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Ideology and Political Protest in Haiti, 1930–46

David Nicholls

This article will examine some movements of protest in Haiti during the period 1930–46, with particular reference to the role which ideology¹ played in the life of these movements. Three such movements will be distinguished, their structure and their bases of support discussed, and the way in which the ideologies connected with these movements influenced the political developments in Haiti which culminated in the revolution of 1946 will be considered.

In July 1915 United States marines had invaded Haiti to begin almost twenty years of military occupation. Although at first certain elements in the country welcomed the United States presence, the nationalist movement rapidly gathered momentum. This manifested itself during 1918 in guerilla warfare, led by Charlemagne Peralte, and in vigorous journalistic opposition among the élite. In the mid-twenties a number of literary journals were founded with the intention of encouraging a truly indigenous literature in the country. 'A specifically national literature must be created on the basis of an analysis of the Haitian soul', insisted two young writers.²

¹ An ideology, as I understand the term, is a more or less consistent, coherent and comprehensive attempt to explain the universe, which is closely connected to some suggested pattern of human action. It is thus used in a 'neutral' sense rather than in the pejorative sense which would distinguish 'ideology' from 'science' or 'theory'.

² Antonio Vieux and Philippe Thoby Marcelin 'La littérature d'hier et celle de demain' *La Nouvelle Ronde* juillet 1925. For a discussion of the whole movement cf. N. Garrett *The Renaissance of Haitian Poetry* (Paris 1963), also an unpublished Ph.D thesis from the University of the West Indies by Michael Dash.

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The Société d'Histoire et de Géographie d'Haïti was founded. At its inaugural meeting H. Pauléus Sannon declared:

At times of great crisis all peoples go back instinctively to the past in order to search in their history for lessons of collective patriotism, for new rules of conduct, whether it be for the purpose of being able better to defend their threatened existence, or for recovering more rapidly from their fall.³

This return to the past involved, particularly for black Haitians, a recognition of the influence of African customs and beliefs upon the life of the country. The ethnological movement, inspired by the writings of Jean Price Mars, J. C. Dorsainvil and Arthur Holly emphasised Haiti's debt to Africa. Price Mars addressed the élite:

Ah, I know with what repugnance I am greeted in daring to speak to you of Africa and of things African! The subject appears to you inelegant and entirely devoid of interest, is not this so?⁴

The ethnological movement was closely related to the new nationalism, but had implications which were potentially divisive, as we shall see.

During the period of the occupation, protest movements in Haiti were generally united in their determination to rid the country of US troops, and to wrest power from collaborators like Presidents Dartiguenave and Borno. In the presidential election of 1930 the nationalist Sténio Vincent was successful, and from this time on nationalism ceased in itself to be a movement of protest.

The three protest movements which were significant in the period following 1930 were *noirisme*, marxism and technocratic socialism. I shall now consider each of these movements, outline the relationship between them, and point to the way in which they influenced the party situation in the crucial elections of 1946.

³ *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire et de Géographie d'Haïti* 1 mai 1925.

⁴ *Ainsi parla l'oncle* (New York 1954) 220.

THE ETHNOLOGICAL MOVEMENT PROVIDED inspiration for *noirisme* as well as for nationalism. In the late twenties a group of young men, known as the *Trois D's* began to meet, in order to consider the implications of the ethnological movement for their generation and for their class. Unlike the intellectuals of the literary movement these men were from non-élite black families. The three D's were Louis Diaquoi, François Duvalier and Lorimer Denis. Perhaps the driving force in the group was Diaquoi, born at Gonaïves in 1907. In a series of articles in 1932 he had emphasized their debt to Price Mars: 'It is in his work that we find our gospel', he declared.⁵

