Fed up with violence

In Creole, there are many ways to express a dilemma. But these days, most Haitians would probably tell you that they are “caught between two fires.”

One fire is the ‘forces of darkness’, the legions of former Tonton Macoutes, soldiers, paramilitary henchmen, and lumpen hooligans, supplemented by dozens of hardened criminals repatriated from the US, who are largely responsible for growing numbers of hold-ups and murders, both criminal and political. Their crime wave is generally referred to as the “insecurity.”

The other fire is the ‘forces of order’, or the Haitian National Police, in particular its heavily-armed Corps for Intervention to Maintain Order, or CIMO. This force is responsible for growing numbers of savage crackdowns, often against the very people who are victims of the “insecurity.”

Worst of all, when the two forces are not conveniently avoiding each other, they seem to be working together.

Recent days offer an alarming sequence of events in Port-au-Prince which reveal just how difficult the Haitian people’s dilemma has become.

On April 9, five bandits held up a CIMO policeman near Martissant 23. There was an exchange of gunfire in which the policeman was killed and a bandit was wounded in the leg. All the assailants escaped. Shortly thereafter, the CIMO arrived in the area and, according to area residents, began a lethal crackdown. The hardest hit neighbourhood was Fontamara.

“The residents said there was a lot of gunfire and a lot of searches,” said Delouis Felix, a former MP...who testified that the police killed his 22-year-old friend. “These young men were passing by and the police made them lie down on the ground and then they shot them... There were other people killed and thrown into the back of trucks. It was like a curfew; by 6 pm, there was absolutely nobody in the streets of Fontamara. The area was completely traumatised.”

Area residents say that the police killed four young men. But the Port-au-Prince Police Chief categorically denied that there were any “concrete cases” of witnesses or families coming to the police to report deaths. “Do they expect us to go to them after what they did to us?” asked one outraged area resident who was afraid to give his name, [...]

In fact, the gulf between the police and the people has grown tremendously since the force was rolled out four years ago, and the police hierarchy is particularly distrusted. “After we uprooted a cancerous Army which was spreading rot, you stabbed us in the back by creating this police corps which has the same cancer at its head, which is what has turned it into a headquarters for all kinds

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WAR IN EUROPE — WHAT THE HAITIAN PAPERS SAY

Le Nouvelliste - 31 March 1999: Will the NATO operation in peace in Yugoslavia be limited to limited air strikes? After one week of bombing, declarations of support for the Serbs are increasing. The objective of the NATO air strikes against Serbia is to weaken the military capacity of the Serbs and to provide a signal to other nations. The analyst says that the NATO ground troops will be to deploy. These analyses use the example of Saddam Hussein, who holds the record for being the re-creation of the mass action... There is no guarantee that the Serbs will be relieved of the war.

Haïti en Marche - 8 April 1999: For several reasons, the NATO attack against Serbia has certainly not met with unanimous approval in Haiti, with the most people holding a deep-seated aversion to the North American military. But especially because President Slobodan Milosevic is a "national". This attacks on Serbia have been a big subject of the NATO intervention and the federalization of the Allied forces recognizes that the Serb anti-aircraft defenses are well-organised, and what is more, that a deployment of ground troops will not be a cakewalk. There is a great risk that the Serbs will burn like a burning fire.

Have you ever been Ekspersyanised?

by Mike Jones

Bookman Ekspersyans are a true band. They are an example of the most electric bands in the world, both on disc and in live performance. Their music is played on keyboards, drums, and bass. The guitarist sounds like a wild, black style, with the percussive rhythms of Haitian groups. They are often described as 'revolutionary' and 'politicized'.

Bookman Ekspersyans - Revolution, Tuff Gong International

Bookman Ekspersyans have two albums, 'Revolution' and 'Tuff Gong International'. Their music is a mixture of electronic, jazz, and reggae influences. The group has been active since 1990, and has toured extensively in the Caribbean and Europe.

Bookman Ekspersyans

Revolution - the new CD by Bookman Ekspersyans.

