

R E P O R T

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T R I P T O H A I T I

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The opportunity to travel to Haiti in April enabled me to learn more about the activities of the Agency for International Development and to make inquiries into the causes of Haitian immigration to the United States.

Thousands of Haitians have left their country and many have come to South Florida. Approximately 8,000 of these people are awaiting Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) proceedings on their political asylum claims, which of course are closely related to the human rights situation in Haiti.

We knew before going to Haiti that it is very difficult to separate human rights from economic deprivation, especially in a developing country like Haiti. We were aware of charges that our foreign assistance efforts merely prop up a corrupt regime which persecutes its people. On the other hand, we were well briefed on the concept that development is the only way in which Haiti's economic and political problems can be solved, and that while the present government leaves much to be desired, it has shown a marked improvement over its predecessor.

In this report, I will provide a summary of our activities in Haiti followed by our findings and recommendations.

TRIP SUMMARY

Country Briefing:

We began the official portion of our visit on April 16th with a briefing by Embassy and AID representatives on the current political and economic situation in Haiti.

Haitian politics are dominated by the Duvalier family. Relationships among family members and close associates affect the governing of the country and result in a certain amount of unpredictability. The implication was that the cabinet has little role to play in the development of major policy decisions. After meeting with cabinet officials later, however, this was not the impression I was given.

The political authority at the local level is in the hands of a prefect who is appointed by President Duvalier. This prefect is usually a military man.

The presentation given by an Embassy official on the economic situation in Haiti was amply illustrated during our stay. As we moved around the country, it was easy to believe that the per capita income is but \$200 a year. Development is hindered by a lack of natural resources and to some degree by local attitudes. We saw much evidence of soil erosion which is a severe problem caused and aggravated by a lack of proper soil conservation techniques.

AID's efforts focus on rural problems. Agriculture, rural infrastructure and health services are the main elements. In FY 1979, AID's program in Haiti amounts to \$15,647,000. Twenty million dollars had been scheduled for the P.L. 480 Title III program in FY 1980. The funds would have been funneled through the Agriculture, Public Works and Health Ministries for labor-intensive projects. Because of the slowness of the Haitian government to meet the fiscalization requirements of the U.S. and other international donors, negotiations on this program have been stalled.

During the briefing, questions were asked concerning the Embassy's role with regard to the flow of Haitians to and from Florida. It is the firm belief of Embassy officials that the Haitians leave for economic reasons. They pointed out that the human rights situation in Haiti has improved and that the Haitian government has curbed the excesses of the Volunteers for National Security (VSN), formerly known as the Tontons Macoutes.

When Haitians are deported from the U.S., the State Department is supposed to have representatives on hand to meet the returning refugees when they arrive in Port-au-Prince. Names and addresses are provided to the Embassy by INS, and the refugees are told to let the Embassy know if they have any political problems. Haitian immigration authorities and Red Cross officials then talk to the returned refugees in the presence of an American official. We were told that there had been some follow-up interviews a few months after a group had returned from Guantanamo and no problems were reported. It does not appear, however, that any systematic effort is made to keep in touch with those returnees who have made unsuccessful political asylum claims in the U.S. It should be noted that follow-up is made difficult by the fact that many Haitians give false names and addresses or simply disappear into the countryside.

Most visa applications from Haitians are rejected by U.S. consular officials. Illegal immigration is the only way most of them can get to the United States. The Embassy staff stated that if the United States were to grant political asylum to the Haitians,

the reaction of the Haitian government would be very negative in spite of the benefits to Haiti of relieving population and economic pressures. I am not so sure, however, that the Haitian government is really that sensitive about its reputation.

Field Trip to Cul-de-Sac:

Following our briefing, we began an excursion into the Cul-de-Sac located northeast of Port-au-Prince. Our first stop was the rural health center at Croix des Bouquets. The health center is primarily a family planning-maternal health clinic. It was very crowded and had a limited amount of equipment. It is a model project which AID hopes will be duplicated in other parts of the country.