A few months before his death in 1932 Diaquoi had announced the formation of the *Griots* group, which was later joined by two important poets, Carl Brouard and Clement Magloire *fils* (later known as Magloire St Aude). The group took its name from a traditional African institution; the *Griot* is the poet, the story-teller, the magician of the tribe, who perpetuates tribal customs and beliefs.⁶ The position which these *Griots* writers put forward was in certain respects similar to the *négritude* ideology being developed among French-speaking black students in Paris during the thirties.⁷ There was the same emphasis upon Africa, the rejection of European values, the insistence upon a specifically African psychology, which sees the world in a way different from the European. In his poem 'Nostalgie', Brouard told of how the sound of the *tambour* hurls his soul back to Africa, where he sits in a dirty hut and drinks blood

⁵ 'L'art et la science au service de l'action: Le Dr Price Mars' *L'Action Nationale* 29 avril 1932. cf. also R. Piquion 'La flamme sacrée' in *L'Action Nationale* 8 mai 1932; C. Brouard in *La Bataille* 5 mars 1932; K. Georges Jacob *L'ethnie haïtienne* (Port au Prince 1941) 158–59.

⁶ cf. M. Delafosse, *The Negroes of Africa* (Port Washington, NY 1968) 268. cf. also H. Trouillot 'L'école des griots et le problème haïtien,' *Les Griots* 29 juillet 1949.

⁷ L. Kesteloot *Les écrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d'une littérature* (Brussels 1965). I use the term *noiriste* rather than *négritude*, because in the Haitian movement there were certain features which were peculiar, the most important being the generally anti-mulatto position and the acceptance of what I call the 'black legend' of the Haitian past. Also among *noiristes* there was a greater emphasis upon the biological foundation of racial differences (though traces of this can be found among writers like Senghor also).

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out of human skulls. In contrast to the intellectuals of the pre-occupation period (including black nationalists like L. J. Janvier and A. Charmant) the writers of this group gloried in Africa, the 'primitive' and 'savage' continent, standing apart from the sophisticated West. This was of course to become a familiar theme among *négritude* writers, and is exemplified in Césaire's *Retour*. Brouard used the term *nigritie* to describe his position in 1929.⁸ Haitians must therefore accept the fact that they are Africans, and cease attempting to be 'ridiculous little whites'.⁹ Duvalier and Denis insisted that the biology of a racial group determines its psychology, which in turn determines its 'collective personality'. The specifically African way of understanding the world is thus to be accounted for in genetic rather than in environmental terms.¹⁰ Duvalier agreed with Gobineau that the races are significantly different from one another, and that this difference has its roots in biological factors. Duvalier conceded that the Haitian people are racially mixed, European and African, but nevertheless they are a people 'whose mentality is characterized by the predominance of the latter'.¹¹

Noiriste writers lay considerable emphasis upon the voodoo religion as authentically Haitian, linking the blacks of the New World with Africa. 'Voodoo', cried Brouard, 'is our own creation, it is the certain pledge of an architecture, of a literature, of a national mystique'.¹² In Brouard and in the other writers of the *Griots* group there was also a romantic belief in the virtue of the masses — of the unsophisticated, the beggar, the unwashed, the peasant with calloused feet who descends from the mountains with his garden produce:

⁸ 'Pour Normil G. Sylvain' *Le Petit Impartial* 9 février 1929; for an interesting discussion of Brouard cf. Roger Gaillard *La destinée de Carl Brouard* (Port au Prince 1966).

⁹ Diaquoi *L'Action Nationale* 12 mai 1932.

¹⁰ 'Question d'anthropo-sociologie: le déterminisme racial' *Les Griots* 3, 1939, 303 f.

¹¹ 'La civilisation haïtienne — notre mentalité, est-elle africaine ou gallo-latine?' *Revue de la Société d'Histoire et de Géographie d'Haïti* mai 1936 12.

¹² 'Le livre de Mr Price Mars' *Le Petit Impartial* 13 Octobre 1928.

You are the pillars of the edifice;
 Disappear,
 And everything will collapse like a house of cards.¹³

We shall see how this belief in the masses, characteristic of the ethnological movement, became in Haiti the basis of a populist political ideology, as it had done with writers like Herder in Germany.

