

## OPTION ZERO IN HAITI

**A**S HIS ADVISORS ponder the ever more troubling consequences of regime change in Iraq, Bush is entitled to take some comfort from the far more successful operation just completed in Haiti.<sup>1</sup> No brusque pre-emptive strikes, domestic carping or splintering coalitions have marred the scene; objections from CARICOM and the African Union have carried no threats of reprisal. In overthrowing the constitutionally elected government of Jean Bertrand Aristide, Washington could hardly have provided a more exemplary show of multilateral courtesy. Allies were consulted, the UN Security Council's blessing sought and immediately received. The signal sent to Chávez, Castro and other hemispheric opponents was unambiguous—yet it was not a bullying Uncle Sam but France that made the first call for international intervention in Haiti's domestic affairs.

In Paris, too, there was much satisfaction at the sophisticated fit between the humanitarian duty of a civilized nation and the need (without losing face) to placate Washington for last year's disobedience over Iraq. The us might well fear this 'Liberia at their gates', as Villepin's Independent Commission report put it—but, wary of domestic reaction among their own black population in an election year, hesitate to act.<sup>2</sup> The Quai d'Orsay's offer of diplomatic protection would guarantee not only safe entry but painless withdrawal, as the proposed UN Stabilization Force, took up the burden three months later.<sup>3</sup> London would be suavely usurped of its chief attack-dog role. Chirac and Villepin had the virtually unanimous backing of the French media, from *Le Figaro* to *Le Monde* and *L'Humanité*, for military intervention in Haiti. Among the most feverish voices has been that of *Libération*, which held President Aristide—a 'defrocked priest turned tyrant millionaire', 'the Père Ubu of the Caribbean'—personally responsible for the 'risk of humanitarian catastrophe' that was claimed to justify the invasion.<sup>4</sup>

On 25 February Villepin issued a formal call for Aristide's resignation. Two days later, France, the US and Canada announced the dispatch of troops to Port-au-Prince. In the early hours of Sunday, February 29 the Haitian president was flown out of his country at gunpoint. Later that same day the UN Security Council suspended its normal 24-hour pre-vote consultation period to push through an emergency resolution mandating the US Marines, French Foreign Legion and Canadian forces already converging on the Haitian capital as the advance guard of a multinational UN force. In the face of such international backing, the Congressional Black Caucus confined itself to mild rebuke. *Libération* gloated at the dissolution of 'the pathetic carnival over which Aristide had proclaimed himself king'. For the *New York Times* the invasion was a fine example of how allies can 'find common ground and play to their strengths'. All that remained was for Bush to call and thank Chirac, expressing his delight at 'the excellent French-American cooperation'.<sup>5</sup>

The Western media had prepared the way for another 'humanitarian intervention' according to the now familiar formula. Confronted by repeated allegations of corruption, patronage, drugs, human rights abuses, autocracy, etc., the casual consumer of mainstream commentary was encouraged to believe that what was at stake had nothing to do with a protracted battle between the poor majority and a tiny elite but was instead just a convoluted free-for-all in which each side was equally at fault. The French press in particular tended to paint a lurid portrait of 'African' levels of squalor and superstition, to serve both as a warning to France's remaining dependencies in the Caribbean and as a challenge that might test, once again, the 'civilizing mission' of the international community. As a former colonizer and slave power, France would be wrong to 'turn its back', argued the chief reporter of Villepin's investigative commission on Franco-Haitian relations. The 2004 bicentenary of Haitian independence offered the chance for a mature coming to terms

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<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to Paul Farmer, Brian Concannon, Randall White, Charles Arthur, Dominique Esser, Richard Watts and Cécile Winter for their help with various aspects of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Régis Debray, *Rapport du comité indépendant de réflexion et de propositions sur les relations franco-haïtiennes*, January 2004, pp. 5, 53.

<sup>3</sup> UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Haiti*, 16 April 2004.

<sup>4</sup> See Patrick Sabatier, *Libération*, 31 December 2003 and 24 February 2004.

<sup>5</sup> *Financial Times*, 2 March 2004; *International Herald Tribune*, 4 March 2004; Sabatier, *Libération*, 1 March 2004; Elaine Sciolino, *New York Times*, 3 March 2004.

with the past, through which France might ‘shed the weight which servitude imposes on the masters’, and negotiate a new relationship.<sup>6</sup>

Rather than a *political* struggle, rather than a battle of principles and priorities, the fight for Haiti became just another instance of the petty corruption and mass victimization that is supposed to characterize public life beyond the heavily guarded gates of Western democracy. Rather than conditioned by radical class polarization or the mechanics of systematic exploitation, the overthrow of Aristide has most often figured as yet another demonstration of perhaps the most consistent theme of Western commentary on the island: that poor black people remain incapable of governing themselves.

### *Breaking the chain*

The structural basis of Haiti’s crippling poverty is a direct legacy of slavery and its aftermath. The 1697 Treaty of Ryswick had formalized French occupation of the western third of the Spanish possession, the island of Hispaniola, under the name of Saint-Domingue. Over the following century, the colony grew to be the most profitable in the world; by the 1780s, it was a bigger source of income for its masters than the whole of Britain’s thirteen North American colonies combined. No single source of revenue made so large a contribution to the growing prosperity of the French commercial bourgeoisie, and to the wealth of cities like Bordeaux, Nantes and Marseille. The slaves who produced these profits rose up in revolt in 1791. Combined British, Spanish and French efforts to crush the rebellion fuelled a war that lasted thirteen years and ended in unequivocal imperial defeat. Both Pitt and Napoleon lost some 50,000 troops in the effort to restore slavery and the status quo.

By late 1803, to the universal astonishment of contemporary observers, the armies led by Toussaint L’Ouverture and Dessalines had broken the chain of colonial slavery at ‘what had been, in 1789, its strongest link’.<sup>7</sup> Renamed Haiti, the new country celebrated its independence in January 1804. I have argued elsewhere that there have been few other events in modern history whose implications were more threatening to the dominant order: the mere existence of an independent Haiti was a reproach to the slave-trading nations of Europe, a dangerous example to the slave-owning

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<sup>6</sup> Debray, *Rapport*, pp. 6, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, London 1989, p. 258.

us, and an inspiration for successive African and Latin American liberation movements.<sup>8</sup> Much of Haiti's subsequent history has been shaped by efforts, both internal and external, to stifle the consequences of this event and to preserve the essential legacy of slavery and colonialism—that spectacularly unjust distribution of labour, wealth and power which has characterized the whole of the island's post-Columbian history.

The main priority of the slaves who won their independence in 1804 was to block a return to the plantation economy by retaining some direct control over their own livelihood and land. Unlike most other Latin American and Caribbean countries, the development of export-oriented latifundia was limited by the widespread survival of small peasant proprietorship, and today 93 per cent of Haitian peasants still have at least some access to their own land.<sup>9</sup> The reduction in size of an average farm to just two acres, however, combined with falling agricultural prices, drastic soil erosion and a chronic lack of investment, ensures that most of these peasants retain their independence at the cost of an effectively permanent destitution.