Later we stopped at a rural health clinic in Bas Boen. It is a primary care center staffed by a nurse. Referrals are made from this type of center to the clinic we visited at Croix des Bouquets. The quality of health care was indicated by the most sophisticated piece of equipment on hand, a scale.

Also at Bas Boen we visited the Israeli rural development project which was quite impressive. Following a successful pilot program, the Israelis are expanding the project to include a larger geographical area. Because the area had little water, it was necessary to dig wells for irrigation. The initial project had six wells and five more are planned for the expansion. With irrigated fields, the farmers can be more productive and learn to cooperate more with one another because they must share the use of the irrigation pumps. One of the villagers is chosen to

be the local manager and is paid a small salary by the project.

An earlier effort by some Israelis to start kibbutz-type settlements failed. They discovered that most Haitians are very attached to what little personal property they have, and this still poses an obstacle even in the present project. The Israeli technicians had suggested that some farmers trade their small parcels of land which were dispersed throughout fields surrounding the village. It would have been more efficient to have had one farmer working one consolidated plot of land rather than several small ones. The response of one Haitian farmer to this suggestion was, "Would you trade your children?"

The wells built for irrigation purposes had also become a center of community activity. Many children played in the water and women from the village did much of their laundry there.

Adequate storage has been a problem for the Haitian farmer. In one of the villages, there was a warehouse where crops could be stored. We looked inside and noted that this particular warehouse contained sacks of AID fertilizer.

Israeli involvement in foreign assistance projects originated as a dream of Golda Meir. She considered it very important for Israel to share with the world the knowledge gained by the Israeli people in developing their country. Recently, Israel has tried to narrow the focus of its foreign assistance to agriculture. It is also the Israeli policy to provide the technicians and have the host country provide most of the funding. The Organization of American States (OAS), for example, participates in the financing of the Bas Boen project.

From Bas Boen, we proceeded to an AID-financed agriculture feeder road. These roads are built to facilitate the movement of crops from the farms to the markets. Because of a limited amount of time, we only inspected the road up to where the blacktop stopped.

Meeting with Private Voluntary Organizations:

Back at the AID mission in Port-au-Prince, we met with representatives from the Haitian Red Cross, Church World Service, Catholic Relief Services, CARE, and the Seventh Day Adventists. We had requested such a meeting in order to discuss the problems which would result from the deportation of more than 8,000 Haitians if their political asylum claims in the U.S. were rejected.

If the refugees left Haïti originally for economic reasons, it is important that their transition back into Haitian society be made easier. Many of them have sold all their possessions and have even gone into debt to finance the trip to Florida. They would be forced to return to Haiti with less than they had before. There would be no incentive to stay home if their only hope for economic survival is to leave the island again.

We had hoped that one of the voluntary agencies would be willing to undertake a program to assist these people. Such a program would emphasize job training and perhaps would be best located in the Northwest section of the country. That particular area is considered Haiti's poorest, and information gathered from various sources suggested that most of the refugees come from that province.

We were also concerned that among the returned refugees would be some who had genuine political reasons for leaving but were unable to prove their cases under the current INS procedures. It was our belief that having such a program in place would provide a point of contact for refugees who had been subjected to any reprisals. In the past, the lack of knowledge concerning the whereabouts of refugees who had returned to Haiti made it difficult if not impossible to know if any harm had come to them.

The PVO representatives rejected any possibility that the refugees could be political, and raised objections to giving the returnees any assistance which could be interpreted as being preferential. One representative even claimed that helping the refugees upon their return would only give other Haitians more incentive to leave.

Although we felt that the problem of preferential treatment could be solved by targeting the assistance to particular geographical areas, such as the Northwest, rather than to just those individuals who had returned from Florida, there was a general unwillingness on the part of the PVOs to get involved at all with the refugee question.

In the end, the solution was no solution at all, for all parties agreed that the problem was one that should be handled by the Minister of Social Affairs.

Private Meetings:

Following the PVO meeting, we met with several persons who

had been recommended to us by contacts in the United States. We were seeking outside opinions on the refugee question in particular and on the human rights situation in general.