Noiriste writers developed a political theory on the basis of their biological, psychological and social ideas. They claimed that political power should be wrested from the élite politicians, and that an alliance must be forged between the rising black middle class and the masses. They surveyed the history of Haiti, and saw political power monopolized by the largely mulatto bourgeoisie, being employed in the interests of this small class. They insisted that the whole system of republican democracy — free speech, freedom of the press, representative government — was nothing but a façade behind which a group of politicians were able to manipulate the instruments of state. The people are indeed sovereign, but representative democracy hands over power to a clique of scheming politicians. Brouard, Piquion, Diaquoi, Georges Jacob and others attacked liberalism and democracy, arguing that what was needed in Haiti was strong black dictatorship, exercised in the interests of the masses. Although they rejected European fascism, the system which they advocated was remarkably similar.¹⁴ The colour question was, according to these writers, of central importance in the history of Haiti. Diaquoi, in a series of articles entitled 'Satan conduit le bal', asserted that colour prejudice lay at the very basis of the social and political life of the country. The politics of Haiti is a field of battle where the sides are drawn up largely on the basis of 'caste' (i.e. colour); the mulattoes, in general, unite to obstruct the blacks, while the blacks, sadly divided among themselves, jealous of each other, deliver themselves over to

¹³'Vous' *La Revue Indigène* 1:2 août 1927 71–2.

¹⁴cf. Diaquoi 'La place au soleil', *L'Action Nationale* 18 avril 1932; Piquion 'Force ou dictature' *La Relève* avril 1934 and 'La salut par la force' *La Relève* mars 1934; Brouard 'L'art au service du peuple' (1938) in Brouard *Pages retrouvées* (Port au Prince 1963) 84.

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an interminable war.¹⁵ The *Griots* writers of the thirties and forties developed a whole black legend of the Haitian past, according to which the black leaders were the true patriots and the real defenders of the masses, while the mulatto presidents and politicians (often acting behind the mask of a black puppet president, *la politique de doublure*) had betrayed the people by feathering their own nests at the expense of the national interest. The legend had been outlined in the previous century by Janvier and others, in answer to the mulatto legend which had been elaborated by Ardouin, St. Rémy and Lespinasse.¹⁶ In a series of articles published in *Chantiers* during 1946, later appearing in book form under the title *Le problème des classes à travers l'histoire d'Haïti*, Duvalier and Denis expounded the black legend. They are for Toussaint rather than Rigaud, for Dessalines but against Boyer; for Acaau, and Pierrot but against Geffrard; for Salnave (one of the few mulattoes to appear on the side of the angels!), Salomon and the National party, rather than Boisrond Canal, Boyer Bazalais and the Liberals.

The concrete demands of the *noiriste* protest included a proper respect for the voodoo religion, a new emphasis upon African culture in music, art and literature, a restructuring of the educational system and particularly a decreasing role for the Roman Catholic church in this field. The church was largely dominated by European clergy, and was regarded as the principal weapon employed by the mulatto élite to maintain the supremacy of Western culture in Haiti.¹⁷ Haitian history, in particular, should be taught by Haitian nationals, and children should be encouraged to respect African traditions and the beauty of the black person. The Caucasian somatic norm — *le canon grec*, as Duvalier called it — had been widely accepted in the established institutions of Haiti, and children were being educated with this image before

¹⁵ *Le Petit Impartial* 11 décembre 1930.

¹⁶ David Nicholls 'A Work of Combat: Mulatto Historians and the Haitian Past, 1847–67' *Journal of Inter-American Studies* February 1974.

