

Saving Haiti from itself

Haiti's agony continues. Sunday's elections, the first in memory, collapsed as waiting voters at polling stations were gunned down or hacked to death with machetes. Heaps of blood-stained bodies were testimony to the fact that terror, voodoo and guns still run Haiti.

Behind the massacres are Haiti's real rulers who were determined to prevent a democratic government from taking office. Political power equals financial power in nations like Haiti. The small mulatto and black elite that runs Haiti was not about to see its income or status threatened by politicians elected by what is seen as the illiterate, subhuman mass of Haiti's wretched peasantry.

The "revolution" that brought in a military junta and forced Baby Doc into exile in France has merely perpetuated Duvalierism without a Duvalier. Haiti's masters continue to be a small oligarchy of army and police officers, wealthy merchants, voodoo (more properly, Ogan) witch doctors and leftovers from Papa Doc's fearsome death squads, the Ton Ton Macoutes.

This elite remains content to suck out whatever wealth remains in this miserable nation, the poorest in the Western Hemisphere. Nothing is given back; Haiti's five million peasants are left to scratch a marginal existence out of the barren red mountains and dead earth in a land that has been devastated and made sterile by the deforestation, ignorance and abuse of generations.

As a result, many of Haiti's people live on the edge of starvation, wracked by diseases, some of which are known only in Africa. In fact, outside of Port au Prince, it's hard to tell the difference between Haiti and the poorest parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Haitians live in almost unimaginable filth and squalor. AIDS, hepatitis, syphilis, tuberculosis and yaws are endemic.

In the 1700s, when under French rule, Haiti was the richest nation of our hemisphere. Today, after almost two centuries of corruption, ineptitude and sheer brigandry under a series of black and

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mulatto regimes, most Haitians today live like animals — without even a humane society to protect them.

This is particularly tragic because Haitians, as I found on numerous trips there over the years, are among the kindest, gentlest and most artistic peoples of the West Indies. It is truly heart-rending to watch their unending agony at the hands of a succession of ruthless thugs.

Clearly, something must be done to save the Haitian people, who cannot save themselves. What we should do is follow the example set by the French in dealing with their former West African colonies. These are ruled by black presidents who are kept in line politically, diplomatically and financially by Grand Frere in Paris. Whenever any of these chiefs ran amok, French troops swiftly intervened and replaced them with more civilized and acceptable rulers.

For example, after "Emperor" Bokasa killed a large number of schoolchildren in his Central African Empire, French paratroopers and intelligence agents kicked him out.

It's time we do the same in Haiti. I don't like the idea of foreign interventions at all. But the situation in Haiti is an emergency that requires immediate action before the nation dissolves into anarchy, mass starvation or even a communist uprising. Anything, even communism, would be better than Haiti's current misery.

The U.S., Canada, Mexico, the West Indian democracies and Brazil should send troops to occupy Haiti. First priority should be public health and proper food distribution. Let this hemispheric force hold elections and ensure that Haiti has a competent, honest government. And make certain that no more Papa Docs later emerge to bring back the nightmare days of murder and black magic.

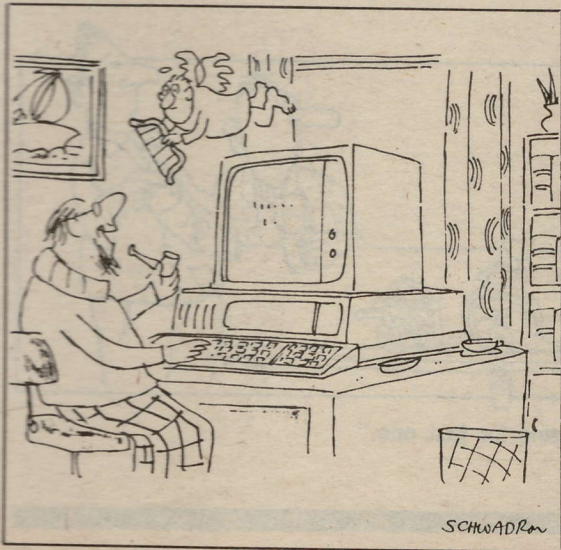
I have no doubt that most Haitians would joyously receive such a liberation force. In 1915, during a period of anarchy and starvation, the U.S. Marine Corps was sent to occupy Haiti. From 1915 to 1934, the Marines brought relative prosperity, financial stability and human decency to Haiti — for the first time in its history.

Haitians speak of this period as their Golden Era. Time now, I think, for the Marines to come back.

Haiti is drowning in disease, poverty and cruelty. It is our responsibility as democracies and members of the hemisphere to save our neighbor. By not rescuing Haiti, we are becoming accessories to the tragedy now going on there.

Scolding and cutting off aid will not solve the problem. Fifteen thousand troops are what is needed to save Haiti. Yes, even some Canadian soldiers. Not just smiling kids on UN peacekeeping junkets, but tough army NCOs ready to shoot down Ton Ton Macoutes and knock heads together until Haiti is brought into the civilized world.

Punch



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