Because many of those to whom we spoke were reluctant to do so without some assurance of confidentiality, we cannot discuss in detail the contents of the conversations. We received a wide variety of opinions on the question of whether or not the Haitians in Florida were political or economic refugees, but the impressions we gained concerning human rights in Haiti were more uniform. These discussions played a role in helping me to better understand Haiti and to interpret information we were receiving from official sources.

MCH/Nutrition Center Visit: •

On the morning of April 17th, we went to Cite Simone Duvalier to visit an MCH/Nutrition Center. The surrounding slums were more commonly known in Port-au-Prince as Brooklyn and Boston. The project was administered by Catholic nuns and received its funding from a variety of sources.

Cases of malnutrition among the children were very evident. While we were there, a woman brought in a small baby, just two weeks old, who had been born severely malnourished. We were told that it was unlikely that the baby would survive.

We watched a feeding session and visited the sections of the center where mothers are taught crafts which are sold to increase their family incomes. A recreational area and a library--small, but the only public library in Port-au-Prince--were also

available for the poor residents of this area. A clinic where malnourished children could receive medical attention was in the process of being expanded.

Official Meetings:

We began a series of meeting with Haitian officials at the Immigration office. We met with the Director, Mr. Guerrier, and the Deputy Director, Mr. Supplice, who was American-educated and acted as the interpreter. The Deputy Director struck me as being influential in policy decisions as well as important in the day-to-day operations of his agency. I could tell he was no "rubber stamp" person.

Both men insisted that no political reprisals against the returning Haitians occurred. They were, they said, more interested in stopping the leaders of the smuggling operations who charged exorbitant rates to transport Haitians to the Bahamas and Florida. Earlier, we had heard stories of Haitians being thrown overboard in the middle of the ocean, or being left to drift when the captain of the boat demanded more money halfway through the journey.

We were told the returning refugees were given a sum of money and clothes if necessary, and were sent back to their homes. The authorities said they had no way of knowing whether or not they actually went back home.

Mr. Supplice gave us a list of refugees who had been returned to Haiti from Miami several days before we arrived there. We noted that about half were from the Port-de-Paix area in the Northwest

province. Surprisingly, American officials who had accompanied us to our meeting said that they were not informed of this recently arrived group, but that persons in the political section of the Embassy should have been informed by the INS officials who had arranged the deportation.

We next went to see the Minister of Social Affairs, Mr. de Ronceray. The project we had discussed the previous day with the PVOs was described to the Minister. He responded that his government could perhaps plan a new village where there would be housing and employment opportunities available for the returning Haitians. AID officials said that discussions could be started concerning U.S. assistance for such a project.

Although we welcomed the apparent willingness on the part of the Haitian government to provide housing and job training to the economically destitute, we realized there was little likelihood that such a proposal would ever happen. Those refugees who feared political repercussions would view the project as a type of concentration camp. Even if one discounted the political considerations, it was doubtful that the Haitian government could successfully carry out this ambitious plan.

We then paid a courtesy call on Foreign Minister Dorcely. During our brief conversation, the Foreign Minister also brought up the problem of the smuggling operations which exploited the Haitians leaving the island.

We proceeded to the Presidential palace to meet with President-for-Life Jean Claude Duvalier. I and Ambassador Jones met privately with President Duvalier for approximately half an hour

before staff and the press were brought in for introductions and pictures.

The conversation centered on the refugee situation. I specifically asked President Duvalier if he would give me his word that no harm would come to the refugees. He replied that it was not necessary to give his word because no harm had ever come to the refugees before and none will in the future. When I asked that he do so nevertheless, he replied, "Of course."

The President also expressed interest in Minister de Ronceray's idea of a new village for the refugees. Apparently he had been notified by the Minister of our earlier discussion. The President said he supported this idea and gave an optimistic view of when such a village could be ready for occupancy.

He also expressed concern about what he perceived as the spectre of leftism in the Caribbean. He was especially worried by the recent coup in Grenada, and seemed to believe that the U.S. is being too accomodating to communism. The signing of the Panama Canal Treaty was viewed by him as a sign of this softening. He asked us what the U.S. was going to do in view of these dangers to regimes such as his which are staunchly anticommunist. It was my impression that this problem was his primary concern.