¹⁷ cf. David Nicholls 'Politics and Religion in Haiti' *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 1970.

them; all this must change.¹⁸ In the political field the demand was for an alliance between the black middle class, the peasants and the urban proletariat to elect a black president — an authentic representative of the masses. This man should be steeped in the traditions of his people, but also able to lead them into a new era. The model was Kemal Atatürk the great ‘modernizer’ of twentieth century Turkey. ‘We have deliberately steeped ourselves in pre-history’, wrote Duvalier and Denis,

in order that we might know ourselves better from the past, and understand at the same time the structure of our mentality, our fundamental self; everything which has preceded us leads to an elaboration of the Haitian Man.¹⁹

Furthermore *noiriste* writers called for solidarity among the black people of the world, in the face of white racism and imperialism, particularly as manifested in Mussolini’s attack on Ethiopia.²⁰

ALTHOUGH THE *NOIRISTES* CLAIMED to be nationalists, their emphasis upon Haiti’s African links and their explicit recognition of the colour factor in Haitian social life, were offensive to Vincent and the ‘bourgeois’ nationalists, who saw this Africanism as undermining Haitian patriotism by placing race above nation; it was therefore a divisive force in the country. ‘It seems that nothing is able to stop our racial mystification in its tragic and vengeful course’, the president lamented.²¹ He observed that although these *négritude* and *noiriste* writers talked much of Africa, they would not dream

¹⁸ F. Duvalier *L’Action Nationale* 11 juillet 1934 (reprinted in *Medaillons*, Port au Prince 1968, 113 f.), K. Georges Jacob op. cit. 35; C. Magloire St Aude ‘La plus belle race du monde’ *L’Action Nationale* 11 juillet 1934; M. Vaval ‘L’éducation qu’il nous faut’ *Flambeau* 7 décembre 1946.

¹⁹ ‘Psychologie ethnique et historique’ *Les Griots* 4, 1939.

²⁰ cf. Magloire St Aude ‘L’enthousiasme Raciale’, *L’Assaut* 31 juillet 1935; Piquion ‘Pour une mobilisation de la Race’ *L’Action Nationale* 11 mars 1935; Brouard ‘A propos d’Ethiopie’ *L’Assaut* 22 juillet 1935. For a discussion of other black responses from the New World cf. S. K. B. Asante ‘The Afro American and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis’ *Race* 15, February 1973, 167 f.

²¹ *En posant les jalons* (Port au Prince 1939) i. 41.

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of actually going there to live; Paris was their headquarters.²² Dantès Bellegarde, an outspoken nationalist critic of the US occupation (after an initial period as a collaborator), attacked the 'false conception of the idea of race', which had led to bloody struggles between Haitians in the past, comparing it to the racialism of Hitler. Haiti is composed of a single nation forged by the 'fraternal co-operation of black and mulatto'.²³ 'It is', he wrote,

truly strange that the young esthetes, clothed according to the latest Paris fashion, or garbed like the tap-dancers of Harlem night clubs, believe that they are able to impose on their compatriots, writers, lawyers . . . the mentality or the religion of the fetishistic tribes of equatorial Africa.²⁴

Bellegarde denied that voodoo could be a religion acceptable to the Haitian people. It was an absurd cosmological system invented by 'the puerile imagination of their primitive African ancestors'.²⁵

This conflict of ideas between *noirisme* and the cultural nationalism of the elite was fully recognized by the *Griots* school quite early on. While they applauded the writers of *La Revue Indigène* for their determination to renounce the cultural parasitism of previous generations, for their turning to the life of the peasant for inspiration, and for their belief in a *littérature engagée*,²⁶ they disliked the abstruse tendencies of the group, and attacked their 'pretensions'.²⁷ This conflict on the ideological level did not, however, prevent co-operation on the practical level. Many of the *noiriste* writers supported the Vincent administration, though they were quickly alienated from the government of President Lescot, who succeeded Vincent in 1941.

²²Ibid. i 153.

²³'La Race n'existe pas' *La Phalange* 1 avril 1939, and 'La Nation Haïtienne' *La Phalange* 22 avril 1939.

²⁴'Vaudou et civilisation chrétienne' *La Phalange* 27 mai 1939.

