

# Blood-soaked bureaucrats

**By John Maxwell**

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**I**n Haiti, on January 24, 1991, the family of 24 year-old youth leader, Yvon Desanges, found his body just outside their gate. They knew him by the clothes he was wearing, his face too badly mutilated to be recognised. There was a rope around his neck. His hands were tied. His eyes had been gouged out. His tongue had been cut out. He had been stabbed so many times it was impossible to count the wounds. He had been shot several times. His abdomen had been slit so that his guts spilled out onto the street.

Ten years later, youths like Yvon Desanges are still being slaughtered for the same reason, sometimes by the same people. Their mothers, sisters and girlfriends are being raped, their houses burnt.

On Thursday, one of Haiti's most notorious terrorists, Louis Jodel Chamblain was escorted to the Justice Ministry in Port-au-Prince by the justice minister himself, one Bernard Gousse, so Chamblain could surrender on camera, to officials of the Ministry of Justice.

Chamblain's stately surrender came against the glittering background of an international donors' conference from which Haiti expects lots of aid from the United States, France, the IMF and the World Bank, all of whom refused to help the lawfully and overwhelmingly elected President Aristide when he was in office.

The assassin's surrender was heralded as a "noble gesture" by Mr Gousse. Mr Gousse is not to be confused with Mr Latortue (Turtle), the prime minister, who a few weeks ago saluted Chamblain's gangsters as "Freedom Fighters".

In the weeks since, Mr Chamblain has been holding court (literally) in the rural areas of Haiti, where, according to reports, people accused of various offences against the new "Freedom" are summarily shot or beaten or otherwise abused.

"I am ready to give myself up as a prisoner – to give Haiti a chance so we can build this democracy I have been fighting for," Chamblain announced. The former army sergeant ran death squads for dictator Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier and was a leader of the Front

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for the Advancement of Progress of the Haitian People - a paramilitary terrorist group which killed some 3,000 civilians in the 1990s. He fled to the Dominican Republic in 1994, was tried in absentia for several murders and found guilty as charged. Under Haitian law, people tried in absentia are entitled to a new trial if they return to the country. They can also be pardoned.

An American lawyer who visited Haiti earlier this month said he'd been told: "Right now anyone can get on the radio stations and accuse anyone else of a crime or with being associated with violent Lavalas gangs. It means that without proof they can say this about you and immediately you have to go into hiding, and immediately you have to be concerned with your own welfare; and immediately the death threats begin."

The assistant secretary-general of the OAS, one Luigi Einaudi, made a revealing comment to a number of people gathered at the Hotel Oloffson last New Year's Eve, as Haiti was about to begin the celebration of its bicentennial years as an independent republic.

"The real problem with Haiti is that the international community is so screwed up that they're actually letting Haitians run the place," Einaudi said, as reported by Margaret Laurent, a leading Haitian lawyer who was one of those within earshot. Laurent was in Jamaica last week to give thanks on behalf of the Haitian people to the Government and people of Jamaica for hosting President Aristide and the refugees who have fled Haiti to avoid the tender mercies of Mr Chamblain's Freedom Fighters.

It may be less unpleasant to deal with the ruthless Freedom Fighters than with a diplomatic Canadian named David Lee, special representative of the OAS secretary-general and head of the OAS Special Mission to Haiti. He was on the platform at Gonaives when Mr Latortue hailed the gangsters as "Freedom Fighters".

Mr Lee, in an address to the OAS, said: "Events on the day were confused. It was clear that the crowds were large and enthusiastic. But from our location within the security bubble it was not evident who was present. Nor could we hear what was being said on the podium at the large public meeting in the main square. The various speakers did not have prepared texts and were in the presence of an exuberant crowd. The OAS, and I personally, certainly did not "approve" (as a press article claimed yesterday) of what was reported in the press to have been said and done on that occasion. I left immediately thereafter for meetings here in Washington." Or, as the the News of the World, the British Sunday newspaper, used to say when investigating prostitutes: "We made our excuses and left."

According to The Associated Press, the crowd was between 2,000 and 3,000 – small by any standards: "Rebel leaders who still run Haiti's fourth-largest city sat on a platform alongside Latortue, Organisation of American States' representative David Lee, recently installed interim Cabinet ministers Bernard Gousse and retired General Herard Abraham,

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and new Haitian Police Chief Leon Charles.”