My response to him was that continuing his efforts to ensure the basic human rights of his people was the best way to handle the threat of a coup. The President expressed some apprehension of going too far in this direction.

Leather Goods Factory:

Later that day, we visited the Richbar leather goods factory which is owned by a Miamian, Mr. Richard Markowitz. We understood that this type of factory is being encouraged by the Haitian government. The products are made for export and the manufacturers are attracted to Haiti by the low wages. The minimum wage in Haiti is \$1.60 per day, and unemployment presently runs at about 40%.

An economic officer from the U.S. Embassy accompanied us on our visit. She stated that transformation industries like Richbar are an important beginning for a country like Haiti. It is not the optimum form of economic development, but it at least provides employment where there was none before. These industries should gradually develop into other types of manufacturing with more long-range benefits for the country.

Radio Nationale:

I was asked by Radio Nationale, the government radio station to visit the studio and be interviewed. The studio itself was quite interesting and contained a considerable amount of very sophisticated equipment. The manager of the station stressed the role of the station as a means of personal communication in Haiti. With so few persons owning telephones, messages are relayed by way of the radio.

My interview lasted about 20 minutes and centered on the refugee question.

Meeting with the Israeli Ambassador:

I requested a meeting with the Ambassador from Israel, the Honorable Zvi Loker, because I was interested in learning more about Israel's relations with Haiti. I had been greatly impressed by the aid project we had visited the previous day, and I also wanted to get another perspective on the refugee problem.

The Ambassador expressed concern about Haiti's voting record in the UN. Its votes are becoming less and less supportive of Israel. Haiti has been trying to strengthen ties with African states and Haiti's traditional support for Israel is a casualty of this effort.

Ambassador Loker did not believe that the refugees have anything to fear when they come back to Haiti, but he expressed great concern about their economic plight.

He also discussed the small Jewish community in Haiti. There is no synagogue, but the Ambassador himself acts as the rabbi once a year at an Embassy ceremony on Yom Kippur.

Port-de-Paix:

On Wednesday, April 18th, we flew to Port-de-Paix, the capital of the Northwest Province and the area from which we believe most of the Haitian refugees come. The first stop was the city hall where we met with three "mayors," one of which was considered more senior than the other two. During our brief meeting with the town officials, we were told that no harm came to the returning refugees, but that the government in Port-au-Prince had been very insistent that greater efforts be made by the local authori-

ties to stop people from leaving Haiti in the first place.

We also went to visit the Bishop of Port-de-Paix. He was accompanied by two priests who spoke English. One of the priests, Fr. Renald Clerisme, was the director of CARITAS, a Catholic development agency, in the Northwest.

CARITAS has been carrying on programs designed to provide employment and income. One such project is a crafts project. Persons in the U.S. had agreed to buy the crafts, but the volume of sales is not nearly enough to make much difference in the lives of the people of Port-de-Paix. Government neglect of the provinces is apparent in the region. Years ago United Fruit Company provided employment, but for a long time there have been few opportunities for the residents.

Another organization which has been active in development activities in the Northwest is the Haitian American Community Help Organization (HACHO). HACHO was completely funded by USAID from 1963 to 1976. Beginning in 1976, the Government of Haiti joined in providing financial support. In 1979, the U.S. ended its administrative support and negotiations have been going on among the Haitian government, USAID, and HACHO concerning the future of HACHO. Support from other sources are expected and the U.S. will fund specific projects.

Father Clerisme expressed some apprehension concerning the effectiveness of the U.S. food aid programs. In his experience, food-for-work projects had done little to stimulate the local economy and failed to instill good work habits in the participants.

With regard to the refugees, Father Clerisme, the Bishop,

and the other English-speaking priest insisted that to their knowledge no harm ever came to the returned refugees. Of the three, only Father Clerisme could think of a refugee, whom he knew personally, who had come back to Port-de-Paix from Florida.

