

## **BUILDING DEMOCRACY IN HAITI: HOW THE U.S. CAN HELP**

The dramatic flight of Haitian Dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier last week opened the door for Haiti to join the ranks of the Western Hemisphere's 26 functioning democracies. The Reagan Administration's role in nudging Duvalier out of Haiti deservedly has won the approval of many who often criticize Reagan's Caribbean policy. The Administration may find, however, that getting rid of Duvalier was the easy part. The tougher task will be to fashion a policy that ensures that a stable democracy takes root in Haiti. As such, the U.S. and its Caribbean allies must be patient and not force rapid changes on Haiti. While Haitian elections, therefore, are essential, they must not be scheduled before Haiti's nascent, pro-Western political parties have a chance to organize and build a strong base among the island nation's six million people.

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with a per capita Gross National Product (GNP) of \$300 and an illiteracy rate approaching 90 percent. Although Haiti has a relatively open economy, with no controls on foreign capital flows and foreign exchange movements, it depends on foreign aid for more than a third of its \$480 million budget. During the final months of the Duvalier regime, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) denied a \$12 million loan due to the government's "fiscal irresponsibility"--a kind way to describe the regime's massive corruption.

Haiti's new six-member governing council already has made important reforms. It has freed political prisoners and disbanded the feared Ton-Tons Macoutes, Duvalier's secret police. The new military-civilian junta, however, lacks popular support, has no experience in governance, and is handicapped by the strong links that all but one of its members had to the Duvalier regime. For these reasons, the governing council can only be temporary. Yet Haiti is not ready for what one local businessman called "instant democracy."

Unlike Grenada, which had a working parliamentary democracy prior to its four and a half years under a Marxist dictatorship, Haiti has no democratic tradition on which to build. Its tiny opposition political

parties were so repressed by the Duvalier regime that they never recruited more than a couple thousand members. The few pro-democracy political groups of Haitian exiles in North America and Europe are small and riven by factional quarrels. It will take at least two years for their members to return home and begin building grassroots support.

Instant elections, thus, are no prescription for Haitian democracy. They would play into the hands of the anti-democratic Left. The pro-Moscow Haitian Communist Party (PUCH), though small, is well organized and funded by Moscow and Havana. Following classic Leninist strategy, the PUCH has formed an alliance with the Haitian Union of Democratic and Patriotic Forces, a group of Maoist and Social Democrat Haitians based in Paris which receives support from the French Socialist Party. This attempt at a "popular front" mimics the method used by Salvador Allende's Marxist regime to win power in Chile in 1970. There is evidence that the Haitian Communist Party already has an extensive underground network in southern Haiti. Haiti, of course, with its strategic location controlling the Windward Passage and the Jamaica Channel, is an alluring target to Moscow. And there have been reports that Cuban guerrillas have infiltrated the country to take advantage of the unstable political situation.

Washington must work closely with Haiti's fledgling democratic political parties to help them develop into organizations that will provide an alternative to the Left. The current governing council should be encouraged to expand to include the moderate opposition. This would provide the moderates with government experience and give the junta greater legitimacy. In addition, the U.S. should mobilize the resources of the National Endowment for Democracy, the National Republican Institute for International Affairs, and the National Democratic Institute for international Affairs. These organizations have an excellent record in fostering the growth of democratic institutions in the Caribbean, and provide a positive bipartisan example of U.S. political principles.

A democracy in Haiti, or elsewhere, can only be constructed on a foundation of economic freedom and respect for individual rights. U.S. organizations such as the Inter-American Foundation therefore should help the new governing council dismantle the repressive apparatus that propped up the Duvalier regime. As important, help will be needed to eradicate the corruption and mismanagement that severely limited Haiti's economic growth. The governing council's progress on human rights should be rewarded by a rapid release of some \$56 million in U.S. economic aid for FY 1986. The council also must be encouraged to attract foreign private investment in Haiti, which will provide jobs.

Haiti presents U.S. policy makers with a great opportunity to demonstrate to other poor Third World nations that democracy and free market economic systems offer their people the best chance of a better life. Given wise and carefully formulated assistance, the U.S. can help this small Caribbean nation to become a model for the developing world.

Timothy Ashby, Ph.D.  
Policy Analyst