



Haiti's new police on duty at the May Day demonstration in Port-au-Prince.

Photo by Leah Gordon

Piggy in the middle

"The first stage was when the police feared the people. The second stage that we are in now is the police starting to use repression against the people." Father Daniel Roussiere, of the Gonaives Justice and Peace Commission, believes that in the third stage the new Haitian National Police will become a replica of the military it was designed to replace.

The force, now some 5,000 strong, was recruited and trained by US officials over the last year. Initially the newly deployed police, aware of the deep-seated popular antipathy to armed men in uniform, went about their duties almost timidly. This itself caused some frustration amongst citizens who were hoping the new force would move against criminal elements, and also disarm the supporters of the former regime.

Instead, as the new recruits have grown in confidence, they have started to exhibit the same behaviour and carry out some of the same abuses as their predecessors: bearing arms when off-duty and using them to settle personal disputes, excessive use of force, and heavy handed crowd control.

According to Father Daniel, the blame lies firmly with the US who, he says, monopolised the recruitment process, and then trained the recruits without regard to human rights and without establishing a system of accountability. This view was echoed by a Canadian police trainer who told the Toronto Star that whereas the few Canadian trainers were trying to build a "community-based" force, the US is creating a trigger-happy, military-style force.

In spite of this unpromising indoctrination, some of the young recruits do aspire to serve a responsible force with a role to play

in guaranteeing basic freedoms. At the end of April, in a largely unreported incident, a group of police circled around the National Palace to protest against the selection of former army personnel for officer positions.

During the month of May it seemed that the struggle over the future direction of the police force entered a new phase. In Port-au-Prince six officers were assassinated in separate attacks, all following the same pattern: new police, plainclothes, on their way home. President Preval claimed it was a campaign aimed at destabilising his government.

Former President Aristide offered a more nuanced interpretation, telling the Haitian Press Agency, "If, in the past, they used the Army to marginalise the people, today they believe it is necessary to have a military police to do the same thing. And since they can't do this, they kill the police to create a division between the police and the population."

The US has 'invested' US\$64 million in a five year police training programme and wants a force to guarantee its interests. President Preval too, lacking the popularity and trust enjoyed by Aristide, needs the police to maintain order as he carries out a structural adjustment programme. The Haitian bourgeoisie lives in paranoid fear of a bloody, people's uprising, a fear heightened by the abolition of the military that traditionally acted as its guard-dog. If the UN military leaves Haiti, as it is scheduled to at the end of June, the police will be expected to ensure there is no re-run of 1791.

In all these scenarios the new Haitian police, 'the piggy in the middle', will find itself in an antagonistic relationship with the peasants and urban poor.

Radio Haiti Inter



On the air at Haiti Inter

Back in business... j

'Knowledge is power' is a favoured maxim of those trying to build a society based on the mobilisation and participation of the majority. In Haiti, where perhaps as few as 20% of the population can read, radio is of crucial importance in the struggle to inform and so empower the poor. The story of Radio Haiti Inter illustrates both the progress made, and the continuing problems facing progressive radio in Haiti.

Founded in 1935, Radio Haiti Inter set new standards in broadcasting under director Jean Dominique, who took over the station in 1967. In the early 1970s Haiti Inter began to take advantage of the limited liberalisation of the Baby Doc Duvalier regime. The station pioneered the broadcasting of domestic, as well as foreign, news, and the use of eyewitness reports. Another innovation was the introduction of broadcasts in Creole, the language spoken by the country's poor majority. The Duvalier dictatorship responded in 1980 by sending its paramilitary force, the Tontons Macoutes, to ransack the station, and it was forced to shut down.

Under attack

In March 1986, a month after the fall of Baby Doc, Jean Dominique returned from exile to be welcomed at the airport by a crowd of over 60,000 supporters. Haiti Inter resumed transmission, but over the next five years was attacked six times by the military because of its determination to report the unfolding struggle for a participatory democracy. Then came the September 1991 military coup d'etat against President Aristide. Soldiers shot at the station building, gunmen broke into Jean Dominique's house, and Haiti Inter closed again.

Now the station is back on the air and is quickly regaining its reputation as the best purveyor of up to the minute news and in-depth analysis. The establishment of democratic government and the abolition of the Haitian military should mean that Haiti Inter can broadcast free from state-sponsored repression. However, the destruction of the station's AM transmitter by a group of armed men in June 1995 serves as a stark reminder that there are still enemies at large in the country. (This set-back to the plans for AM broadcasting means that Haiti Inter is restricted to the FM wavelength. FM produces a strong, clear signal but one that cannot cross mountain ranges, severely limiting the number of potential listeners in Haiti.)