Extension of this destitution to the country as a whole was guaranteed by the isolation of its ruined economy in the decades following independence. Restoration France only re-established the trade and diplomatic relations essential to the new country's survival after Haiti agreed, in 1825, to pay its old colonial master a 'compensation' of some 150 million francs for the loss of its slaves—an amount roughly equal to the French annual budget at the time, or around ten years' worth of total revenue in Haiti—and to grant punishing commercial discounts. With its economy still shattered by the colonial wars, Haiti could only begin paying this debt by borrowing, at extortionate rates of interest, 24 million francs from private French banks. Though the French demand was eventually cut from 150 to 90 million francs, by the end of the nineteenth century Haiti's payments to France consumed around 80 per cent of the national budget; France received the last instalment in 1947. Haitians have thus had to pay their original oppressors three times over—through the slaves' initial labour, through compensation for the French loss of this labour, and then in interest on the payment of this compensation. No other single factor played so important a role in establishing Haiti as a

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<sup>8</sup> Hallward, 'Haitian Inspiration: Notes on the bicentenary of Haiti's independence', *Radical Philosophy* 123, Jan–Feb 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Carolyn Fick, *The Making of Haiti: the Saint Domingue revolution from below*, Knoxville 1990, p. 249; World Bank, *Haiti: The Challenges of Poverty Reduction*, August 1998, p. 4.

systematically indebted country, the condition which in turn ‘justified’ a long and debilitating series of appropriations-by-gunboat.

The most consequential of these foreign interventions was launched by Woodrow Wilson in 1915, a counterpart to his punitive assaults on the Mexican Revolution. The us occupation lasted for nearly twenty years, and extended between 1916 and 1924 into a parallel incursion into the Dominican Republic next door. The American military regime proceeded to institute an early version of a structural adjustment programme: they abolished the clause in the constitution that had barred foreigners from owning property in Haiti, took over the National Bank, reorganized the economy to ensure more ‘reliable’ payments of foreign debt, expropriated land to create their own plantations, and trained a brutal military force whose only victories would be against the Haitian people. Rebellions—that of Charlemagne Peralte in the north during the early years of the occupation, or the strike wave of 1929—were savagely repressed. By the time they pulled out in 1934, us troops had broken the back of the initial peasant resistance to this socio-economic engineering, killing between 5,000 and 15,000 people in the process.

The army the us had constructed became the dominant power after the Marines departed, keeping both the population and politicians in check—the generals often taking turns as president themselves. It was as a counter to this force that the bespectacled ex-doctor François Duvalier organized his own murderous militia, the Tonton Macoutes, after winning the 1957 presidential election that followed the overthrow of the previous military regime. For the next fourteen years, as ‘Papa Doc’ declared himself the divine incarnation of the Haitian nation, the 10,000-strong Macoutes were used to terrorize any opponents to his rule. Initially wary of his *vaudouiste* nationalism, the us soon embraced Duvalier’s staunchly anti-communist regime. When François Duvalier died in 1971, his son Jean-François, ‘Baby Doc’, was proclaimed President for Life and enjoyed still more enthusiastic us support. Foreign aid and elite corruption soared, but for the mass of Haitians pauperization and political oppression continued undiminished.

### *The gathering flood*

By the mid-80s, a new generation was coming of age in the sprawling slums of Port-au-Prince, open to the appeal of liberation theology in

the coded *kreyòl* sermons of radical priests—chief among them, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Born in 1953, Aristide grew up outside the confines of Haiti's traditional political class. A talented linguist, Aristide flourished at the Salesian seminary, and read psychology and philosophy at the State University in the 70s, along with the works of Leonardo Boff and other liberation theologians. He began broadcasting on the local Catholic radio stations that sprang up in the late 70s, before being dispatched by his order to study archaeology in the Middle East in 1979, and then to Montreal for some (unsuccessful) 'theological reprogramming'.<sup>10</sup>

By 1985 he was back preaching in Haiti, as the popular upswell against Baby Doc's bloated regime grew into a mass wave of protests. Aristide's Easter sermon that year—'The path of those Haitians who reject the regime is the path of righteousness and love'—was recorded on dozens of cassette players, and heard all over the country. His cry, '*Va-t'en, Satan!*' was taken up by the mass movement which, in February 1986, chased Baby Doc off to exile in France, just weeks before Marcos, under similar pressure, was sent packing from the Philippines. The murderous tactics of the junta that followed, under General Namphy, could not demobilize the flood—*lavalas*, in *kreyòl*—of political groups, trade unions, mass organizations, peasant associations and 'little church' community groups, the *ti legliz*. Aristide was now preaching full-time at the church of St Jean Bosco, on the edge of the Port-au-Prince slumtown of La Saline. The elections scheduled for November 1987 were cancelled by the army on polling day, but not before it had engineered the murder of dozens of voters as they waited to cast their ballots. In September 1988 Macoutes stormed Aristide's crowded church, killed members of the congregation and destroyed the building; Aristide was snatched to safety by his supporters. In the protests that followed, rank-and-file troops rose against their officers, driving Namphy out, before a counter-coup under General Avril threw the leading *ti soldats* into jail. The autumn of 1989 brought more mass strikes and mobilizations against Avril's regime, a further bloody crackdown and renewed protests. In March 1990, he too was driven from power.

### *First Lavalas victory*

In December 1990, Aristide stood as the presidential candidate of the Front National pour le Changement et la Démocratie, the loose coalition

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Danner, 'Haiti on the Verge', *New York Review of Books*, 4 November 1993.

of popular organizations formed to contest Haiti's first free elections. Aristide swept to an unexpected victory in the first round, with 67 per cent of the vote (the US favourite, World Bank economist and former Duvalier minister Marc Bazin, won only 14 per cent). The Haitian elite lost no time in trying to destabilize him. The first coup attempt came within a month of his election, and was blocked by a massive counter-mobilization. In office, Aristide's room for manoeuvre was limited by the FNCD's minority in the legislature, the ramshackle state and judicial apparatus and the continuing depredations of the Macoutes, checked only by the threat of popular resistance from the slums. Nor did Aristide's gifts as a mass leader translate easily into parliamentary coalition-building or manipulation of the levers of state. Once in power, Aristide moved cautiously, while continuing to speak of a radical redistribution of wealth. He won the support of international lenders by balancing the budget and trimming the corruption-ridden bureaucracy. Otherwise he restricted himself to mild agrarian and educational reforms and the appointment of a presidential commission to investigate the extra-judicial killings of the previous five years.

Even these moderate steps were too much for the elite to tolerate. In September 1991, just seven months after his inauguration, the army seized power again, installing a new junta under General Cédras. Over the next three years the military instituted a reign of terror in an attempt to dismantle the Lavalas networks in the slums; around 5,000 Lavalas supporters were killed. Churches and community organizations were invaded, preachers and leaders were murdered. In September 1993 thugs led by CIA-trained Louis Jodel Chamblain assassinated democracy activist and key Aristide ally, Antoine Izméry. In April 1994, paramilitaries under the leadership of Jean Tatoune, another CIA product, slaughtered scores of civilians in what became known as the Raboteau massacre in the town of Gonaïves.