Mr Lee obviously had no idea where he was, no idea who was next to him on the platform and, in fact, was probably not even aware that President Aristide had been overthrown or that Mr Latortue was pretending to be prime minister. I wonder what he was smoking? But perhaps, like so many others in Haiti, he had simply been kidnapped.

According to the Haitian Press Agency, Port-au-Prince is in a state of paralysis at the moment, trembling in insecurity. Well-known businessman and leading free-zone operator, Michel Handal (who has Jamaican connections), was abducted on Saturday a week ago, in the central business district. Several other business people have been abducted but the families prefer to deal privately with the kidnappers, with whom, no doubt, they are on familiar terms.

Meanwhile, prices for staple foods have almost doubled. A bag of rice which cost about 1,700 Jamaican dollars less than two months ago, now costs nearly 2,500. Outside Port-au-Prince the prices are even higher, and the security situation worse.

People in the capital told a visiting American lawyers' group two weeks ago that they are now afraid not only of the Duvalierist criminals like Chamblain's men, but also of the American Marines. According to some witnesses, the international forces led by the US Marines undertook targeted killings of Aristide supporters in the poorest areas in and around Port-au-Prince.

Anthony Fenton reports: “We were told that the US Marines had recently slaughtered, in one night, 78 people in the Belair neighbourhood of Port-au-Prince. Reportedly, the US [and “other foreign occupiers”] had brought ambulances with them in anticipation of a bloodbath. All but two of the people murdered were carried away in these ambulances. Now no one will know the identities of those killed. We were told that the interim government, led by the US, has the “intent to destroy popular organisations.”

‘Popular organisations’, of course, means Aristide's Lavalas Family.

Meanwhile, the world's official Samaritan, the UN's Kofi Annan, has continued his expert dithering. Having passed by Haiti in January – like the Levite on the Jericho Road – he is now speaking grandly of a UN force of 6,700 soldiers and 1,600 policemen to “turn Haiti into a functioning democracy”.

The transfer from the US to the UN force is to take place by June 1 and will no doubt proceed with the process of “nation building”, as patented by George W. Bush and employed so effectively in Iraq. I am personally offended by the idea of ‘nation building’ because I believe the term was invented in Jamaica by Norman Manley and his people at Jamaica Welfare, and that it properly means that the people of the country are the ones who consciously mould themselves into a nation. It is not a political brain transplant nor a

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transfer of technology.

A nation was being built in Haiti, but not according to American neo-liberal specifications. It encompassed things like literacy and 150 new high schools, more built in 10 years than in the previous two centuries; it encompassed improved health care, with a little help from Haiti's friends, such as Cuba and Dr Paul Farmer, a Harvard professor, who almost single-handedly at first, pulled Haiti back from the brink of surrender to rampaging HIV/AIDS. Farmer believes treatment for HIV/AIDS is a human right, which puts him beyond the pale for the bureaucrats. He deserves to be known and recognised across the world as a true poor people's hero.

In an article in the New England Journal of Medicine, Professor Farmer reports simply and eloquently that the savage disruption the putsch has had on the health of poor Haitians. He speaks of the advances made over the past 10 years, noting inter alia, that Haiti's government had US\$300 million for all the public services it provided, and contrasted that with the revenues of just one of Harvard's 17 hospitals with revenues of US\$1.3 billion. There was general disregard for the neutrality and immunity of health institutions during conflict; several hospitals were the targets of violence, including Farmer's own hospital in the Central Plateau where two patients were murdered. The university hospital is at a standstill for lack of personnel; vehicles belonging to Dr Farmer's clinic were stolen, halting the movement of patients and medicines, and, in early March Haiti's newest medical school – Tabarre – for the training of poor people's children to be doctors, was taken over by the US Army as a military base.

Dr Farmer asks: "What will become of its faculty, composed in large part of Cuban public health specialists, but also including Haitian, US and European teachers? More to the point, what will become of its 247 medical students? What will happen to the only medical school in Haiti whose top priority is the development of a cadre of physicians to serve the nation's poorest and most vulnerable people?"

Perhaps we should ask these questions of Kofi Annan, Colin Powell and P. J. Patterson, all of whom come from the same sort of background that most Ghanaians, Jamaicans and Haitians share. Part of that background, of course, is the struggle for liberty led 200 years ago by Haitian and Jamaican slaves dying so their children could be free.

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