We asked to see this person, but were told that he had gone to another village to visit some friends. Nevertheless, we proceeded to the neighboring village to find him. We went up a "Food-for-Work" road that was very difficult to drive on. We were fortunate to be in a four-wheel drive vehicle. We stopped at the church in the village and learned from the French priest there that many of his parishioners had left for the United States or the Bahamas.

The man we were seeking, however, had already left again for Port-de-Paix where we eventually found him. We learned that he had only been in Florida for a couple of days. He had landed on the beach at 2:00 a.m. and was picked up by INS at daylight. He was detained briefly and told that his choice was going back to Haiti "voluntarily" or going to jail. He was never told that he could see a lawyer or even make a phone call. Understandably, he chose to return to Haiti rather than go to jail.

We also showed the Bishop and the priests the list of returned Haitians we had been given by the Immigration officials. Although many of them had listed Port-de-Paix addresses, the clergymen told us that they did not know any of them.

Fish Farming:

Upon our arrival back in Port-au-Prince, I by chance met Mr.

Paul Polishuk who lives in my congressional district and owns a fish farm in Haiti. I was especially interested in learning about his operation since AID officials had told me earlier that fish farming just was not feasible in Haiti.

Mr. Polishuk insisted that his fish farm is working. Projects such as his are a great source of protein for the hungry people of Haiti and I resolved to encourage AID to take another look at the feasibility of fish farming in Haiti.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I came away from Haiti with a much better understanding of the economic conditions in the country and some strong impressions concerning the political climate there.

The need for development assistance is clear. The poverty in Haiti is overwhelming, and special attention should continue to be devoted to agriculture and soil conservation as well as basic human needs such as food and health care.

Erosion is an obvious problem in Haiti and presents a massive challenge to the government and all donor countries. Without a solution to this problem, little progress can be made in upgrading Haitian agriculture. Rural incomes will remain abysmally low, and hunger and malnutrition will continue.

While I was very impressed with the feeding program we visited in Port-au-Prince, such programs barely scratch the surface of the tremendous nutritional needs of the children of Haiti.

Although no one can quarrel with the fact that feeding the hungry is a good thing, I heard many criticisms of feeding programs

funded under Title II of the P.L. 480 program. Charging that food aid does more harm than good, the critics maintain that free food creates a dependency on foreign handouts and discourages the production of locally available food sources. Watching tiny undernourished babies being fed in the Port-au-Prince slum, it was hard to believe, however, that they would have been better off without the food provided through foreign assistance.

The strongest criticisms, however, were reserved for the "Food-for-Work" projects. Even AID officials agreed that changes in this program were probably needed. We were told that a study was to be done to more properly evaluate this program's effectiveness. Complaints about these projects again centered on the dependency that develops in participants. The motivation to produce for themselves is destroyed as they come to rely on food given as payment for working on the Title II projects. Also very disturbing are accounts of participants selling food rather than consuming it. This can further distort the local market system and harm the local farmers.

Since my only experience with "Food-for-Work" projects was a road leading out of Port-de-Paix, I cannot really judge the value of the projects themselves. I did note, however, that the road was extremely primitive and in ill-repair.

I believe Congress should pay close attention to the effectiveness of Title II programs, and I am anxious to have the results of the study AID officials said was to be conducted.

I believe we should also pay close attention to the relationship between foreign assistance and migration. There are both

political and economic factors which have caused the flight of thousands of Haitians to Florida. The economic reasons are quite obvious given the high level of unemployment (40%) and widespread poverty. Foreign aid can address the economic causes by increasing incomes. Economic development is seen by some as the best solution to the refugee problem.

One AID official, however, suggested that an effective foreign assistance program could increase the number of Haitians leaving Haiti. His theory was that as incomes rise, the means to leave the island would be more readily available. This theory, however, is only an assumption, and I personally doubt that this would be the case.

A truly effective program may be difficult to achieve in Haiti. Government officials and the more affluent Haitians do not seem all that concerned about the hardships of their own people. I observed a certain amount of "malign neglect" on the part of this group, and AID officials complained of the government's lack of commitment.