At the same time, the (exemption-ridden) economic embargo imposed against the Cédras regime led to widespread malnutrition. Waves of emigrants tried to flee to the US. Aristide, exiled in Washington, tried to marshal diplomatic support. Hostile to Aristide's agenda and smarting from the recent Iran–Contra affair, the first President Bush chose to turn a blind eye. Clinton, confident that 'the mission is achievable, and limited', was more amenable. Military success in Haiti would help repair the damage done in Somalia, and Aristide's return would stem the flood of

refugees. us conditions, however, were exorbitant. Aristide had to agree to an amnesty for the coup-makers, in effect pardoning the murder of thousands of his supporters. He had to accept that his term as Haitian president would end in 1995, as if he had served it in full. He had to share power with the opponents that he had defeated so convincingly in 1990, and to adopt most of their highly conservative policies; in particular, he was required to implement a drastic IMF structural adjustment programme.

Aristide was perfectly aware, of course, of the political cost of structural adjustment; his most recent book on the oppressive consequences of globalization is broadly consistent with his speeches of the late 1980s.<sup>11</sup> The question that began to divide the Lavalas movement in the mid-1990s was simply, what kind of resistance to us and IMF objectives was feasible? Even someone as critical of Aristide's 'dictatorial turn' as Christophe Wargny believed that 'no Haitian government can survive without American support'.<sup>12</sup> As UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi—currently hard at work in Baghdad—candidly explained on Haitian radio in 1996, there was never any question that either the us or the UN would tolerate even limited attempts to dilute the elite's monopoly of economic power.<sup>13</sup> Under the circumstances, Aristide's new government felt it had little room for manoeuvre. And though he won 87 per cent of the vote in the 1995 presidential elections, albeit on a lowered turnout, Aristide's successor René Préval found himself in a still more difficult position.

The attempts of Préval's prime minister, Rosny Smarth, to legislate the unpopular IMF programme would permanently fracture the Lavalas coalition, both inside parliament and in the country as a whole. The politicians most in line with Washington's priorities, and most critical of what they condemned as Aristide's top-down style, banded together under his rival Gérard Pierre-Charles to form a more 'moderate' faction, which eventually called itself the Organisation du Peuple en Lutte. From late 1996, Aristide began organizing a more cohesive party of his own supporters, the Fanmi [family] Lavalas, drawing on his personal authority among the Haitian poor. The split between the OPL and the FL soon became irreversible, paralysing the legislature and blocking the appointment of a new prime

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<sup>11</sup> Aristide, *Eyes of the Heart: Seeking a Path for the Poor in the Age of Globalization*, Monroe, ME 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Wargny, *Le Monde*, 23 February 2004; and *Haiti n'existe pas*, Paris 2004.

<sup>13</sup> The elite, Brahimi explained, should 'know two things: that political changes are inevitable, but that, on the ideological, economic front, they have the sympathy of Big Brother, capitalism'. Cited in *Haiti Briefing* 25, September 1997.

minister or a full cabinet after Smarth's resignation in 1997.<sup>14</sup> Préval finally broke the parliamentary deadlock by dissolving the National Assembly in 1999, and after some delay new elections were held in May 2000.

### *Globalization comes to Haiti*

Predictably, the IMF cure for Haiti's desperate poverty involved further reductions in wages that had already sunk to starvation levels, privatization of the state sector, reorientation of domestic production in favour of cash crops popular in North American supermarkets and the elimination of import tariffs. It was the last of these, easiest to implement, that had the most immediate impact. With the tariff on rice cut from 50 per cent to the IMF-decreed 3 per cent, Haiti—previously self-sufficient in the crop—was flooded with subsidized American grain, and rice imports rose from just 7,000 tonnes in 1985 to 220,000 tonnes in 2002. Domestic rice production has all but disappeared.<sup>15</sup> A similar sequence eliminated Haiti's poultry sector, at the cost of around 10,000 jobs. Haitian farmers tend to associate these developments with the most bitterly resented of all the international community's many aggressive interventions in their domestic economy—the 1982 extermination, to allay the fears of American importers concerned by an outbreak of swine fever, of Haiti's entire native pig population, and their subsequent replacement with animals from Iowa that required living conditions rather better than those enjoyed by most of the island's human population.

As a result of these and related economic 'reforms', agricultural production fell from around 50 per cent of GDP in the late 1970s to just 25 per cent in the late 1990s. Structural adjustment was supposed to compensate for agrarian collapse with an expansion of the light manufacturing and assembly sector. The lowest wages in the hemisphere, backed by a virtual ban on trade unions, had encouraged mainly American companies or contractors to employ around 60,000 people in this sector in the late 1970s, and through to the mid-90s companies like Kmart and Walt Disney continued to pay Haitians around 11 cents an hour to make pyjamas and T-shirts.<sup>16</sup> The companies benefit from tax exemptions lasting

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<sup>14</sup> See Kim Ives in *Haiti Progrès*, 12 March 2003 and 27 November 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Oxfam, *Trade Blues*, May 2002.

<sup>16</sup> National Labor Committee, *The us in Haiti: How to Get Rich on 11 Cents an Hour*, New York 1996, and NLC, *Why is Disney Lying?*, New York 2004; see also Ray Laforest in *Haiti Progrès*, 13 August 1997.

for up to 15 years, are free to repatriate all profits and obliged to make only minimal investments in equipment and infrastructure.<sup>17</sup> By 1999, Haitians fortunate enough to work in the country's small manufacturing and assembly sector were earning wages estimated at less than 20 per cent of 1981 levels. Nevertheless, still more dramatic rates of exploitation encouraged many of these companies to relocate to places like China and Bangladesh, and only around 20,000 people were still employed in the Port-au-Prince sweatshops by the end of the millennium. Real GDP per capita in 1999–2000 was estimated to be 'substantially below' the 1990 level.<sup>18</sup>

It would be wrong to think that these reforms were implemented with anything approaching Third Way zeal. On the contrary, the Lavalas government was continually criticized for its 'lack of vigour' by international financial institutions: 'Policies imposed as conditions by international lenders have been at best half-heartedly supported by the domestic authorities, and at worst violently rejected by the public'.<sup>19</sup> With its back to the wall, Lavalas resorted to what James Scott has famously dubbed the 'weapons of the weak': a mixture of prevarication and evasive non-cooperation. This proved partially successful as a way of deflecting at least one of the main blows of structural adjustment, the privatization of Haiti's few remaining public assets. Lavalas had good reason to drag its feet. When the state-run sugar mill was privatized in 1987, for example, it was bought by a single family who promptly closed it, laid off its staff and began importing cheaper sugar from the us so as to sell it on at prices that undercut the domestic market. Once the world's most profitable sugar exporter, by 1995 Haiti was importing 25,000 tons of American sugar and most peasants could no longer afford to buy it.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, in September 1995 Aristide dismissed his prime minister for preparing to sell the state-owned flour and cement mills without insisting on any of the progressive terms the IMF had promised to honour—opening the sale to middle-class and diaspora participation, and ensuring that some of the money it earned was to go towards literacy, education and compensation for victims of the 1991 coup. Aristide could only delay the process for two years, however. In

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<sup>17</sup> Charles Arthur, *Haiti in Focus*, London 2002, p. 51.