²⁵*Haïti et ses problèmes* (Montreal 1942) 95.

²⁶cf. Duvalier 'Interrogeons l'histoire et claironnons les vérités' *L'Action Nationale* 25 juillet 1934; reprinted in Duvalier *Medaillons*, 129.

²⁷Diaquoi *Oedipe* 3 septembre 1931; Denis in *Les tendances d'une génération* (Port au Prince 1934) 53.

THERE WAS THUS A CONFLICT between a *noiriste* ideology which pictured Haiti as essentially African in its culture and a nationalism which thought in terms of a *créole* culture, unique to Haiti, strongly influenced by French as well as by African traditions; between a *noiriste* position which, recognizing the deep divisions existing in Haitian society based largely on colour, insisted that political power ought to be in the hands of the blacks, and a nationalism which denied the existence of a significant colour problem and which believed that political power should be in the hands of the most competent, educated and enlightened section of the community (that is, in their hands), and be exercised in the general interest. This conflict manifested itself in a particularly acute form in the controversy concerning the so-called 'anti-superstition' campaign conducted by the Roman Catholic church with support from the state, in 1941-42.

This campaign can be said to have been initiated by Bishop Paul Robert of Gonaïves, who, in a pastoral letter of April 1941 pointed to the 'absolute incompatibility, the irreconcilable opposition, between christianity and superstition'. He went on to state that the disastrous confusion between christianity and superstition was the greatest obstacle to the reign of Christ in Haiti. By superstition he meant the 'collection of religious beliefs and practices which came from Africa'.²⁸ In the following week Elie Lescot was elected president of the country, and he made it clear that 'my government will be a catholic government'.²⁹ In May a Eucharistic Congress was held in Gonaïves, and the central theme was the struggle against voodoo. By September of the same year Archbishop Le Gouaze could claim that over 100,000 people had taken the oath against voodoo, and that the campaign was gaining momentum.³⁰ A special catechism was published, asserting that the *houngan* (voodoo priest) was 'the principal slave of Satan' and that the *loas* (voodoo

²⁸ *La Phalange* 8 avril 1941.

²⁹ Quoted by J. Foisset, *La Phalange* 14 mai 1941.

³⁰ *La Phalange* 12 septembre 1941. For the text of the oath see Alfred Métraux *Le vaudou haïtien* (Paris 1958) 302-3.

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spirits) were representations of the evil one.³¹ Also hymn books were produced for use in campaign.³² Mission services were held in one part of the country after another in what the church newspaper *La Phalange* called this 'spiritual blitzkrieg'.³³ Although voodoo practices had been illegal in Haiti for many years, and in 1935 penalties had been increased,³⁴ the law was not always strictly enforced. Lescot gave explicit support to the campaign:

We, *Elie Lescot*, President of the Republic, personally recommend to the protection of the civil and military authorities of the Republic, the Revd. Father *Carl Edward Peters*, Missionary of the Company of Mary, and we entirely approve the mission which the Revd. Father Peters has undertaken to combat fetishism and superstition. . . .³⁵

The campaign was, however, dramatically terminated, after shots had been fired in a church at Delmas, outside Port au Prince, on 22 February 1942, during a campaign service conducted by Father Rémy Augustin.

The 'anti-superstition' campaign caused considerable controversy in the press. In a series of articles, Jacques Roumain, director of the Bureau d'Ethnologie, attacked the campaign. Although a marxist, Roumain on this occasion found himself in a temporary alliance with the *noiristes*. The Haitian people, he maintained, are no more superstitious than other nations, and the voodoo cult is the vehicle for conserving the folk traditions of the masses. Are not the peasants of Brittany also superstitious? Breton priests do not need to come to Haiti to combat superstition. In any case, Roumain observed, a priest, by attempting to destroy cultic objects, only strengthens popular belief in their power. When the peasants see the parish priest ordering a certain tree to be cut down, this is in their eyes clear evidence for the priest's recognition of the power of the voodoo spirits. Roumain also

³¹Métraux op. cit. 299.