This is best exemplified by the existence of off-budget accounts which are used for a variety of purposes. Some of the money may be used for hospitals and schools, but it is generally assumed that much of it goes to personal enrichment. Whatever the purpose, this unaccountability undermines foreign assistance efforts, which in effect substitute for Haitian government revenues which are diverted to these off-budget accounts.

The upper class's neglect of the majority of Haitians is also demonstrated in the concentration of the government's develop-

ment efforts in Port-au-Prince. Very few employment opportunities exist outside the capital city. There is some tourist activity in Cap Haitien, but no industries are to be found in cities like Port-de-Paix.

The lack of job opportunities and the poor farming in the Northwest Province, in addition to its geographic location, go a long way towards explaining the high proportion of refugees who come to Florida from this area. Our assistance efforts in this province should be given special attention. Greater employment opportunities will serve to discourage those refugees without political problems from making the trip to the United States.

The refugee problem is one which will not go away. In light of this, it is unfortunate that the private voluntary organizations we talked with ducked this issue. This is a situation where a commitment now could help alleviate a problem which will only grow more serious in the years to come.

Addressing the economic problems of Haiti will not, however, resolve the serious questions raised concerning human rights violations. As a congressional visitor only in Haiti for a few days, I did not witness any overt acts of repression which we normally associate with human rights violations. My conversations and observations, however, did lead me to the conclusion that Haitians live in a climate of fear, and that government actions are unpredictable and arbitrary.

We had attempted to contact a few persons whose names we had received from our acquaintances in the U.S. We were greeted with suspicion in most cases and had a great deal of difficulty

trying to convince them that we meant no harm and that we had gotten their names from friendly sources. In at least one case, we found it hard to justify such fear in view of the paucity of information given us, but as that person later told us, "That tells you something about Haiti." Fear and suspicion exist even without obvious cause.

In the course of these conversations, we asked if they knew of any harm coming to the Haitians who had been returned from Florida. We received a wide range of answers, from absolutely no harm to a report of a killing. Others said that the returnees were sometimes jailed but usually not for a long time.

The one returnee whom I found in Port-de-Paix had experienced no problems upon his return to Haiti and apparently received more callous treatment at the hands of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service in Miami. This particular person gave no indication that he had left Haiti for political reasons.

I was concerned by the fact that the returnees were so difficult to locate. The priests in Port-de-Paix recognized none of the names from their area included in the list given us by the Haitian immigration authorities, and a missionary who served in the Southern part of Haiti could recall just one such person.

We were given some explanations for these apparent disappearances. False names and addresses, for example, are often given by the returning Haitians. Another possible explanation is the fact that in order to leave Haiti in the first place, persons had to go into debt. Upon returning, they have no means to repay these debts and thus are afraid to return to their home villages. These

explanations may suffice for some of the disappearances, but I believe that greater efforts should be made to determine where these people are and why they find it advantageous to go underground.

I am also concerned that future political problems could develop for the returned refugees, particularly those who could be deported following a lengthy stay in the United States. One of the persons we spoke with asserted that they may leave as economic refugees, but when they return they are political. This statement can be interpreted in two ways. It can mean that the returnees are indeed persecuted because they left Haiti, or it can mean that the Haitians become very politicized during their stay in the U.S. In the second case, their U.S. experience may vividly demonstrate to them the political and economic shortcomings of Haiti. Their increased frustration upon returning to Haiti can lead to greater political involvement and agitation, thus making them threats to the established order that they may not have been before.

Improvements in the area of human rights should be recognized and encouraged, but we should not ignore the fact that what Amnesty International has referred to as the "apparatus of repression" of the previous Duvalier regime has not been dismantled. Changing the name and appearance of the Tontons Macoutes is not the same as abolishing the group. The ubiquitous military presence, whether regular army or special groups such as the Leopards, is an obvious instrument of intimidation.

In addition, the great fear the government has of leftist

movements around the Caribbean could well lead to the introduction of more repressive measures.

These factors make me very skeptical of the assertions of both Haitian and American officials that the Haitians in Florida are purely economic refugees. I am not qualified to say how many are indeed political refugees, but given the conditions in Haiti, we must give these persons every possible opportunity to prove their asylum cases.