<sup>18</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, *Haiti: Country Profile 2003*, pp. 24, 19.

<sup>19</sup> EIU, *Profile*, p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Lisa McGowan, *Democracy Undermined, Economic Justice Denied: Structural Adjustment and the Aid Juggernaut in Haiti*, Washington, DC 1997.

1997 the flour mill was duly sold for just \$9 million, at a time when its yearly profits were estimated at around \$25 million per year.<sup>21</sup>

The Lavalas government never yielded, however, to us pressure to privatize Haiti's public utilities. At the same time, and with drastically limited resources, it oversaw the creation of more schools than in all the previous 190 years. It printed millions of literacy booklets and established hundreds of literacy centres, offering classes to more than 300,000 people; between 1990 and 2002 illiteracy fell from 61 to 48 per cent. With Cuban assistance, a new medical school was built and the rate of HIV infection—a legacy from the sex tourism industry of the 1970s and 80s—was frozen, with clinics and training programmes opened as part of a growing public campaign against AIDS. Significant steps were taken to limit the widespread exploitation of children. Aristide's government increased tax contributions from the elite, and in 2003 it announced the doubling of a desperately inadequate minimum wage.<sup>22</sup>

### *Opposition to Aristide*

The government's course created enemies both to the right and to the left. Unsurprisingly, Aristide came under fire from those who advocated more enthusiastic compliance with the us and IMF, among them the (highly unpopular) Prime Ministers, Smarck Michel (1994–95) and Rosny Smarth (1996–97), along with other members of the OPL. From the beginning, the simple presence of Lavalas in government had terrified a large portion of the dominant class. 'Among the Haitian elite', as Robert Fatton has explained, 'hatred for Aristide was absolutely incredible, an obsession'.<sup>23</sup> With Lavalas in power, many observers noted a 'new confidence among the poor people of Haiti'.<sup>24</sup> For the first time in living memory the distribution of private property seemed vulnerable, as occasional instances of land invasion and squatting went unopposed. Though in practice he tended to cooperate with business leaders and international lenders, Aristide appeared willing to strengthen his hand

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<sup>21</sup> Aristide, *Eyes of the Heart*, pp. 31, 15.

<sup>22</sup> For a summary of these achievements, see in particular the Haiti Action Committee's 2003 pamphlet, *Hidden from the Headlines: The us War Against Haiti*.

<sup>23</sup> Fatton, quoted in Marty Logan, 'Class Hatred and the Hijacking of Aristide', *Inter Press Service News Agency*, 16 March 2004.

<sup>24</sup> David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti*, New Brunswick, NJ 1996.

in government with veiled threats of popular violence against ‘bourgeois thieves’.<sup>25</sup> ‘Panic seized the dominant class’, Fatton notes. ‘It dreaded living in close proximity to *la populace* and barricaded itself against Lavalas’.<sup>26</sup> Gated communities multiplied and the provision of private security became one of Haiti’s fastest growing industries. Class sympathy among Western elites who felt themselves under similar threat, both at home and abroad, goes a long way to explaining the recent international perception of the Lavalas regime.

A growing distrust of Aristide’s ‘demagogic populism’, meanwhile, slowly alienated many of the foreign or exiled intellectuals—René Depestre, James Morrell, Christophe Wargny—who had once supported him.<sup>27</sup> More importantly, several of Haiti’s most significant peasant organizations, including the *Movman Peyizan Papay* (MPP), *Tèt Kole Ti Peyizan* and *ΚΟΖΕΡΕΡ*, as well as the small militant group *Batay Ouvriye*, condemned the Fanmi Lavalas for its cooperation with structural adjustment and accused it of becoming ‘*anti-populaire*’. Clément François of *Tèt Kole* spoke for many critics of Lavalas when he argued that Aristide should not have agreed to the US conditions that allowed him to return from exile: ‘he should have stayed outside and let us continue the struggle for democracy; instead, he agreed to deliver the country on a platter so that he could get back into office’.<sup>28</sup> MPP leader Chavannes Jean-Baptiste made the same point in 1994, shortly before he became involved in a bitter personal feud with Aristide.

The true extent of popular disaffection with Lavalas is difficult to measure. As a rule, foreign commentators find it ‘hard to credit the strength of emotion that Aristide elicited and continues to provoke in Haiti’.<sup>29</sup> *Tèt Kole* and the MPP were certainly weakened by their opposition to Aristide, and neither group remains a significant political force. In the

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<sup>25</sup> On Aristide’s early mix of revolutionary rhetoric and constitutional practice see Mark Danner, ‘The Fall of the Prophet’, *New York Review of Books*, 2 December 1993 and Alex Dupuy, *Haiti in the New World Order: The Limits of the Democratic Revolution*, Boulder, CO 1997, pp. 128–9.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Fatton, *Haiti’s Predatory Republic: The Unending Transition to Democracy*, Boulder, CO 1997, pp. 86–7.

<sup>27</sup> Tracy Kidder, ‘Trials of Haiti’, *The Nation*, 27 October 2003.

<sup>28</sup> François, quoted in ‘Behind Aristide’s Fall’, *Socialist Worker*, 12 March 2004, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Arthur, *Haiti in Focus*, p. 60; cf. Paul Farmer, *The Uses of Haiti*, Monroe, ME 2003, pp. 113–4.

late 90s Jean-Baptiste became an ally of Pierre-Charles's pro-American OPL, before joining, in 2000, the openly reactionary Convergence Démocratique; the militancy of his followers has been dulled, as Stan Goff notes, 'by the steady trickle of project dollars flowing through the almost interminable list of non-governmental organizations that infest every corner of Haiti'.<sup>30</sup> The OPL itself is probably the party which most closely resembles that 'civic' alternative to Lavalas so dear to liberal commentators, but after years of futile parliamentary manoeuvring it was virtually wiped out in the 2000 elections.<sup>31</sup>

For all its undeniable faults, in other words, the FL remained the only significant force for popular mobilization in the country. No other political figure of the past fifty years has had anything like Aristide's stature among the urban and rural poor. Reporting from Port-au-Prince in March 2004, the BBC's correspondent was obliged to concede that, whereas Aristide was 'universally reviled' by the wealthy elite, he was still almost as universally affirmed by the great majority of the urban poor.<sup>32</sup> The doctor and activist Paul Farmer, who has worked in Haiti's central plateau since the mid-80s, makes a still stronger case for the enduring depth of Aristide's popularity in the countryside.<sup>33</sup> The one demonstration of any size against the FL during the most recent elections was an MPP gathering organized in September 2000. It drew several thousand people. Otherwise, political opposition to Aristide was confined almost entirely to the ranks of the dominant class.<sup>34</sup> The Haitian elite found it hard to rally support in the streets. An *Economist Intelligence Unit* report describes the anti-Aristide protest held in November 2003 by the 'Group of 184', which claims to represent a wide range of civil-society organizations:

On the morning of the rally, a few hundred Group of 184 supporters had assembled at the designated site but found themselves heavily outnumbered by as many as 8,000 Aristide loyalists. When some government

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<sup>30</sup> Stan Goff, 'A Brief Account of Haiti', *BBC-NEWS* October 1999; cf. Goff, *Hideous Dream: A Soldier's Memoir of the US Invasion of Haiti*, New York 2000.