In common with other progressive commercial media outfits, Haiti Inter is facing serious difficulties with the generation of income. In spite of all the political upheaval of the last decade, the country's wealth continues to be concentrated in the hands of a very small elite, and it is to this sector that the commercial media must look for advertising revenue. That this is the very same sector that opposed the movement towards democracy in the 1980s, and supported the 1991 coup d'etat, presents progressive ventures such as Radio Haiti Inter with a big problem.

Business boycott

Speaking to Haiti Briefing in February, Jean Dominique admits his station is feeling the pinch. "We are with the poor people, those 'in the street', and because of that, advertising, which is our sole source of revenue, is nearly completely absent. Five years ago we were number one in terms of advertising. Now

we are working with only 10% of our capacity. There is a practical ceiling on the advertising community, and we are suffering from a lack of demand. Scanning the FM dial, it is clear that Haiti Inter is on the air for only a few hours. In any commercial, the recent 2000, runs ads throughout the year. In 2000, inaugurated last year, Leopold Berlangier, a close ally of Jean Bazin. Bazin was the US ambassador in the 1990 election, and Prime Minister. He is de facto regime during the election. Jean Dominique hopes that, in the future, onism, the business sector will be able to stand that this is very bad for Haiti Inter. "I hope that the station can stand that this is very bad for Haiti Inter. "I hope that the station can stand that this is very bad for Haiti Inter."

● At the end of May, Haiti Inter received Action for Press Freedom and Action for Press Freedom. They expressed their concern about a recent attack on the station against the local press. The station was vandalised against New Mirebalais, which had just been destroyed in the Central Plateau. The station was destroyed of materials, and the station was destroyed of solar panels. There have been attacks against Radio Lumiere, the station in the south of Haiti. The attack against Radio Lumiere was by Jean Daryl Laraques, who was killed in Port-au-Prince on Saturday.



Photo by Leah Gordon

just

15% of our advertising cancelled by the business offering."

noticeable that whereas hours at a time without opened station, Vision its transmissions. Vision October, is headed by political ally of Marc favoured candidate in the Minister representing the coup period.

spite of political antagonism will eventually turn instead they will come to understand commercial policy. We are number one with mean business and not deal with a radio station.

Haiti's Group of Reflection (GRALIP) expressed outbreak of harassment. GRALIP noted several acts in Vision radio station in men ransacked the and stole the inverters and also been acts of banditry the AM evangelical Baptist Haiti. GRALIP also noted Caribes correspondent, was shot and wounded day May 11.

PRIVATISATION: Aristide speaks, Parliament to vote

The big guns have opened fire in the continuing battle over the privatisation of Haiti's state enterprises. Former President Aristide broke a three-month silence in early May when he spoke to the Haitian Press Agency. "When we look at the effects privatisation has had on other countries, it has not brought improvement for citizens in any country."

He went on to say that privatisation is a two-headed trap dividing those who are working for the same democracy, and asked the country's leaders to listen to the Haitian people and not be swayed by the temptation of building a democracy for the people without their participation. These fine words outraged many in Haiti only too aware that it was Aristide himself who when President agreed to go ahead with the structural adjustment programme.

At the end of May, after four weeks of behind-closed-doors negotiations between the Haitian government, and World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) officials, the director of the IMF, Michel Camdessus, flew into Haiti to meet President Preval. After the meeting they released a joint press statement announcing they had come to an "identical view of the upcoming structural adjustment and economic reform programme for modernising Haiti's public enterprises."

Attention then shifted to the Haitian Parliament, called into extraordinary session at the end of May by President Preval to vote, among on other things, on privatisation. Although dominated by the Lavalas coalition that backs Preval, some leading MPs voiced their opposition. Senator Samuel Madistin, vice president of the Senate, said "I am extremely hostile to the privatisation programme of public enterprises." Lower House President, Fritz Robert St-Paul, said a meeting with Camdessus had failed to persuade him that privatisation was needed.

Popular organisations Meanwhile a dozen peasant, grassroots, union and student organisations wrote a letter to the legislature asking them "not to vote on the privatisation law of certain public enterprises that could cost 15,000 state employees their job." These organizations, including the National Popular Assembly, the Collective Mobilization Against the IMF, the National Union of Haitian Schools, and the Tet Kole peasant movement, called on the MPs to "respect the will of the population and not succumb to the pressure of either international agencies or the current government."

At the time of writing Parliament had not yet voted. Source: Haitian Press Agency



Anti-privatisation demonstration in Port-au-Prince on May Day. Photo by Leah Gordon.

World Bank official lays down the line

Javed Burk, a World Bank vice-president responsible for programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean, visited London in May. As chairman of the Bank's Task Force on Social Development, Burk has made three trips to Haiti during the last two and a half years. At a meeting with British non-governmental organisations Christian Wisskirchen of the Haiti Support Group asked him about the Bank's plans for Haiti.

