

Self-Determining Haiti

I. THE AMERICAN OCCUPATION

By JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

TO know the reasons for the present political situation in Haiti, to understand why the United States landed and has for five years maintained military forces in that country, why some three thousand Haitian men, women, and children have been shot down by American rifles and machine guns, it is necessary, among other things, to know that the National City Bank of New York is very much interested in Haiti. It is necessary to know that the National City Bank controls the National Bank of Haiti and is the depository for all of the Haitian national funds that are being collected by American officials, and that Mr. R. L. Farnham, vice-president of the National City Bank, is virtually the representative of the State Department in matters relating to the island republic. Most Americans have the opinion—if they have any opinion at all on the subject—that the United States was forced, on purely humane grounds, to intervene in the black republic because of the tragic coup d'etat which resulted in the overthrow and death of President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam and the execution of the political prisoners confined at Port-au-Prince, July 27-28, 1915; and that this government has been compelled to keep a military force in Haiti since that time to pacify the country and maintain order.

The fact is that for nearly a year before forcible intervention on the part of the United States this government was seeking to compel Haiti to submit to "peaceable" intervention. Toward the close of 1914 the United States notified the government of Haiti that it was disposed to recognize the newly-elected president, Theodore Davilmar, as soon as a Haitian commission would sign at Washington "satisfactory protocols" relative to a convention with the United States on the model of the Dominican-American Convention. On December 15, 1914, the Haitian government, through its Secretary of Foreign Affairs, replied: "The Government of the Republic of Haiti would consider itself lax in its duty to the United States and to itself if it allowed the least doubt to exist of its irrevocable intention not to accept any control of the administration of Haitian affairs by a foreign Power." On December 19, the United States, through its legation at Port-au-Prince, replied, that in expressing its willingness to do in Haiti what had been done in Santo Domingo it "was actuated entirely by a disinterested desire to give assistance."

Two months later, the Theodore government was overthrown by a revolution and Vilbrun Guillaume was elected president. Immediately afterwards there arrived at Port-au-Prince an American commission from Washington—the Ford mission. The commissioners were received at the National Palace and attempted to take up the discussion of the convention that had been broken off in December, 1914. However, they lacked full powers and no negotiations were entered into. After several days, the Ford mission sailed for the United States. But soon after, in May, the United States sent to Haiti Mr. Paul Fuller, Jr., with the title Envoy Extraordinary, on a special mission to apprise the Haitian government that the Guillaume administration

would not be recognized by the American government unless Haiti accepted and signed the project of a convention which he was authorized to present. After examining the project the Haitian government submitted to the American commission a counter-project, formulating the conditions under which it would be possible to accept the assistance of the United States. To this counter-project Mr. Fuller proposed certain modifications, some of which were accepted by the Haitian government. On June 5, 1915, Mr. Fuller acknowledged the receipt of the Haitian communication regarding these modifications, and sailed from Port-au-Prince.

Before any further discussion of the Fuller project between the two governments, political incidents in Haiti led rapidly to the events of July 27 and 28. On July 27 President Guillaume fled to the French Legation, and on the same day took place a massacre of the political prisoners in the prison at Port-au-Prince. On the morning of July 28 President Guillaume was forcibly taken from French Legation and killed. On the afternoon of July 28 an American man-of-war dropped anchor in the harbor of Port-au-Prince and landed American forces. It should be borne in mind that through all of this the life of not a single American citizen had been taken or jeopardized.

The overthrow of Guillaume and its attending consequences did not constitute the cause of American intervention in Haiti, but merely furnished the awaited opportunity. Since July 28, 1915, American military forces have been in control of Haiti. These forces have been increased until there are now somewhere near three thousand Americans under arms in the republic. From the very first, the attitude of the Occupation has been that it was dealing with a conquered territory. Haitian forces were disarmed, military posts and barracks were occupied, and the National Palace was taken as headquarters for the Occupation. After selecting a new and acceptable president for the country, steps were at once taken to compel the Haitian government to sign a convention in which it virtually foreswore its independence. This was accomplished by September 16, 1915; and although the terms of this convention provided for the administration of the Haitian customs by American civilian officials, all the principal custom houses of the country had been seized by military force and placed in charge of American Marine officers before the end of August. The disposition of the funds collected in duties from the time of the military seizure of the custom houses to the time of their administration by civilian officials is still a question concerning which the established censorship in Haiti allows no discussion.

It is interesting to note the wide difference between the convention which Haiti was forced to sign and the convention which was in course of diplomatic negotiation at the moment of intervention. The Fuller convention asked little of Haiti and gave something, the Occupation convention demands everything of Haiti and gives nothing. The Occupation convention is really the same convention which the Haitian government peremptorily refused to discuss in

December, 1914, except that in addition to American control of Haitian finances it also provides for American control of the Haitian military forces. The Fuller convention contained neither of these provisions. When the United States found itself in a position to take what it had not even dared to ask, it used brute force and took it. But even a convention which practically deprived Haiti of its independence was found not wholly adequate for the accomplishment of all that was contemplated. The Haitian constitution still offered some embarrassments, so it was decided that Haiti must have a new constitution. It was drafted and presented to the Haitian assembly for adoption. The assembly balked—chiefly at the article in the proposed document removing the constitutional disability which prevented aliens from owning land in Haiti. Haiti had long considered the denial of this right to aliens as her main bulwark against overwhelming economic exploitation; and it must be admitted that she had better reasons than the several states of the United States that have similar provisions.

