and watching a World Cup match interspersed with slogans such as “No to Occupation”, he elicited this remark from Edvelt, a young grassroots organiser. “We want to see an invasion by the US if it means the restoration of democracy and even if it means heavy loss of life among our partisans who would assist it.”

Newsweek kept up its enhanced reputation for Haiti coverage with a piece on August 8. The title said it all: “Notes from the Underground”. The subtitle was even more explicit: “Haiti: Trying to live long enough to topple the junta.” The article was a short but powerful analysis of the scale and success of the resistance, and the art of ‘marronage’—hiding. The piece included a mocking jibe from marronage’s prime exponent, Evans Paul. “We resist. We are not the ones that are losing.”

Finally there was the strange tale of *The Guardian*. Last year the liberal daily sacked the doyen of the Haiti press corps, Greg Chamberlain. This year it is paying the price. A piece by the

unknown Anthony Milne (written from Britain) cast doubt on Aristide’s popularity and made an unforgivable factual error, claiming that the turnout in the December 1990 election was just 55% when in fact it was over 70%. Then there was *The Guardian*’s new star, Maggie O’Kane. Having become British journalist of the year for her reporting of Bosnia she was dispatched to Port-au-Prince to await the invasion. She kicked off with half the front page on July 30 to report nothing more than the departure of the last Air France flight out of Haiti. The piece looked more like the opening shot of the press award season than any serious effort to report Haiti, a fact borne out by a flawed, stereotypical editorial on the same day. The latter began, “Haiti is a hell hole of modern plagues and ancient curses”, but made no effort to analyze who might be responsible for Haiti’s condition or image. The media would be high up the list of culprits.

by Philip Wearne

Clinton pulls back from Haiti invasion