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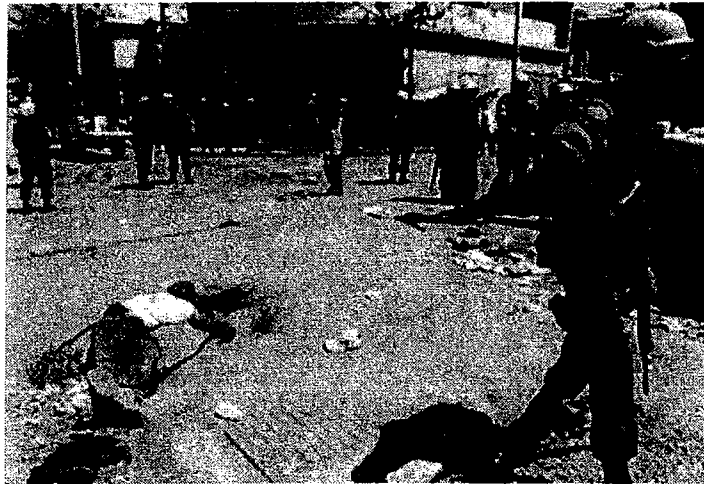
## Haitian Police Open Fire on Nonviolent March for Democracy

by Bill Quigley

One year ago today, the elected government of Haiti, led by President Jean Bertrand Aristide, was forced out of office and replaced by unelected people more satisfactory to business interests and the US, France and Canada.

Today there was a large nonviolent March for Democracy called for the neighborhood of Bel-Air (Beautiful Air). I attended with Pere Gerard Jean-Juste and others from St. Clare's Parish. We started with prayers in the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in the center of Bel Air. After prayers we joined the larger crowd outside marching and singing through the streets of the old and quite poor neighborhood.

Thousands of people were walking and dancing to the beat of drums, loudly chanting, "Bring Back Titi (Aristide)!!!!" in Creole, French and English.



Brazilian U.N. peacekeepers surround the body of a Haitian man killed during a protest march by supporters of former Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide calling for his return on the one year anniversary of his ouster in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Monday, Feb. 28, 2005. Two people were killed and several wounded when Haitian police arrived to break up the pro-Aristide march four blocks from the National Palace. (AP Photo/Kent Gilbert)

Fr. Jean-Juste has become one of the main voices for democracy in Haiti since his release from prison several weeks ago after 48 days in jail with no charges. He was interviewed two dozen times by local and international media during the walk with the crowd. It all seemed like a peaceful unorganized mardi gras parade until I noticed the Reuters correspondent was wearing a bullet proof vest. MINUSTAH, the UN security presence was all around. The giant moving party continued down Des Cesar Street. The street was packed from side to side with people carrying signs, umbrellas, and handmade cardboard posters all calling for the return of democracy and Aristide. Neighborhood people joined in or clapped and danced from their front steps.

Suddenly, at the corner of Monsieigneur Guillot Street and Des Cesar, there was a loud boom from very close by. People started screaming and running. Another boom, then another. As people fled, I slipped on a pile of fruit and tried deperately to hide behind a very small tree. As people rushed past and dove into an opening in a concrete wall, the

booms continued. I then dove through the wall and hid behind a one foot wide concrete pillar. The booms continued. People were down in the street. I saw a big white official looking truck hurtling down the street as the booms continued. Others saw police in black uniforms, helmets, ski masks, and large guns shooting into the crowd. People around me were huddled under stairs and crying. The group from St. Clare's pulled me into a corner and we were rolled into a ball until the booms stopped.

Out on the street a man was down and unconscious. Fr. Jean-Juste knelt over him and prayed. Down the street others were carrying injured people on their backs. The crowd screamed that the police were coming back and we ran down an alley into a small home. Children were screaming, adults were crying, everyone was in fear. We waited, dirty and drenched in sweat, until the growing UN presence made it safe to leave.

Early reports document several people shot, including journalists, at least one killed. Others were beaten. Two men showed me where the police wounded them.

As we drove slowly out of the now deserted neighborhood, the faces of the people on the porches who were so happy minutes before, were now somber, many crying.

As we rode back to his parish, Fr. Jean-Juste said: "The Aristide supporters were such a big number, it was very difficult to have a proper estimation of the crowd. The message is clear. Our vote has been counted. It still must be counted. There is no other way for Haiti to go forward but with the return of constitutional order, the release of all political prisoners, and the physical return of President Aristide."

Though the march for democracy in Haiti was halted by police shooting into the unarmed crowd, the people I talked to said their march for the return of democracy in Haiti will continue.

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