The balking of the assembly resulted in its being dissolved by actual military force and the locking of doors of the Chamber. There has been no Haitian legislative body since. The desired constitution was submitted to a plebiscite by a decree of the President, although such a method of constitutional revision was clearly unconstitutional. Under the circumstances of the Occupation the plebiscite was, of course, almost unanimous for the desired change, and the new constitution was promulgated on June 18, 1918. Thus Haiti was given a new constitution by a flagrantly unconstitutional method. The new document contains several fundamental changes and includes a "Special Article" which declares:

All the acts of the Government of the United States during its military Occupation in Haiti are ratified and confirmed.

No Haitian shall be liable to civil or criminal prosecution for any act done by order of the Occupation or under its authority.

The acts of the courts martial of the Occupation, without, however, infringing on the right to pardon, shall not be subject to revision.

The acts of the Executive Power (the President) up to the promulgation of the present constitution are likewise ratified and confirmed.

The above is the chronological order of the principal steps by which the independence of a neighboring republic has been taken away, the people placed under foreign military domination from which they have no appeal, and exposed to foreign economic exploitation against which they are defenseless. All of this has been done in the name of the Government of the United States; however, without any act by Congress and without any knowledge of the American people.

The law by which Haiti is ruled today is martial law dispensed by Americans. There is a form of Haitian civil government, but it is entirely dominated by the military Occupation. President Dartiguenave, bitterly rebellious at heart as is every good Haitian, confessed to me the powerlessness of himself and his cabinet. He told me that the American authorities give no heed to recommendations made by him or his officers; that they would not even discuss matters about which the Haitian officials have superior knowledge. The provisions of both the old and the new constitutions are ignored in that there is no Haitian legislative body, and there has been none since the dissolution of the assembly in April, 1916. In its stead there is a Council of

State composed of twenty-one members appointed by the president, which functions effectively only when carrying out the will of the Occupation. Indeed the Occupation often overrides the civil courts. A prisoner brought before the proper court, exonerated, and discharged, is, nevertheless, frequently held by the military. All government funds are collected by the Occupation and are dispensed at its will and pleasure. The greater part of these funds is expended for the maintenance of the military forces. There is the strictest censorship of the press. No Haitian newspaper is allowed to publish anything in criticism of the Occupation or the Haitian government. Each newspaper in Haiti received an order to that effect from the Occupation, *and the same order carried the injunction not to print the order*. Nothing that might reflect upon the Occupation administration in Haiti is allowed to reach the newspapers of the United States.

The Haitian people justly complain that not only is the convention inimical to the best interests of their country, but that the convention, such as it is, is not being carried out in accordance with the letter, nor in accordance with the spirit in which they were led to believe it would be carried out. Except one, all of the obligations in the convention which the United States undertakes in favor of Haiti are contained in the first article of that document, the other fourteen articles being made up substantially of obligations to the United States assumed by Haiti. But nowhere in those fourteen articles is there anything to indicate that Haiti would be subjected to military domination. In Article I the United States promises to "aid the Haitian government in the proper and efficient development of its agricultural, mineral, and commercial resources and in the establishment of the finances of Haiti on a firm and solid basis." And the whole convention and, especially, the protestations of the United States before the signing of the instrument can be construed only to mean that that aid would be extended through the supervision of civilian officials.

The one promise of the United States to Haiti not contained in the first article of the convention is that clause of Article XIV which says, "and, should the necessity occur, the United States will lend an efficient aid for the preservation of Haitian independence and the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty." It is the extreme of irony that this clause which the Haitians had a right to interpret as a guarantee to them against foreign invasion should first of all be invoked against the Haitian people themselves, and offer the only peg on which any pretense to a right of military domination can be hung.

There are several distinct forces—financial, military, bureaucratic—at work in Haiti which, tending to aggravate the conditions they themselves have created, are largely self-perpetuating. The most sinister of these, the financial engulfment of Haiti by the National City Bank of New York, already alluded to, will be discussed in detail in a subsequent article. The military Occupation has made and continues to make military Occupation necessary. The justification given is that it is necessary for the pacification of the country. Pacification would never have been necessary had not American policies been filled with so many stupid and brutal blunders; and it will never be effective so long as "pacification" means merely the hunting of ragged Haitians in the hills with machine guns.

Then there is the force which the several hundred Ameri-

can civilian place-holders constitute. They have found in Haiti the veritable promised land of "jobs for deserving democrats" and naturally do not wish to see the present status discontinued. Most of these deserving democrats are Southerners. The head of the customs service of Haiti was a clerk of one of the parishes of Louisiana. Second in charge of the customs service of Haiti is a man who was Deputy Collector of Customs at Pascagoula, Mississippi [population, 3,379, 1910 Census]. The Superintendent of Public Instruction was a school teacher in Louisiana—a State which has not good schools even for white children; the financial advisor, Mr. McIlhenny, is also from Louisiana.