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Updates

CAMPAIGN FOR THE RETURN OF THE FRAPH/FADH DOCUMENTS

A little over a year since it began, the international campaign to lobby the US to return Haitian army and death squad documents stolen in 1994 has received the backing of thousands of individuals both in the US, in Haiti, and here in Europe. As of the end of April, over 4,000 people in Europe had signed the petition, including 1,523 from France, 852 from Belgium, 753 from Ireland, and 732 in England, Scotland and Wales.

At the United Nations Human Rights Commission session in Geneva in April, Adama Dieng, the Commission's independent expert on Haiti, renewed his appeal for the return of the documents in their entirety:

'Today, there is unanimous opinion that these documents, including audio and video cassettes of torture sessions as well as photos, would be a valuable source of information for the prosecution of those responsible for serious crimes committed during the coup regime... Despite my appeals and the persistent requests of the Haitian authorities, supported by the UN Civilian Mission in Haiti, by 69 members of the US Congress, three Nobel Prize winners, dozens of NGOs, and thousands of individuals across the world, the Haitian people are still waiting for these documents which constitute an essential part of their History. This Commission has the duty and the obligation to invite the United States to return, without delay and without deletions, the said documents.'

As we go to press, it is hoped that the full UN Human Rights Commission will be allowed to vote on a resolution calling for the return of the FRAPH/FADH documents, and that it will vote in favour.

DUVALIER TO ESCAPE JUSTICE?

The Paris-based Committee to Bring Duvalier to Judgement is continuing the process of compiling legal cases against the former Haitian dictator, Jean-Claude Duvalier, for crimes against humanity. However, a court hearing on the status of his residency in France was held in March, but Duvalier failed to appear, and the hearing was postponed until May.

In April, the Committee to Bring Duvalier to Judgement deployed the reticence of the French authorities to trace and detain the former dictator, and denounced the preparations being made for him to escape justice by leaving France for another country.

In Haiti, the news of the moves to judge Duvalier has been welcomed at a time when violence and human rights abuses are again on the rise. Former Tonton Macoutes, and soldiers from the now-abolished Haitian army, are believed to be responsible for a recent spate of murders and shootings in the Haitian capital. In March, Senator Yvon Toussaint was shot dead, and Pierre Esperance, the Treasurer of the Haitian Platform of Human Rights Organisations, was shot and badly wounded.

The Committee to Bring Duvalier to Judgement web pages index (in French) is at http://www.chrd.org.in.html

APN TO BECOME A POLITICAL PARTY

After struggling for twelve years as one of Haiti's leading popular organisations, the National Popular Assembly (APN) has chosen to transform itself into a "people's political party" and to participate in upcoming elections in Haiti.

The vote to make the leap from mass organisation to political party came during the APN's Fourth National Congress held from March 26-28 at the Domaine Ideale Hotel in Carrefour. Over 500 delegates - mostly peasants, workers, small merchants, and students - gathered for three days of workshops and general assemblies in which they hammered out the new structure and political direction of the organisation.

"It is time for the APN to position itself to be able to participate in any elections where it judges the conditions are correct and where it can advance the cause of the masses," said APN spokesperson Ben Dupuy. "For that to be possible, the APN must transform itself, not into a traditional political party, but into a party of the people, which will continue to tie its fate to that of the masses and struggle for popular power, which is the one condition necessary to bring real change to the country."

APN leaders consider participation in upcoming elections necessary, but only at certain levels.

"We are not going to enter the race for seats in the Senate or Chamber of Deputies," Dupuy said. "Even if one were elected, there is little one could do there under the present conditions."

Instead the APN will offer candidates for certain municipalities and, above all, the Territorial Collectives, which direct local affairs and elect the members of the Permanent Electoral Council, which will conduct the year 2000 presidential election. It will be difficult for Washington to employ its usual tactic of buying votes in these local races, since APN militants are well-known, proven and trusted in many rural areas and cities.

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