³²cf. Rémy Augustin *Cantiques pour la campagne anti-superstitieuse* (Port au Prince 1942).

³³26 janvier 1942.

³⁴For details of the law on voodoo see K. Georges Jacob op. cit. 71 f.

³⁵In C. E. Peters *Lumière sur le humfort* (Port au Prince 1941) 4.

accused some priests of stealing ethnological and archaeological objects under the guise of the campaign.³⁶ Roumain, however, thought that voodoo beliefs, like all religious beliefs were part of a false consciousness, and that they were destined to be replaced by a scientific world view.³⁷ His position on this matter was generally accepted by other Haitian marxists.³⁸

Roumain also pointed to the political aspect of the campaign. We should not, he claimed, underestimate the fact that the French Catholic hierarchy was pro-Vichy and collaborationist, that it was 'part of the pro-fascist apparatus'.³⁹ Antagonism between the Roman Catholic church and the voodoo cult, however, goes back to colonial times, when voodoo was proscribed. Many of the early rulers of independent Haiti, fearful of the political potential of the cult and eager to point the country in the direction of 'civilization', persecuted the religion. Nevertheless voodoo beliefs and practices continued, and during the reign of Emperor Faustin Soulouque (1849–59) voodoo was practised openly. This led to increased demands by the élite for a *concordat* with the Papacy, which was signed by President Geffrard in 1860. Thus began one hundred years of foreign ecclesiastical domination. The religious struggle in Haiti has thus always had important political and social implications, and this was certainly true in the case of the campaign of 1941–42. It must be seen as a desperate effort by the franco-ophile mulatto élite to maintain its superiority in the cultural field, in the face of a growing working class and peasant movement led by black middle class intellectuals. Also from within its own ranks the socialist protest constituted a further challenge to the established order. The collapse of the

³⁶ 'Réplique finale au R. P. Foisset VIII' *Le Nouvelliste* 30 juillet 1942.

³⁷ This is reflected in the attitudes of Manuel, the hero of Roumain's celebrated novel *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (Port au Prince 1944).

³⁸ cf. Edris St Amand 'Pour l'ethnologie' *Le Nouvelliste* 11 décembre 1942; J. S. Alexis 'Lettre à R. P. Salgado' *Le Nouvelliste* 6 janvier 1958, also *Les arbres musiciens* (Paris 1957); R. Depestre 'Les métamorphoses de la négritude en Amérique' *Présence Africaine* 1970 19 f. and *Arc en ciel pour l'occident chrétien* (Paris 1967).

³⁹ *A propos de la campagne 'anti-superstitieuse'* (Port au Prince 1942) 13.

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campaign clearly indicated the strength of this opposition, and anticipated the *noiriste* victory of 1946.

NATIONALISM, CEASED TO BE AN IDEOLOGY of protest by the early thirties, and was superseded by *noirisme* and socialism. Haitian nationalism, declared Jacques Roumain in 1934, has its roots in the poverty and the suffering of the masses, exacerbated by American imperialism; but this genuine nationalism had been exploited by bourgeois politicians for their own ends. Nevertheless, the masses were, according to Roumain, beginning to see that the struggle against imperialism was only part of a larger struggle against capitalism, local and foreign. 'It is', he wrote,

a fight to the last against the Haitian bourgeoisie and against the bourgeois politicians, valets of imperialism, cruel exploiters of the workers and peasants.⁴⁰

Under the influence of Roumain, the Communist Party was formed in Haiti in 1934. The deep divisions in Haitian society, and the phenomenon of colour prejudice were accounted for in economic terms. 'Colour prejudice', he wrote,

is the sentimental expression of the opposition of classes – of the class struggle – the psychological reaction to a historical and economic fact: the unbridled exploitation of the Haitian masses by the bourgeoisie.⁴¹

We have already observed how Roumain was considerably influenced by the ethnological movement, and the part which he played in the controversy over the 'anti-superstition' campaign. Although fiercely anti-clerical, Roumain claimed

⁴⁰'L'écroulement du mythe nationaliste' in *Analyse schématique* 32–34 (Port au Prince 1934) ii-iv. It is interesting to compare the ideas of Roumain about the relationship between colour and class with those of the Peruvian marxist José Carlos Mariátegui, particularly *Siete Ensayos de Interpretación de la Realidad Peruana* (Lima 1928).