<sup>31</sup> Wargny, 'Haiti's Last Chance', *Le Monde diplomatique*, July 2000.

<sup>32</sup> Lak, 'Poverty and pride in Port-au-Prince', *BBC Radio* 4, 20 March 2004.

<sup>33</sup> Farmer, *Uses of Haiti*, pp. 348–75; Farmer, 'Who Removed Aristide?', *London Review of Books*, 15 April 2004.

<sup>34</sup> See Béatrice Pouligny, *Libération*, 13 February 2001; Fatton, *Haiti's Predatory Republic*, pp. 144–7, 169 fn. 40.

supporters threw stones and shouted threats at their opponents, the police struggled to keep order. As the situation rapidly deteriorated, the police dispersed the crowd using tear gas and firing live ammunition in the air. Meanwhile, the Group of 184's flat-bed truck with a sound system was stopped by police en route to the rally and thirty people travelling in the convoy with it were arrested when police discovered unlicensed firearms. Clearly unable to proceed as planned, the Group of 184 organizers called off the rally before it had begun . . . André Apaid [the Group's coordinator] said the episode showed that the authorities would not allow opponents to assemble and thus were not contemplating fair elections.

The report failed to mention that Apaid is an international businessman who owns several factories in Haiti, the founder of Haiti's most prominent commercial tv station, and leading figure in a 2003 campaign to block Aristide's decision to double the minimum wage. It does note, however, that:

The turnout for the rally was lower than might have been suggested by the Group's claim to have more than 300 member organizations. It was scarcely able to assemble more than this number of demonstrators. The presence at the rally of many members of the more affluent sector of society reinforced a perception that the Group of 184, despite its claims to represent civil society, is an organization with little popular appeal. This interpretation was confirmed by the failure of a 'general strike' called by the Group on November 17. Although many private businesses in Port-au-Prince, including private schools and banks, did not open, the state-owned banks, government offices and public transport, as well as street markets, functioned as normal. In the rest of the country the shutdown was largely ignored.<sup>35</sup>

### *May 2000 watershed*

Despite the massive preponderance of their popular support, however, neither Préval nor Aristide, in his 1991 or 1994–95 spells in office, had ever been able to govern with the full support of the legislature. But in the decisive legislative and local elections of May 2000, a united Fanmi Lavalas won majorities at all levels of government, taking 89 of 115 mayoral positions, 72 of 83 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 18 of the 19 Senate seats contested.<sup>36</sup> The 1995 elections

<sup>35</sup> EIU, *Country Report January 2004: Dominican Republic, Haiti*, pp. 40–1.

<sup>36</sup> Established under the 1987 Constitution, the National Assembly comprises an 83-seat Chamber of Deputies, directly elected from the municipalities, and a 27-seat Senate, three senators representing each of Haiti's nine provinces.

had already ‘completely discredited the so-called traditional political parties—especially those that collaborated with the military regime between 1991 and 1994’, effectively eliminating them from any further role in electoral politics.<sup>37</sup> In May 2000, members of the original Lavalas coalition who had turned against Aristide suffered the same fate. For the anti-Aristide opposition, the elections proved that there was no chance of defeating the FL at the polls for the foreseeable future.

It was at this point that the campaign to discredit the Lavalas government entered a new and more intensive phase. During the summer of 2000, most of Aristide’s opponents—dissidents like Pierre-Charles’s OPL and Jean-Baptiste’s MPP, along with right-wing evangelicals, business leaders and ex-Duvalierists—banded together to form the ‘Convergence Démocratique’. From the start, the CD’s main objective was *Option Zéro*: the total annulment of the 2000 elections and a refusal to allow Aristide to participate in any subsequent vote.<sup>38</sup> In order to make this strategy seem compatible with democratic conventions, the CD had first to redouble its efforts to portray the FL as irredeemably undemocratic, authoritarian, violent and corrupt—accusations already long familiar from the propaganda that accompanied the Cédras coup in 1991.<sup>39</sup>

The first priority was to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the FL’s electoral victory. The pretext here was a minor technical complaint made by observers from the Organization of American States. The OAS had

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<sup>37</sup> Dupuy, *Haiti in the New World Order*, p. 172.

<sup>38</sup> Between June 2000 and February 2004, the CD rejected each FL offer of new elections right through to the final attempt at a peaceful resolution to the conflict, a CARICOM-brokered proposal approved by the OAS in mid-February 2004, whereby Aristide would accept one of his opponents as his prime minister, hold new legislative elections and serve out the remainder of his term with severely limited powers. Aristide accepted the deal immediately, as did France and the US. The CD refused it just as immediately and then somehow managed to ‘persuade’ its imperial patrons to follow suit, leaving Aristide with a choice between exile or civil war.

<sup>39</sup> For 1991, see the influential contributions by *New York Times* reporter Howard French, e.g. ‘Aristide’s Autocratic Ways Ended Haiti’s Embrace of Democracy’, *New York Times*, 22 October 1991. In many ways, French’s articles read like rough drafts for recent attacks—such as the tirade by Andrew Gumbel: ‘The Little Priest Who Became a Bloody Dictator Like the One He Once Despised’, *Independent*, 21 February 2004; Lyonel Trouillot, ‘In Haiti, All the Bridges Are Burned’, *New York Times*, 26 February 2004; Peter Dailey, ‘Fall of the House of Aristide’, *New York Review of Books*, 13 March 2003. Kim Ives subjects this last article to a point-by-point rebuttal in *Haiti Progrès*, 12 March 2003.

actually described the May 2000 elections as ‘a great success for the Haitian population, which turned out in large and orderly numbers to choose both their local and national governments. An estimated 60 per cent of registered voters went to the polls’, and ‘very few’ incidents of either violence or fraud were reported. Even the staunchly anti-FL Centre for International Policy agreed that the May 2000 elections were Haiti’s ‘best so far’.<sup>40</sup> The OAS subsequently characterized the elections as ‘flawed’ not because they disputed the fairness of the vote or the overwhelming clarity of its result but because, once the Lavalas victories were recorded, they objected to the methodology which Haiti’s Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) used to count the votes for eight of the seats in the Senate. Rather than include all of the many less popular candidates in its calculation of voting percentages, the CEP—which Haiti’s constitution identifies as the sole and final arbiter in all electoral matters—decided to count only the votes cast for the top four candidates in each race. By this method, Lavalas candidates won 16 Senate seats in the first round, taking an average 74 per cent of the vote.<sup>41</sup>

The OAS had itself been closely involved in the development of this form of calculation, and there is no good reason to believe that the balance of power in the Senate would have been any different whatever method was used. The results are consistent both with the undisputed returns registered in the Chamber of Deputies ballot held at the same time and with a US-commissioned Gallup poll taken in October 2000. In November 2000, Aristide went on to win the presidential election with 92 per cent of the votes cast, on a turnout estimated, by those few international

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<sup>40</sup> Final Report of OAS Mission in Haiti, 13 December 2000, p. 2. A more substantial report by the International Coalition of Observers likewise concluded that the 2000 elections were both ‘fair and peaceful’: Melinda Miles and Moira Feeney, *Elections 2000: Participatory Democracy in Haiti*, February 2001. Henry Carey, ‘Not Perfect, But Improving’, *Miami Herald*, 12 June 2000.

