

Haitian Stasis

BY PAUL LS. CASSAGNOL

The scarcity of hard currency and deep cuts in foreign assistance have brought Haiti to a point of complete economic stagnation. Hurricane David and poor crops have curtailed exports drastically. What mother nature has left undone the president has completed, diverting internal revenues from the treasury, which are converted into available dollars and transferred to private bank accounts abroad. At a popular estimate the Duvalier family is worth more than \$500 million, cash.

Firm evidence of treasury looting was first provided by World Bank Report No. 1243-HA of September 25, 1976, revealing that \$45.5 million in government revenues for fiscal 1975 were unbudgeted and could not be accounted for. In 1977, according to a report prepared by the U.S. embassy staff in Port-au-Prince and published by the U.S. Department of Commerce in *Foreign Economic Trends* (No. 77-148), the "unbudgeted receipts amounted to 60 million in FY/77 and [were] projected at 69 million in FY/78." Now Jack Anderson provides an update. "Baby Doc," he says in his column of March 29, "has been stealing millions of dollars in loans provided by the International Monetary Fund." And what is more, Michele, the president's bride of a year, has been drawing a monthly allowance of \$100,000 from the treasury under her husband's authorization.

The regime maintains itself in power by illegal arrests, torture, brutal killings, disappearances, suppression of free speech and association, rigged elections, and the subterfuge of a "presidency for life." Under the dictatorship of the two Duvaliers more than 10,000 citizens have died from unnatural causes. Of the 500,000 who have sought exile and the more than 30,000 that have boarded leaky boats for the coast of Florida, two hundred miles to the north, some 10,000 have been technicians, professionals, skilled people—this in a population of only five million.

Under such circumstances foreign assistance, whether bilateral or multilateral, is only a support to oppression and a subsidy of corruption. The Union Patriotique

Haitienne (UPH), of which I am president, has made two formal appearances before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Foreign Relations, chaired by Clarence D. Long (D., Md.), to call for an end to U.S. aid to the Duvalier regime until complete fiscalization of internal revenues is attained and has made similar presentations to many international institutions, including the IMF and the U.N. We have picketed the West German and French consulates in New York to similar purpose.

Following a UPH interview in his office in April, 1979, Senator Edward Zorinsky (D., Neb.) helped to introduce into the Senate Foreign Relations Committee report a resolution supporting the withholding of U.S. assistance from Haiti because of its "failure to undertake promised budget reforms required for effective development programs and reduction of corruption." The whole Senate followed suit and, led by Senators Lawton Chiles (D., Fla.) and Jacob K. Javits (R., N.Y.), passed an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act, instructing that the \$18.4 million of assistance "may be made available to Haiti if the President determines that the Government of Haiti has shown good faith in implementing adequate fiscal reform and human rights measures" (*Congressional Record*, June 19, 1979).

"LIBERALIZATION"

Under such external pressure to fiscalize all internal revenues and relax the repressive hold on Haiti's citizens, Duvalier launched a program of "liberalization." Greater freedom of speech was permitted. Political parties began to form. But the process, once begun, presented an obvious danger to the regime and the government issued its Press Law of September 23, 1979, modified on April 3, 1980, according to which any criticism of the government is considered a communistic or terrorist act, calling for severe condemnation, its perpetrator to be tried before a special tribunal.

The measure did not still the voices of "opposition." On November 28, 1980, the government abruptly rounded up some sixty of its putative critics and about four hundred union members and silenced all offending publications and radio stations.

This blitzkrieg took place just after the return of the Haitian delegation from a meeting of the OAS General Assembly in Washington. At that meeting a report by the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, condemning the new Haitian laws concerning the press and free association, denouncing the legislative elec-

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tions of February, 1979, as nonrepresentative, and declaring that "freedom to participate in government is incompatible with the institution of a presidency for life," had been approved for late November release. The Haitian chancellor, leader of the delegation, had just given assurances to his Latin colleagues and to the U.S. that the Haitian Government would maintain and further its policy of "liberalization." It was at this same time that a representative of the IMF, visiting Haiti in an official capacity, established that Duvalier and his family were looting the treasury. He succeeded in obtaining from the president a promise of immediate and total fiscalization of the Régie du Tabac and the pleasantly named Bureau des Contributions, vehicles of the Duvalier private wealth. The president, with seeming zeal, began to strip his family and their satraps of power and to crack down on the most prominent among the Tontons Macoutes and the VSN security force. One wonders, though, how long the policy will remain in effect. It is speculated that the president actually staged the mass arrests in the hope of silencing those who could provide evidence to the IMF and OAS of government wrongdoing.

Yet the acting U.S. assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs seems not to have been taken in and has provided a welcome earnest of the Reagan administration's approach to Haiti. At a hearing of the House Subcommittee on Inter-American Affairs on March 23, John A. Bushnell noted the countries for which development and military assistance are earmarked, Haiti not among them. In reply to a question by a House member, Mr. Bushnell explained that some form of assistance is contemplated for Haiti but, for the present, "we have felt it was appropriate to cut back on our assistance levels." He volunteered that despite the Haitian Government's program of "liberalization," the events of last November had rendered the situation even worse than before.

ENGINES OF CHANGE

Today Haiti lies on the brink of disaster. It bled heavily under the government of Duvalier père. It languishes now under his equally despotic son, who was installed as his father's replacement at the age of nineteen in a ceremony dominated by the presence of then U.S. Ambassador to Haiti Clinton B. Knox. Surely Haiti is ready for a change.

As to what the engine of change ought to be there are a number of opinions. Some opt for a "unity movement," a coalition of political groups to force the ouster of the present regime, the future to be on a "see-what-comes-next" basis. Still others believe that only a military upheaval or armed invasion can uproot Duvalier—again, with the future up for grabs. There are some who would allow the Social Democrats or Marxists of Europe to help obtain a Duvalier-free Haiti, accepting their support to achieve that end and perhaps determine the economic and political shape of the Haiti to come. Several other political groupings choose to organize a "democratic front" to oust the current regime, with a firm commitment *d'ores et déjà* to replace it with a democratic government chosen in open and freely contested elections. This is the plan UPH supports. There



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can be no other way of ensuring the birth and continuation of a truly pluralistic and democratic government.

In all cases, outside forces—and their internal allies as well—must desist from any attempt at imposing a government upon the people either directly or through policies that, however indirectly, help to continue the present regime in power. *Potè-metè* (a good créole word whose French roots are obvious), whether by the U.S. or any country in the Western Hemisphere or Europe, can have no part in the island's future. **WV**