Many of the Occupation officers are in the same category with the civilian place-holders. These men have taken their wives and families to Haiti. Those at Port-au-Prince live in beautiful villas. Families that could not keep a hired girl in the United States have a half-dozen servants. They ride in automobiles—not their own. Every American head of a department in Haiti has an automobile furnished at the expense of the Haitian Government, whereas members of the Haitian cabinet, who are theoretically above them, have no such convenience or luxury. While I was there, the President himself was obliged to borrow an automobile from the Occupation for a trip through the interior. The Louisiana school-teacher Superintendent of Instruction has an automobile furnished at government expense, whereas the Haitian Minister of Public Instruction, his supposed superior officer, has none. These automobiles seem to be chiefly employed in giving the women and children an airing each afternoon. It must be amusing, when it is not maddening to the Haitians, to see with what disdainful air these people look upon them as they ride by.

The platform adopted by the Democratic party at San Francisco said of the Wilson policy in Mexico:

The Administration, remembering always that Mexico is an independent nation and that permanent stability in her government and her institutions could come only from the consent of her own people to a government of her own making, has been unwilling either to profit by the misfortunes of the people of Mexico or to enfeeble their future by imposing from the outside a rule upon their temporarily distracted councils.

Haiti has never been so distracted in its councils as Mexico. And even in its moments of greatest distraction it never slaughtered an American citizen, it never molested an American woman, it never injured a dollar's worth of American property. And yet, the Administration whose lofty purpose was proclaimed as above—with less justification than Austria's invasion of Serbia, or Germany's rape of Belgium, without warrant other than the doctrine that "might makes right," has conquered Haiti. It has done this through the very period when, in the words of its chief spokesman, our sons were laying down their lives overseas "for democracy, for the rights of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own government, for the rights and liberties of small nations." By command of the author of "pitiless publicity" and originator of "open covenants openly arrived at," it has enforced by the bayonet a covenant whose secret has been well guarded by a rigid censorship from the American nation, and kept a people enslaved by the military tyranny which it was his avowed purpose to destroy throughout the world.

The second article of the series by James Weldon Johnson, What the United States Has Accomplished in Haiti, will appear in the next issue, dated September 4.

The Soviet Domestic Program

By HENRY G. ALSBERG

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WHAT part of the soviet program has then been carried out? Despite the pressure of war, I should say on the whole, that the greater part of its socialist program has been at any rate sketched in. And remember, in this connection, that the marvel remains for all of us that even this "blocking in" has been accomplished with civil war and several foreign wars and a deadly blockade to occupy public attention. The middle class has been pretty well abolished—at least the old middle and upper classes. A true democracy of material condition, even if it is one of poverty, has been enforced. There are no great differences in dress or standards of living. Everybody is always more or less shabby; everybody always more or less hungry. Chicherin wears a baggy old suit, mercifully of a neutral snuff color; but some of the clerks in the Foreign Office far outshine their chief in their appearance. As to the democracy of food, that strikes me a bit nearer the belt-line. But if commissars can survive on a mess of soggy macaroni, we visitors, who get a much better *pyok*, should manage to do likewise. I think this matter of a common standard of living is not to be exaggerated. It makes for true brotherhood. And there exists here a real contempt for those who lay such a terrific emphasis on externals.

One hears, of course, everywhere of the establishment of a new middle class—that of the soviet officials. There are said to be more than 400,000 of them in the country. Some of them may be seen, truly, going off to the country over Sunday, or riding about in rather shabby cabs drawn by soviet horses. On the other hand, as far as wealth and luxury go among the higher officials, I can honestly say that I have as yet seen none of it, and I have visited in the homes of some of them. Naturally, with ability and willingness to accomplish things, comes authority in the community. That kind of a bourgeoisie is gradually being formed. How any state is to escape such a governing class, based on hard work, I find it difficult to see.

In the matter of nationalization, the revolutionary government has been fairly successful. Practically all the factories, transportation systems, food-getting, and food-producing systems, the health protection and educational systems have been taken over by the state. It does not change the fact to say that most of these systems at the present time are functioning inadequately, and that the food-distributing system is being supplemented by "bag-men," or *Mishoshchnik*, and petty speculators. I think these things will only be temporary, and will be improved as the government machinery is perfected when the pressure of war is over. Certainly in some directions, especially in the matter of health protection for mothers, infants, and children, and in the matter of education, the Soviet Government has gone far beyond all possible expectations.

Extreme centralization may account for a good deal of inefficiency. At any rate one hears that complaint on all sides, from the anarchists, the social-revolutionaries, both left and right, and the Mensheviks and bourgeois. Doubtless the tendency has been fostered by circumstance rather than by conscious will. During 1917 and the beginning of 1918 the great drop in the productivity of Russian factories