<sup>41</sup> *Haiti Progrès*, 31 May 2000. In the North-East department, to take one of the examples least favourable to Lavalas, a total of 132,613 votes were cast for two Senate seats. If all candidates’ votes were counted, 33,154 votes would be needed to win a seat on the first round; with only the top four candidates’ counted, the FL candidates—who won 32,969 and 30,736 votes respectively; their closest rival polled less than 16,000—went through with comfortable majorities. The head of the CEP maintained that this method was in keeping with past practice: *Haiti Progrès*, 28 June 2000; the point was disputed by the US State Department and opponents of the FL: James Morrell, ‘Snatching Defeat from the Jaws of Victory’, Centre for International Policy, August 2000.

observers left in the country, at around 50 per cent (although much lower by the opposition).

### *Throttling aid*

The immediate response from the Clinton Administration was to seize upon the OAS objection to the calculations for the senatorial seats in order to justify a crippling embargo on foreign aid—democratic scruples hard to square with Washington’s support for the Duvalier dictatorships and the juntas that succeeded them. In April 2001, after cutting off its own aid to Haiti’s government, the US blocked the release of \$145 million in previously agreed loans from the Inter-American Development Bank, and of another \$470 million scheduled for the following years. In 1995 the Haitian government had received close to \$600 million in aid. By 2003 the total government budget had been reduced to just \$300 million—under \$40 a head per year for each of its 8 million citizens—minus the annual \$60 million payment on the national debt (45 per cent of which was incurred by the Duvalier dictatorships).<sup>42</sup> The response of the IMF and other international lenders was to force Haiti to make still deeper cuts in its budget and pay yet higher sums in arrears.

Few governments could survive such sustained financial assault. The combined effect of these measures was to overwhelm an already shattered economy. Haitian GDP fell from \$4 billion in 1999 to \$2.9 billion in 2003. While American exports to Haiti have risen substantially in recent years, a majority of Haitians now live on the edge of starvation, without access to water or medicine; average incomes amount to little more than a dollar a day and unemployment hovers around 70 per cent. In 2001, a bankrupt Aristide agreed to virtually all of the concessions demanded by his opponents: he obliged the winners of the disputed Senate seats to resign, accepted the participation of several ex-Duvalier supporters in his new government, agreed to convene a new and more opposition-friendly CEF and to hold another round of legislative elections several years ahead of schedule. But the US still refused to lift its aid embargo.

The next priority of the CD campaign was to portray the FI as fundamentally authoritarian and corrupt. That there were some grounds for

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<sup>42</sup> Anne Street, *Haiti: A Nation in Crisis*, Catholic Institute for International Relations Briefing, London 2004, p. 4.

this is plain. Drug-running—Haiti has long been a relay station for Colombian cocaine heading north—has increased since 1990. As in other destitute countries patronage remains widespread, even if it falls far short of the ‘officially sanctioned piracy’ characteristic of the pre-Lavalas period.<sup>43</sup> More urgently, the legacy of violence in Haiti, from the colonial era through to the dictatorships fronted by Duvalier, Namphy and Cédras, has left deep scars; Aristide himself is the survivor of repeated assassination attempts. The murderous assault on Lavalas during his first exile pushed some pro-FL groups, like Jeunesse Pouvoir Populaire and the Petite Communauté de L’Église de Saint Jean Bosco, to adopt quasi-military forms of self-defence against former soldiers who were disbanded but not disarmed in 1995. Vigilante gangs associated with Lavalas are certainly responsible for some of the violence that has occurred over the past few years. Critics of the FL have been quick to equate these gangs with Duvalier’s Tonton Macoutes.<sup>44</sup>

In a comparative perspective, however, political violence during the Lavalas administrations was far less than under previous Haitian regimes. Amnesty International’s reports covering the years 2000–03 attribute a total of around 20 to 30 killings to the police and supporters of the FL—a far cry from the 5,000 committed by the junta and its supporters in 1991–94, let alone the 50,000 usually attributed to the Duvalier dictatorships.<sup>45</sup> Examination of Lavalas violence would also suggest that

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<sup>43</sup> Janice Stromsem and Joseph Trincellito, ‘Building the Haitian National Police’, *Haiti Papers* 6, Washington, DC April 2003.

<sup>44</sup> Jean-Claude Jean and Marc Maeschalck, *Transition politique en Haïti: radiographie du pouvoir Lavalas*, Paris 1999, pp. 104–11.

<sup>45</sup> In 2000, Amnesty reported that ‘a number of electoral candidates, party members and their relatives were killed, most by unidentified assailants’, among them the courageous left-wing radio journalist Jean Dominique. There were also ‘several reports of unlawful killings by police; most of the victims were criminal suspects’. In 2001, another journalist, Brignol Lindor, was killed ‘by a mob which included members of a pro-FL organization’, and Amnesty refers to ‘several killings of alleged criminal suspects by police or crowds carrying out “popular justice”’, but identifies only one such victim (Mackenson Fleurimon, who ‘on 11 October was reportedly shot dead by the police in the Cité Soleil neighbourhood of Port-au-Prince’). In 2002, ‘at least five people were reportedly killed’ in confrontations between members of opposing parties, and seven people (three of whom are identified as FL supporters) appear to have been either executed or ‘disappeared’. Amnesty also refers to two other killings in 2002: the shooting of Christophe Lozama, a pro-FL justice of the peace, and the assassination of the bodyguard protecting the widow of Jean Dominique. Pending publication of its 2004 report (which will cover 2003),

it was, indeed, largely a matter of *gang* violence. There are armed gangs in Port-au-Prince, as there are in São Paulo, Lagos or Los Angeles; their numbers have swelled in recent years with the deportation to the island of over a thousand Haitian and Haitian-American convicts from the American prison system. Above all, it should be stressed that the lion's share of recent violence in Haiti has been perpetrated by the us-trained paramilitary forces deployed by opponents of the Lavalas regime since the summer of 2001.

### *Final assault*

Economic constraints paralysed the Lavalas administration and political pressure backed it into a corner; but in the end, only old-fashioned military coercion on the Contra model could dislodge it from power. Leading figures in the Convergence Démocratique made no secret of their intentions at the time of Aristide's reinauguration as president in February 2001; they openly called for another us invasion, 'this time to get rid of Aristide and rebuild the disbanded Haitian army'. Failing that, they told the *Washington Post*, 'the CIA should train and equip Haitian officers exiled in the neighbouring Dominican Republic so they could stage a comeback themselves'.<sup>46</sup> The us, it seems, obeyed these instructions to the letter.

