

@CHAPTER = HAITI

Despite continuing attacks on popular organizations, unchecked random violence and slow progress toward elections, Haiti's military government continued to enjoy the support of the Bush administration throughout most of 1989. That support included the first major government-to-government aid since the violent collapse of the November 1987 elections, and excuses and silence in the face of ongoing abuses. By year's end, however, with increasingly bold military repression and a new U.S. ambassador, the administration had begun to show greater resolve in pressing for elections and a halt to abuses.

Lieutenant General Prosper Avril took power in a September 17, 1988 military coup, the fourth military or military-dominated government to rule Haiti since the fall of the Duvalier dictatorship in February 1986. Despite vows to hold elections and respect human rights, General Avril has made little progress on either front. Arrests and beatings of members of popular organizations that were critical of military rule continued throughout the year, as did the military practice of breaking up demonstrations held by such organizations. This repression heightened on November 1, when three popular leaders in Port-au-Prince were arrested by the Presidential Guard, savagely beaten and, the next evening, displayed on national television. The military government charged the three with plotting to assassinate General Avril and other military leaders, but no proof of the purported plot has been presented, and the arrests came three days after a highly publicized press conference in which the three had participated in a call for a month of nonviolent protest leading to a demonstration on November 29, the second anniversary of the aborted 1987 elections. The three, together with another purported plotter, remained in custody at year's end.

Haiti has also continued to be plagued by what Haitians have come to call "insecurity" -- the killing of seemingly randomly selected victims. The attackers are almost always heavily armed and at times are sighted wearing parts of uniforms. In late September the Avril government announced the arrest of several soldiers said to be behind the "insecurity." But the killings, as well as rapes and armed robberies, have continued, and many have come to believe that, by sowing terror, they are designed to impede organized opposition to the government and provide a pretext for postponing elections. Those suspicions were fueled during the night of November 17-18, when seven armed men in civilian clothes murdered three youths who were pasting up posters for ousted President Leslie Manigat; two were shot dead and the third was dragged to his death at the back of the assailants' vehicle, according to a fourth youth who escaped. No one has been prosecuted for this crime.

These developments have led many to question whether elections promised for 1990 will take place. In late September 1989, fully a year after assuming power, the Avril government accepted an electoral calendar proposed by an independent electoral council which called for elections in six stages, beginning with local elections in the spring of 1990, legislative elections the following summer and presidential elections in the fall, with a new president to assume power in February 1991. The prolonged and complicated calendar has been criticized by Haitian political parties for inviting fraud and violence -- since international monitoring of such an extended calendar will be difficult -- and for discouraging popular mobilization. General Avril himself has fueled speculation that the elections will be postponed by making such statements as his November 24 proclamation that, before elections can be held, the Haitian people need enough food to eat so that politicians cannot buy their vote for several cents. General Avril has used similar comments to argue for renewed U.S. aid before an elected civilian government takes office.

Despite this serious human rights situation, the Bush administration, and the Reagan administration before it, uttered not a word of public criticism over ongoing military abuses during General Avril's entire first year in power. The Bush administration made its first public comments on Haiti on March 14, when Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Richard Melton testified before a House subcommittee. (The State Department's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 1988*, written by the Reagan administration but issued in early February, described abuses only under Haiti's prior rulers, but none under General Avril.) Echoing U.S. comments about past Haitian dictators, including Jean-Claude Duvalier, Melton described the Avril government as "offering the best, and perhaps the last real chance for democratic reform in Haiti." He acknowledged ongoing abuses but claimed that "there is little if any evidence to link these abuses to policy levels within the Avril government." This claim was contradicted by widespread attacks on Avril opponents, including, for example, the January beating of two Avril opponents in the National Palace, the site of General Avril's presidential office. Two weeks later during a trip to Port-au-Prince, Melton called for elections but said nothing about military abuses.

At the same time that Melton was exculpating General Avril, the Bush administration was pressing Congress to resume direct aid to the Haitian government as a reward for the "progress" that General Avril was said to have made. The progress cited included the reinstatement, on the day before Melton's testimony, of portions of the popularly enacted 1987 Constitution, which had been suspended by the predecessor military government in June 1988; the establishment in April 1989 of the constitutionally prescribed electoral council to organize and run elections, although at the time no electoral calendar had been set; and assistance in combatting drug trafficking.

These developments were considerably short of the conditions for the restoration of aid that had been set at the time that most aid to the Haitian government was suspended following the aborted November 1987 elections. At that time, the State Department had proclaimed that, at the very least, "the electoral process [would have to be] resumed and restored" and that "an independent Electoral Commission is a key to restoring the electoral process." In addition, the State Department had noted "other measures that are crucial to Haiti's transition to democracy, [including]: the arrest, prosecution and punishment of those responsible for the election violence, the maintenance of public order, and the protection of Haitians during the election period as well as respect for the results of the new elections."

Congress agreed, however, to permit \$10 million in food aid (wheat given to the government for resale on the local market). While an unsuccessful coup attempt in early April delayed disbursement of this aid, it was released on August 3. Two weeks later, on August 17 and 18, Melton visited Haiti, where his statement to the press made no mention of the military's attacks on popular organizations, the "insecurity" killings, or the Avril government's failure to halt these abuses. Rather, Melton contented himself with broad statements on the importance of democracy and expressed "hope that elections can be scheduled in the not-too-distant future."

