

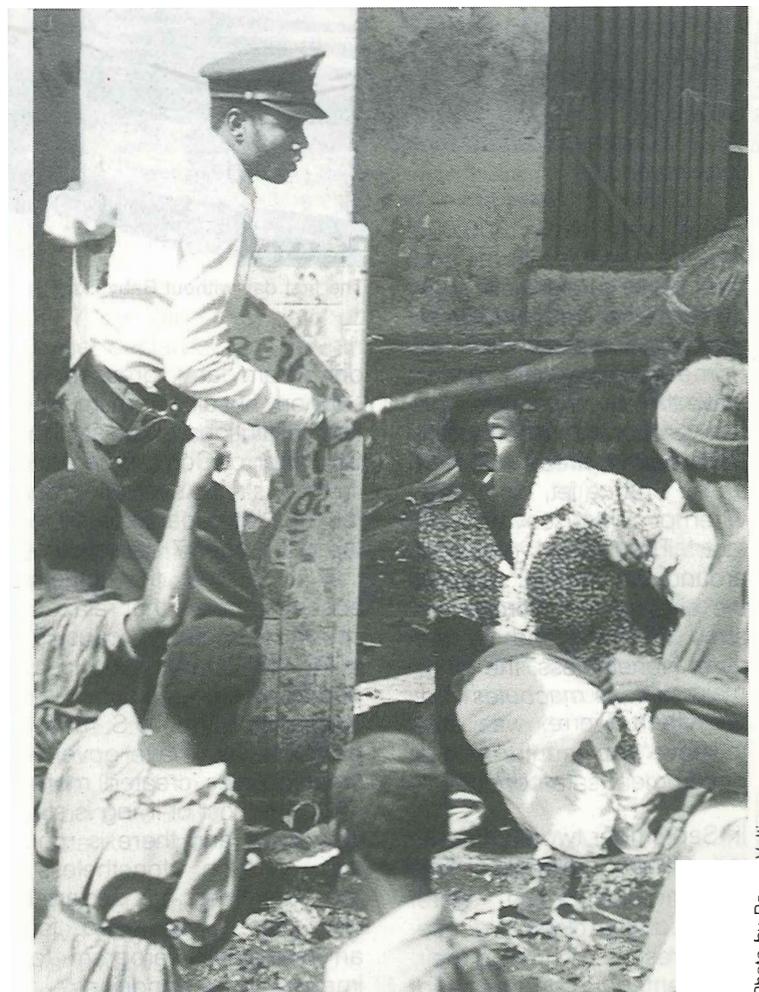
Freedom Is Not Built in a Day

This year will be decisive for Haiti as mass movements struggle to limit the powers of the military government.

It's been a year now since the Haitian people managed to put an end to 29 years of dictatorship by Jean-Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier. It was front page news around the world. But when the dust died down after the last incidents related to Baby Doc's move to southern France, the whole world simply forgot

about Haiti, as if overthrowing a dictator was all the country needed to solve its problems. But things haven't been that simple in Haiti's first post-Duvalier year.

In November 1986, there were three important events involving grass-roots participation. The first was a women's demonstration against repression with some 30 to 40 thousand women marching. Right after that, there was a transport strike that paralyzed transportation, not



Even with Duvalier gone, repression continues

Photo by Pe Valtierra

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only in the capital city, but also in provincial areas. This strike was in response to the death, under "strange circumstances," of a member of the bus drivers' union, precisely when the union was involved in a labor dispute with the current government.

The third important event was a 100,000-person strong demonstration, without a doubt the country's largest protest march ever held. Its purpose was to show the strength of grassroots discontent over the continued presence of Duvalier followers in the country and in the government itself. The march was people's response to an announcement made just a few days earlier that many important figures from the Duvalier regime were going to form a political party with the hopes of taking power. The announcement provoked a strong reaction from those who resent the fact that Duvalier and his associates were never punished for the atrocities they committed against the Haitian people. And it wasn't only that; the present government has actually supported Duvalier's old secret police force, the greatly feared *tontons macoutes*.

There were some 300,000 *tontons macoutes* by the end of Duvalier's reign, although the force was dissolved just a few days before his fall. Some were gradually able to leave the country. In late April last year, one of its former directors was already aboard an Air France jet, disguised, when people discovered the fact. Thousands gathered around the airport, stopped the airplane and forced the army to arrest and try the man. Nonetheless, the other major *tontons macoutes* leader, Albert Pierre, was able to leave the country with a government safe conduct.

In September two high ranking officers, Colonels Frank Ronain and Valve, were arrested after clear evidence was presented showing their involvement in torture and other crimes. A few weeks

later, however, a military court decided in secret to release them, and they immediately left the country. The same month, disappearances began again. Charlotte Jacqueline, a monitor for the Church's literacy mission, was disappeared in one of the capital city's poor neighborhoods.