⁴¹'Préjugé de couleur et lutte de classes' in *Analyse* p.v; cf. also Roumain in S. E. Cardinal Verdier *et al*, *L'homme de couleur* (Paris 1939) 112.

to respect religions, and told how he had written a life of Jesus the revolutionary for his son:

because at that time, it was the best means of teaching him respect and love of man, hatred of exploiters, the dignity of poverty, the necessity for the 'end of the world' – the world of oppression, of misery, of ignorance.⁴²

Roumain associated the interests of the Haitian masses with those of the proletariat in metropolitan countries, accepting the Soviet line on this matter. Stalin had written in 1918 that the Russian revolution had created a new proletarian front throughout the world, 'extending from the proletarians of the West, through the Russian revolution, to the oppressed peoples of the East'.⁴³ Roumain's marxism, his concept of what today would be called the 'third world', and his hostility to official christianity emerge in one of his best-known verses. In place of the sad spirituals, negro people would join with 'the dirty Arabs', 'the dirty Indians', 'the dirty Jews' in singing the 'Internationale':

No brothers, comrades,
We shall pray no more.
Our revolt rises like the cry of a stormbird over the rotten splashing
of the swamps.
We shall sing no more our sad despairing spirituals
Another song shall surge from our throats
We unfurl our red flags
Stained with the blood of our heroes
Under this banner we shall march
Under this banner we march.
Rise the damned of the earth
Rise the prisoners of hunger.⁴⁴

Roumain spent most of the thirties in prison and in exile, returning to Haiti in 1941. After a period as director of the Bureau d'Ethnologie, he was appointed to a diplomatic post in Mexico, but died in 1944. Roumain's influence especially

⁴²'Réplique finale au R. P. Foisset VII' *Le Nouvelliste* 13 juillet 1942.

⁴³*Works* (Moscow 1953) iv, 170.

⁴⁴*Bois d'ébène* (Port au Prince 1946).

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among the young radical sons of élite families, was considerable, and the intellectuals associated with the journal *La Ruche* in 1945–46 looked to his writings for inspiration. Marxism in Haiti was, at this period, and continues to be, largely a movement among intellectuals from mulatto élite families, with no large following among the urban or rural workers. ‘Every great class movement in history’, observed Robert Michels,

has arisen upon the instigation, with the co-operation, and under the leadership of men sprung from the very class against which the movement was directed.⁴⁵

Of the departed Jacques Roumain, Jean F. Brierre wrote:

And the light in which we march,
We, who are called the living,
Is perhaps only a golden trail
Laid with the fruitful seed
Of his apostolic word.
Already the night falls. . . .⁴⁶

The marxist insistence on the economic factor as basic, and the denial of any objective difference between races, led to a theoretical conflict between marxism and the predominant variety of *noirisme*. For the marxist, significant colour and racial differences are to be explained as a result of different economic and social conditions, and of a false consciousness on the part of those involved. These racial differences have no objective basis. In answer to the question, ‘Are you a racist?’ René Piquion replied: ‘Yes I am, and this is perhaps one of the reasons I am not a communist. Anyone who is a racist is not a communist.’⁴⁷

Duvalier and Denis claimed that the marxist analysis applied only to economically advanced countries, and was therefore not a relevant ideology for Haiti. Furthermore the marxist emphasis upon materialism was not in accord with

⁴⁵*Political Parties* (New York 1962) 230.