Burk's ideological approach was clear and his answers frank. He said he was one of those who believed that it was preferable to have the economies of countries, like Haiti, run by "vicious private sector companies" rather than by "inefficient governments". His subsequent comments left little doubt that the previous Haitian government of President Aristide was counted in the latter category.

Regarding Aristide's current role, Burk was very unhappy, saying he was behaving in an "unhelpful" manner by criticising plans for privatisation. In contrast, Burk expressed respect for the new President, Rene Preval, who he has met repeatedly. He stated that there are three important issues for Haiti's economy: power, ports and transport, but made no mention of agriculture, the livelihood of over 70% of the population. Incredibly, given the continuing argument over the issue in Haiti, he said there was "no dispute" that power and the ports needed to be run by the private sector. He summed up with a comment that is perhaps typical of the World Bank's arrogant and paternalistic attitude, "Don't worry, we are looking after Haiti".

Boukman Eksperyans back in Britain

Boukman Eksperyans, one of Haiti's most popular racines (roots) bands, are returning to play in the UK in June. On Saturday, 22nd June, they will take part in Liverpool's annual AfricaOye festival, in the afternoon in Princes Park, Toxteth, and then, that evening, at Hardy's club, Liverpool 1. On Sunday, 23rd June, they play the Royal Festival Hall, South Bank Centre, London.

Well-known for their outspoken opposition to the post-Duvalier dictatorships, Boukman Eksperyans have continued to speak out against corruption and injustice. In April, Lolo Beaubrun, the band's founder and lead singer, spoke to Haiti Briefing about the political situation since the return to democratic government. "During the coup a devil was a devil and everyone could see that. But now people are carrying on the same way under the cover of democracy. This is much more dangerous." Lolo spoke of his disillusionment with the Lavalas politicians who now control the Haitian government at national and local level. "The Lavalas people have stolen money from the community. The same thing that Duvalier was doing, and maybe worse. More and more people think that now... You recognise a tree by its fruit." He continued, "The state money does not reach the peasants in the mountains.

There is a lot of magouy (corruption) and racketeering. We can't continue like this. For example, if (President) Preval is talking about re-establishing the authority of the state, then he has to arrest peo-



Lolo Beaubrun.

Photo by Leah Gordon

ple. Aristide told me that when someone is arrested the judges release them. So arrest the judge. If the judge goes to jail something will change... They must arrest people around Preval who are responsible for racketeering, for taking the money that belongs to the people."

In recent months Lolo and other members of Boukman Eksperyans have been

out talking to people on the streets of Port-au-Prince's shantytowns, and up in the mountains of the countryside. Referring to the sense that Lavalas has betrayed the peoples' hopes for real change through formal political channels, Lolo said, "We are working with popular organisations to take them out of politics, but to still try to make concrete what they are doing.

They need work. People are dying of simple illnesses. We are pulling out of politics, and it is making the politicians afraid."

It's for this reason, Lolo believes, that attempts have been made to link him with a now almost mythical 'Red Army'. At the end of last year the activities of armed gangs, in particular in the Cite Soleil area of the capital, made the news after a number of violent exchanges with the new Haitian police force. Whether these gangs, some calling themselves 'the Red Army', others just given that label by the media or the rumour mill, have any particular political orientation is questionable. For Lolo, the 'Red Army' concept stinks of a CIA strategy

designed to divide and control the people of the poorer slum areas. "It's a pretext to kill people, to get into the ghettos and kill the leaders of the popular organisations. They say I am the chief of the Red Army and that I give them arms, but the people of Haiti do not believe it because they know our force is not guns but the spirit."

From the horse's mouth

US Army Captain Lawrence Rockwood, who was court-martialled following his attempt to check conditions in the Port-au-Prince prison in September 1994, addressed a Haiti Support Group meeting in May. He confirmed many long-held suspicions about the US role in Haiti.

Rockwood was a counter-intelligence officer working on the Central America region for the four years preceding the US intervention in Haiti. From his experience during this time he said it was clear that the liberation theology current within the Catholic Church was considered to be the gravest threat to US interests in the area. In this context he claimed there is little doubt that the US backed the 1991 military coup d'etat against the priest and president of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

This background, Rockwood continued,

explains why the US intervention in Haiti in 1994 failed in its stated aim of achieving a safe and secure environment. US Army officers in Haiti had no enthusiasm for their role in restoring President Aristide whom they continued to view as an enemy of US interests. They therefore had no inclination to jeopardise the lives of the troops under their command by instituting an effective disarmament campaign.

In fact, Rockwood claims, the biggest threat perceived by the US Army in Haiti came not from the thugs and gangsters in the Haitian military nor other armed supporters of the Cedras regime. What worried US Army officers most was the potential for US military casualties resulting from their task of defending the Haitian elite from expected attacks by the rest of the population.

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