One month later, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Bernard Aronson visited Haiti. In a statement issued on September 16, he underscored the administration's support for the Avril government's vow to uphold the electoral calendar and to ensure the security of voters. But he made no mention of continuing human rights abuses.

U.S. silence on abuses under the Avril government was due in large part to Ambassador Brunson McKinley, whose insistent deference to the Haitian military

since the ouster of the Duvalier dictatorship led gradually to this virtual abandonment of U.S. public criticism of military abuses. But with the appointment of a new U.S. ambassador, Alvin Adams, and the increasingly stark repression of the Avril government, the Bush administration appeared during the last two months of 1989 to be taking a more aggressive posture toward human rights in Haiti. On November 9, shortly after Adams's confirmation though before he had arrived in Port-au-Prince, the State Department spokeswoman issued a protest over the November 1 beatings of the three popular leaders -- the first critical U.S. statement ever on rights violations by the Avril government. The State Department observed that "based on their appearance on television, they had been mistreated," and noted that "concerns about these arrests" had been expressed to "senior officials of the Haitian government." The State Department then called on the Haitian government "to ensure that any detainees are treated in strict accordance with Haitian law and with respect for their civil and human rights." It also reaffirmed the belief that "free and credible elections leading to the inauguration of a civilian government is an essential step in finding solutions to Haiti's problems."

Four days later, in an address to the Organization of American States ("OAS"), Secretary of State James Baker suggested concern over the Avril government's ability to protect the electorate and to carry out fair and honest elections when he called on the OAS and the Caribbean Economic Community ("CARICOM") to monitor elections. He added: "In 1987, the democratic community stood helpless as voters were gunned down in polling booths; surely we cannot permit that nightmare to return."

As Ambassador Adams arrived in Haiti to assume his post on November 24, he showed a personal willingness to speak publicly about Haiti's human rights problems. In a speech at the airport upon his arrival, Ambassador Adams invoked a Creole proverb, "*Bourik chaje pa kanpe*" -- a loaded donkey cannot stand still, a reference to the burdened Haitian people and their expectations for democracy. He invoked the same proverb several days earlier at his swearing-in ceremony in Washington. Apparently as a result, Ambassador Adams was turned away at the Haitian Foreign Ministry the first time he tried to present his credentials, on November 28, and General Avril feigned a cold the same day to avoid meeting Adams (although Avril reportedly met the same day with the Taiwanese ambassador to receive a check for \$1 million in aid).<\$FThe government newspaper, *L'Union*, also responded to Ambassador Adams by declaring: "*Chaj trò lou bourik kouche*" -- an overloaded donkey lies down, thus echoing General Avril's view that Haiti's economic problems would have to be solved before elections could be held.> Ambassador Adams was ultimately permitted to present his credentials and to meet with General Avril in early December.

This greater U.S. outspokenness on abuses in Haiti parallels an apparently firmer resolve not to deliver additional aid to the Avril government until significant progress is made in respecting human rights and inaugurating an elected civilian government. For fiscal year 1990, the Bush administration has budgeted \$41.4 million in humanitarian and development assistance, which is directed through private voluntary and non-governmental agencies. The administration has also budgeted some funds for the Haitian government to combat drug trafficking. Neither form of aid was suspended following the November 1987 elections. In its November 9, 1989 statement, however, the State Department made clear that any further government-to-government assistance "will be contingent on tangible evidence of progress on a transition to democracy and respect for human rights." Congress took a similar position in its aid bill on Haiti.

One important deficiency in U.S. policy toward Haiti has been the failure to

press vigorously for prosecution of those responsible for past abuses. For example, following the September 11, 1988 attack on St. Jean Bosco church in which 12 were killed and 77 wounded, the Reagan administration called on the military government to "investigate, apprehend and punish" the attackers. But there has been no public follow-up to this appeal. The Reagan administration said nothing when, during the night of December 31, 1988 and January 1, 1989, the Avril government granted a safe conduct out of the country to Franck Romain, the former mayor of Port-au-Prince and the alleged mastermind of the massacre, who had taken refuge in the Dominican embassy. Nor did the Bush administration comment when, on November 18, 1989, Dominican President Joaquin Balaguer said that he would not grant an extradition request by the Haitian government for Romain. The silence on the treatment of this alleged murderer contrasts with the Bush administration's insistence that the Papal Nuncio in Panama turn over Manuel Antonio Noriega for prosecution.

Nor has the Bush administration issued calls for the prosecution of those responsible for gross abuses in Haiti over the past several years, including the Jean Rabel massacre of July 1987, the murder of presidential candidates Louis Eugene Athis in August 1987 and Yves Volel in October 1987, the election day killings of November 1987, the murder of four members of the Labadie Youth Movement in August 1988, the killing of two Cité Soleil residents who denounced participants in the St. Jean Bosco massacre in November 1988, and the above-mentioned murder of the three Manigat supporters in November 1989. While such notorious murderers remain at large, it will be difficult for the Haitian people to feel secure enough to venture to the polls for the next elections.