In addition, the current government is very isolated, not

Despite all this, however, it is important to emphasize that with Duvalier's fall, the Haitian people won their right to express themselves freely. Today, there is great freedom of expression; events and problems in Haiti are publicly discussed and debated on the radio and television and in the newspapers. Using this newly conquered freedom, people have been able to build a strong chal-

lenges of political prisoners had been found—into a monument to Duvalier's victims. The government refused to sanction the march and sent in the army to fire on demonstrators. Six people were killed and many more wounded. People understood this as an expression of the attempts to re-establish "Duvalierism." From that day on, people have firmly maintained their own demands



The first day without Baby Doc

Photo by Pedro Valterra

only from any grass-roots support, but also from important institutions such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Industrial Association. In fact, the latter participated in the November 7 demonstration to protest the junta's economic policy that relaxed import restrictions, causing many nationally produced goods to be edged out of the market mostly by U.S.-made products. Nor have government policies created more jobs. The cost of living is still very high, and there is runaway inflation. Nonetheless, the government has declared that there's no need for an emergency program to improve living conditions.

lenges to the government that sought to establish a kind of "Duvalierism" without Duvalier. And if the government hasn't been successful in its efforts, it's only because of grass-roots mobilizations, not only in the capital, but throughout the provinces as well. The entire society has been shaken by the mobilizations, a society held in the grips of terror for more than a quarter of a century.

The definitive split between the new government and the people came on April 26. All of the country's human rights organizations had called for a demonstration to convert the country's major torture center—where 10,000 skel-

and redoubled their efforts to keep the Duvalierists from achieving their goals.

The government decided to hold elections on short order, hoping to divert people's attention, dilute grass-roots organizing efforts and divide the popular movement around different leaders, representing a variety of different perspectives, who might be vying for office. But the movement didn't go for the bait. To the contrary, it intensified its efforts to have grass-roots demands met, demands focused on hunger, unemployment, environmental problems, health care and misery. Indifference spread, then, toward the

electoral process that was to choose members for a constituent assembly. As a result, abstentionism was the overwhelming victor in the October 19 elections. Less than ten percent of the voting age population turned out at the ballot box, handing a clear message of disapproval to the military government.

At the same time, the Reagan administration's very obvious efforts to shore up the ruling junta have begun to generate widespread anti-U.S. sentiments among people for the first time. While still a new phenomenon, it has grown to such an extent that when U.S. Secretary of State George Schultz was in the country last October, there were large demonstrations to protest his visit. In addition, people protested against the presence of 11 U.S. military advisors, as well as the \$4 million sent in direct aid to the Haitian army.

In order to provide some context for the above, it is important to note that under Duvalier, the army was not the main institution used for domestic repression. Rather that task was assigned to the *tontons macoutes*, which in addition to the 300,000-strong secret police, included a 45,000-man, active paramilitary force. The army had been relegated to a secondary position and had only 7500 men. According to the new Pentagon proposal, the Haitian army should grow to have some 25,000 troops.

The U.S. economic aid destined exclusively for the army is to be used to buy arms and to modernize its fighting capacity. That's why in the protests against Schultz' visit, people shouted, "We want bread, we want factories, we don't want arms."

The anti-U.S. demonstrations were the first of their kind in Haiti since the time when the United States occupied the country militarily from 1915 to 1934. And it is really quite symbolic that on the very same day that the largest pop-

ular protest in Haiti's history was being held, arms were being unloaded from a U.S. plane in Port-au-Prince, the country's capital.

This year there will be municipal elections in July and presidential elections at the end of the year. The new President-elect will take office in February 1988. Nonetheless, up until now, not only have people shown a marked indifference to the electoral process, but they actually regard the whole thing as "suspect" since there's no candidate with a platform addressing real grass-roots concerns. In addition, no candidate has been able to develop a political organization with the capacity to mobilize people around the elections.

There is also a widespread belief that the military government isn't really going to allow totally free elections and is actually cooking up a fraud to let the army keep its hold on power or looking for a civilian who would be willing to front for the armed forces. And many people think it's equally probable that given the strength of the popular movement, the army will simply decide not to hold elections, thus prolonging their de facto government.

At the same time, the leadership from a variety of different political movements deeply committed to democracy are thinking about joining together in a broad coalition of forces. They could, then, work more effectively toward the transition to genuine democracy in Haiti, based on meeting basic grass-roots needs and creating a new and lasting social pact.

But no matter what happens, 1987 will doubtless be a decisive year for defining the path to be taken by the Haitian state in this new period of the country's history. ★

Gerard Pierre-Charles