The insurgency that eventually triggered the second coup began just when it seemed as if Aristide's new administration might finally be making some political progress. Shortly after talks held in mid-July 2001 at the Hotel Montana, the OPL's Pierre-Charles and other leaders of the CD acknowledged that they were close to achieving a 'total agreement' with the FL. Less than a fortnight later, on 28 July, groups of army veterans launched attacks against police stations along the Dominican Republic border, killing at least five officers. What happened next is typical of the pattern that persisted right through to the completion of *Option Zéro* on 29 February 2004. The government arrested 35 suspects

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an Amnesty briefing paper released on 8 October 2003 refers to mounting violence in clashes between FL opponents and supporters; it identifies two FL supporters killed in political confrontations and refers to government claims that four other FL supporters were killed in Cité Soleil. All reports on [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org). See also Arthur, *Haiti in Focus*, p. 25; Patrick Bellegarde Smith, *Haiti: The Breached Citadel*, Boulder, CO 1990, pp. 97–101.

<sup>46</sup> *Washington Post*, 2 February 2001.

linked to the attacks, including some CD supporters. With the approval of the US ambassador, the CD responded by breaking off further negotiations with the FL, claiming that Aristide had staged the attacks himself in order to justify a crackdown on his opponents. A similar sequence would follow the next major incident, a full scale assault on the Presidential Palace in December 2001.<sup>47</sup>

What actually began to unfold in Haiti in 2001, in other words, was less ‘a crisis of human rights’ than a low-level war between elements of the former armed forces and the elected government that had disbanded them. Amnesty International reports indicate that at least 20 police officers or FL supporters were killed by army veterans in 2001, and another 25 in further paramilitary attacks in 2003, mostly in the lower Central Plateau near the US-monitored Dominican border. Militarization of some regional FL groups was an almost inevitable result. Most of the known leaders of this insurgency were trained by the US and, although evidence of Washington’s direct support for the ‘rebels’ will be hard to find, American allegiances have been made perfectly explicit in the wake of Aristide’s expulsion.

In the autumn of 2003 the guerrillas based over the border (led by Louis Jodel Chamblain and Guy Philippe) were strengthened by a new insurgency inside Haiti itself led by Jean Tatoune. Despite his close US connections and a conviction for his role in the Raboteau massacre of 1994, Tatoune managed to swing the Gonaïves-based gang known as the ‘Cannibal Army’ against Lavalas, after making the implausible but widely reported claim that Aristide was behind the murder, in September 2003, of the gang’s former leader, long-standing Lavalas activist Amiot Métayer—who also happened to be an equally long-standing enemy of Tatoune.

### *Demanding reimbursement*

In April 2003, the desperately cash-starved Aristide attempted to rally his countrymen with the demand that, in the bicentennial year of Haitian independence, France should reimburse the 90 million francs that Haiti had been forced to pay between 1825 and 1947 as compensation for the loss of colonial property. Assuming a low return of 5 per cent in

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<sup>47</sup> Fattou, *Haiti’s Predatory Republic*, pp. 184–5, 206–7.

annual interest, he calculated that the sum was now equivalent to 21 billion American dollars. As Michael Dash has noted, 'Aristide got a lot of support for this demand both inside and outside of Haiti', particularly in Africa and Latin America.<sup>48</sup> Unlike most slavery-related reparation demands currently in the air, the Haitian claim refers to a precise and documented sum of money extracted in hard currency by the colonial power. Though quick to pour scorn on the claim, the French government was clearly rattled, with Chirac soon resorting to threat: 'Before bringing up claims of this nature', he warned in the summer of 2003, 'I cannot stress enough to the authorities of Haiti the need to be very vigilant about—how should I put it—the nature of their actions and their regime'.<sup>49</sup>

The commission dispatched by the Foreign Ministry to devise a more 'philosophical' defence of the French position duly concluded that, while Haiti had indeed been 'impeccable' in its own payments to France, there was no 'legal case' for the reimbursement claim. To general applause from the French media, the Commission's Report described the FL's demand as 'aggressive propaganda' based on 'hallucinatory accounting'. It noted with some satisfaction that 'no member of the democratic opposition to Aristide takes the reimbursement claims seriously'. It recognized, however, that the opposition and paramilitaries lacked sufficient 'mobilizing force' to see the job through; and that the Americans, though hamstrung by domestic considerations ('*boat-people*, Black Caucus'), were looking for 'an honourable way out of the crisis'. It stressed that a 'more affirmative' French engagement in Haiti would not be carried out against the interests of the us, but in a spirit of 'harmony and farsightedness'. At stake was an opportunity for 'audacious and resolute coordination'.<sup>50</sup>

Without such intervention, as the Report acknowledged, the Lavalas government could not have been dislodged. The stumbling block was Aristide's continuing popularity. The battering of the last fifteen years had taken its toll on his support, but as the most detailed—and by no means uncritical—study of the recent period concludes, there was no

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Dionne Jackson Miller, 'Aristide's Call for Reparations from France Unlikely to Die', *Inter Press Service News Agency*, 12 March 2004.

<sup>49</sup> *Miami Herald*, 18 December 2003; Heather Williams, 'A Coup for the Entente Cordiale! Why France Joined the us in Haiti', *Counterpunch*, 16 February 2004.

<sup>50</sup> Debray, *Rapport*, pp. 13, 11, 12, 52–4.

doubt that Aristide still enjoyed ‘undisputed and overwhelming popularity’ among the mass of Haitians.<sup>51</sup> The Gallup poll conducted in October 2000 rated the FL as thirteen times more popular than its closest competitor, and over half of those polled identified Aristide as their most trusted leader.<sup>52</sup> According to the latest reliable measure, a further Gallup poll conducted in March 2002, the FL remained four times more popular than all its significant competitors combined.<sup>53</sup>

### *Return of the old guard*

The real goals of the occupation that began on 29 February 2004 are perfectly apparent: to silence or obliterate all that remains of this support. During the first week of their deployment, the Franco-American invasion force operated almost exclusively in pro-Aristide neighbourhoods and killed only FL supporters. Their new puppet Prime Minister Gérard Latortue (a 69-year-old ex-UN factotum and Miami talk-show host) publicly embraced the convicted mass-murderer Tatoune and his ex-army rebels in Gonaïves as ‘freedom fighters’—a move interpreted by the *New York Times* as ‘sending a clear message of stability’.<sup>54</sup> Latortue’s ‘national unity government’ is composed exclusively of members of the traditional

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<sup>51</sup> Fatton, *Haiti’s Predatory Republic*, p. 182.

<sup>52</sup> In the October 2000 poll, Aristide’s closest rivals, Evans Paul and Gérard Pierre-Charles, both disaffected members of the original Lavalas coalition, scored only 3.8 and 2.1 per cent respectively; the hapless Bazin, Aristide’s rival in 1990, scored less than 1 per cent.

