

Dangers of U.S. Haiti occupation emerge

by Cynthia Rush

When President Bill Clinton sought a last-minute diplomatic solution to the Haitian crisis on Sept. 18, he sidestepped the trap he had inherited from former President George Bush. Bush and his British backers had hoped to lock Clinton into acceptance of a United Nations-led dictatorship in Haiti which would both destroy that nation's Armed Forces and eliminate all vestiges of national sovereignty. But by underscoring that U.S. troops occupying Haiti would cooperate with Haitian military and police to pave the way for the return of deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and by initially deemphasizing the need to disarm the military, Clinton threw Aristide's one-worldist entourage off balance.

Those who control the mentally unstable former Haitian President quickly recovered, however, and now the dangers implicit in having 15,000 U.S. troops "peacefully" occupy Haiti have visibly emerged. Through a series of provocations staged by Aristide's supporters inside Haiti, U.S. forces are being thrust more and more into a policing role—in some areas practically constituting the government—while the international media justify mob violence by saying that Haitians are just "freely expressing themselves" after three years of "brutalization" by military "thugs and torturers."

Thus the stage has been set for smashing Haiti's Armed Forces through abrogation of the seven-point accord worked out Sept. 18 between former President Jimmy Carter and Haitian Army commander Gen. Raoul Cédras and Army Chief of Staff Gen. Philippe Biamby. That agreement states that Haitian military leaders will step down once the Parliament approves a broad amnesty for all members of the military and police; but it establishes an outside date of Oct. 15 for their departure even if the amnesty is not passed by then. If Aristide's backers succeed in overturning the accord, then Clinton will find himself dragged in the direction of imposing colonial rule—something Haitians bitterly recall from the U.S.'s 1915-34 occupation—and increasingly tied to the insane policy outlook of the pro-terrorist Aristide. This is what he had tried to avoid with the Sept. 18 agreement.

What kind of amnesty?

In his speech before the United Nations Sept. 26, Clinton announced the unilateral lifting of most U.S. sanctions against Haiti, with the exception of those levied against the

600 top military and pro-military elites who helped to oust Aristide in the September 1991 coup. The U.S. expects to circulate a resolution at the U.N. calling for lifting the global embargo against Haiti, to be enacted upon Aristide's return.

Easing restrictions on Haiti's devastated economy and starving people may help in the short term. But the central issue affecting Haiti's future stability is the broad amnesty promised in the Sept. 18 accord. Aristide's sabotage of a similar amnesty last year caused the collapse of the Governors' Island agreement, and now his U.S. backers, including Bush holdovers in the State Department, are activated either to ensure its defeat, or to define it so narrowly that Cédras and other military leaders would be forced to leave the country rather than face prosecution. Cédras has repeatedly said that he has no intention of leaving Haiti, and has been mentioned as a possible presidential candidate in 1995 elections.

When in the spirit of the Carter agreement Haitian President Emile Jonassaint convened a special session of the Parliament to vote on an amnesty, the State Department responded that the "illegitimate" President was not authorized to make such a call, and that only Aristide could do so. On Sept. 25, clearly under U.S. pressure, Aristide did convene the special session for Sept. 28, but one day later, U.S. embassy spokesman Stan Schraeger reported in Port-au-Prince that American troops would prevent pro-military legislators from participating in the debate because they had been elected in "illegal" elections last January. U.S. troops will also protect 11 pro-Aristide legislators who returned from exile for the session, as well as another 13 who have been in hiding in Haiti. As the Jonassaint government charged Sept. 26, the exclusion of pro-military lawmakers is a breach of the Carter accord and an "intolerable interference" into Haiti's internal affairs.

If a broad amnesty is not passed, the mob violence which Aristide's supporters in the Lavalas movement have begun to direct against Haitian military and police will escalate. Emboldened by the incident they provoked in the northern city of Cap Haitien in which U.S. Marines gunned down 11 Haitian policemen, these mobs have been running amok, trashing police stations and barracks and looting food warehouses. Making clear that the military is the target, when a Port-au-Prince police station known as the "Cafeteria" was taken over by U.S. military troops, a large Lavalas crowd stood by screaming, "Those are the criminals. . . . It's not the Lavalas that has a problem now, it's the Army."

But as one Haitian soldier put it, "Destroy us, and you destroy the last institution still standing here. . . . I just don't think the Americans know what they're dealing with here right now." On Sept. 30, the third anniversary of the coup, as many as 30,000 Aristide supporters are expected to take to the streets in Port-au-Prince. While Aristide is reportedly urging his followers to observe that date in a "religious" manner, Pentagon officials are said to fear a new outbreak of mob violence.