<sup>53</sup> A brief exchange in early March on the BBC’s flagship news programme illustrates how that support has generally been treated by the world media. After a short interview with the now exiled Aristide, in which he repeated his claim that he had been forced out of office under US pressure, the programme anchor turned to BBC correspondent Daniel Lak in Port-au-Prince and asked, in the corporation’s characteristically even-handed way: ‘So it’s not completely made up, Aristide does have people who support him, it’s not just a handful of thugs who are paid by him?’ Lak replied: ‘Oh absolutely. The people who support him are the poor of this country, the vast majority. There are 8 million Haitians, and probably 95 per cent of them are desperately poor . . . It’s the rich and the small middle class who support Aristide’s opponents, and the poor who generally support Aristide.’ What then about the conflicting explanations of Aristide’s departure: was it effectively a coup, or a voluntary resignation? ‘Is it possible to peer through and establish any truth about this’, asked the anchor, ‘or is it just too difficult, from where you’re standing?’ Lak’s answer speaks volumes: ‘I think it’s just too difficult, um . . . The two options are pretty stark. But it’s clear that the Americans did want to see the back of Mr Aristide’ (‘The World at One’, BBC Radio 4, 8 March 2004).

<sup>54</sup> *New York Times*, 21 March 2004.

elite. On March 14, the Haitian police began arresting Lavalas militants on suspicion of unidentified crimes, but decided not to pursue the rebel death squad leaders, even those already convicted of atrocities. The new National Police chief, Léon Charles, explained that while 'there's a lot of Aristide supporters' to be arrested, the government 'still has to make a decision about the rebels—that's over my head'.<sup>55</sup> On March 22 Latortue's new Interior Minister, the ex-General Hérard Abraham, announced plans to integrate the paramilitaries into the police force and confirmed his intention to re-establish the army which Aristide abolished in 1995.<sup>56</sup> In late March, anti-Aristide death squads continued to control the country's second largest city, Cap-Haïtien, where 'dozens of bullet-riddled bodies have been brought to the morgue over the last month'.<sup>57</sup> While scores of other Aristide supporters were being killed up and down the country, the US Coast Guard applied Bush's order, in keeping with usual US practice (but in flagrant violation of international law), to refuse *all* Haitian applications for asylum in advance.

The Security Council resolution that mandated the invading Franco-American troops as a UN Multinational Interim Force on 29 February 2004 called for a follow-up UN Stabilization Force to take over three months later. In March, Kofi Annan duly sent his Special Advisor, John Reginald Dumas, and Hocine Medili, to assess the situation on the ground. The 'Report of the Secretary-General on Haiti', published in April, took the obfuscatory euphemism of UN discourse to new levels. 'It is unfortunate that, in its bicentennial year, Haiti had to call again on the international community to help it overcome a serious political and security situation', wrote Annan. The circumstances of the elected President's overthrow were decorously skirted, the Secretary-General merely noting that: 'Early on February 29, Mr Aristide left the country'. The toppling of the constitutional government was deemed to offer Haitians the opportunity of 'a peaceful, democratic and locally-owned future'.<sup>58</sup>

Admittedly, the realization of that future was to be somewhat protracted. Annan noted that, while the local political parties, including

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<sup>55</sup> Michael Christie, 'Haiti police begin rounding up Aristide associates', *Reuters*, 14 March 2004.

<sup>56</sup> Ibon Villeda and Joseph Guylor Delva, 'Haiti to integrate rebels into police force', *Reuters*, 23 March 2004.

<sup>57</sup> Paisley Dodds, 'Cap-Haïtien scene', *Associated Press*, 23 March 2004.

<sup>58</sup> UNSC, 'Report of the Secretary-General on Haiti', 16 April 2004, pp. 31, 3.

the Fanmi Lavalas and Convergence Démocratique, all hoped for general elections before the end of 2004, ‘members of civil society and the international community were of the view that more time would be needed’. Moreover, democracy—when the time was right—should begin at parish-pump levels, since ‘Haiti’s political life has too often been dominated by highly personalized presidential elections, fostering inflammatory rhetoric and distracting the population’s attention from local challenges’. On April 29, the Security Council voted unanimously to send an 8,300-strong UN Stabilization Force from 1 June, under the leadership of Lula’s Brazil, to ‘foster democratic governance’ and, of course, ‘empower the Haitian people’. Among the paragons of popular empowerment dispatching troops to Haiti are Nepal, Angola, Benin and Pakistan.<sup>59</sup> ‘We will stay until democracy is reinstated’, announced the Chilean UN ambassador, whose country had joined the initial invasion force along with the US, France and Canada. The latter may soon be coming under renewed pressure to prove its loyalty, since—what with the Ivory Coast and Burundi—the UN reports having difficulty in mustering enough Francophone forces for all the missions in hand. As UN spokesman David Wimhurst confessed to the *LA Times*: ‘There’s a surge in peacekeeping, and there’s a squeeze on troops. We’re concerned that it will be difficult for French-speaking countries to step up to the plate.’<sup>60</sup>

### *Exemplary Haiti*

In 1804, the outcome of Haiti’s war of independence dealt an unprecedented blow to the colonial order. The victory celebrated two hundred years ago was to inspire generations of revolutionary leaders all over Africa and the Americas. The triumph of neo-colonialism achieved in February 2004 was clearly meant to ensure that Haiti will never again furnish the ‘threat of a good example’. Reduced to poverty and debt-dependence by reparation payments to its former colonial master, the country was further brutalized by the dramatic polarization of wealth and power imposed by its tiny ruling elite. By the mid-80s, the brutal and corrupt Duvalier dictatorships ended by provoking a mass protest movement too powerful for them to control. When the Haitian elite lost confidence in Jean-Claude Duvalier’s power to preserve the status quo, it initially sought merely to replace his regime with another form of military rule. This solution lasted

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<sup>59</sup> Voting for the occupation force, in addition to the permanent five: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Brazil, Chile, Germany, Pakistan, Philippines, Romania and Spain.

<sup>60</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, 1 May 2004.

from 1986 to 1990, but the army could only suppress the growing movement by resorting to unacceptably public levels of violence. Unrelenting repression brought Haiti to the brink of revolution.

What began following the Lavalas election victory of 1990 was the deployment of a partially new strategy for disarming this revolution, at a moment when the Cold War no longer offered automatic justification for the repression of mass movements by the overwhelming use of force. Designed not simply to suppress the popular movement but to discredit and destroy it beyond repair, the key to this strategy was the implementation of economic measures intended to intensify already crippling levels of mass impoverishment, backed up by old-fashioned military repression and propaganda designed to portray resistance to elite interests as undemocratic and corrupt. The operation has been remarkably successful—so successful that in 2004, with the enthusiastic backing of the media, the UN and the wider ‘international community’, it resulted in the removal of a constitutionally elected government whose leadership had always enjoyed the support of a large majority of the population.

There is every reason to suspect that by the end of this year, many hundreds of FL activists will have been killed. With them will die the chances of rebuilding any inclusive popular movement for at least another generation. The Lavalas leadership had many faults, and there is much to learn from its defeat. But Lavalas was the only organization of the last half-century to have successfully mobilized the Haitian masses in a social and political challenge to their intolerable situation, and it was removed from office through the combined efforts of those who, for obvious reasons, feared and opposed that challenge. If Lavalas also remains a bitterly divisive force, this is largely because it was the only large-scale popular movement ever to question the massive inequalities of power, influence and wealth which have always divided Haitian society. That Lavalas managed to do little to reduce them may say less about the weakness of the movement than it does about the extraordinary strength, today, of such inequalities.

1 May 2004