⁴⁶*Nous garderons le dieu* (Port au Prince 1945).

⁴⁷*L’Assaut* 11 septembre 1935.

the African way of looking at the world. 'For us', they claimed, 'the spiritual fact is as real as the material fact'.⁴⁸ L. S. Senghor has made a similar criticism of marxism on a number of occasions. In spite of this theoretical incompatibility, marxists, like Depestre, Alexis and Constant, were, as we shall see, prepared to forge a temporary alliance with *noirisme*, by supporting Estimé after his election in 1946; some marxists also favoured the election of Duvalier in 1957.

The marxism of Roumain was also theoretically incompatible with the bourgeois nationalism of Vincent. Some marxists, however, found it possible to come to terms with such nationalism, on the ground that it was an instrument in the struggle against imperialism, or that it was stimulating economic growth and thereby preparing the way for an eventual proletarian revolution. Roumain, as we have seen, himself accepted a diplomatic post under Lescot, though only after the Soviet Union had entered the second world war. Many disciples of Roumain, particularly mulattoes like Anthony Lespès, supported the Parti Socialiste Populaire in 1946 and assisted Louis Déjoie in the presidential campaign of 1956-57.

DURING THE PERIOD UNDER CONSIDERATION there were also non-marxist socialist protest movements; in particular there was a strong tendency towards a kind of Saint-Simonism — an attack upon unrestricted capitalism, combined with a belief in government by experts and technocrats, which should replace a bankrupt and out-dated political system. This technocratic tradition in Haiti goes back well into the nineteenth century, and is present in the political thought of Edmond Paul.⁴⁹ Writers of the thirties, like Jules Blanchet, were socialists in the sense that they attacked capitalism and the system of liberal democracy which frequently accompanied it, and they saw the economic factor as the ultimately determining factor in human history.

⁴⁸ 'Eclaircissements' *Le Nouvelliste* 15 décembre 1942.

⁴⁹ Edmond Paul, *Questions politico-économique* (Paris 1861) and *Oeuvres posthumes* (Paris 1896).

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It is social reality which determines the consciousness of men.⁵⁰ Blanchet called for increased specialization, for it is this which characterizes advanced societies.⁵¹ The state is seen as a great public service corporation, along the lines sketched by Léon Duguit and Emile Durkheim, which should play an active and creative role in planning the economy of the country. Property is a social function, and not an individual right, and is therefore properly subject to state control. Blanchet pointed to Italy and to the Soviet Union as providing examples of the way in which governments could intervene constructively by planning the economic development of a country.⁵² 'The old notion of the liberal state has been amended', he wrote,

... The state has relinquished its passive role of policeman; its mission is to increase its duties, and its prime function is to organize.⁵³

This economic and social planning was said to be more a matter of science than art, and calls for the creation of cadres of technical experts who should control the state apparatus.⁵⁴ In order to achieve such a state, correct ideology is necessary. 'Without doctrine', wrote Blanchet, 'action is precarious, fruitless, incoherent'.⁵⁵ Although it is proper to refer to the ideas of Blanchet as ideas of protest, he had, together with Piquion and others of this tendency, come to terms with the Vincent administration. 'Long live Sténio Vincent, uncompromising protector of the working masses', cried the journal *L'Assaut* (edited by Blanchet and Piquion).⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Blanchet 'L'évolution économique' *La Relève* juin 1935 2, and 'L'état et la production' *L'Action Nationale* 23 décembre 1935; cf. also J. Blanchet and R. Piquion *Essais sur la culture* (Port au Prince n.d.) 5-6.

⁵¹ 'Classes sociales et syndicalisme' *La Relève* avril 1935 pp. 1 f, 'La primauté de l'esprit' *La Relève* janvier 1935, 'La primauté de l'économique' *La Relève* février 1935.

⁵² 'Tendances nouvelles' *La Relève* septembre 1935 2-3.

⁵³ 'Idéologies nouvelles' *Maintenant* 15 février 1936.

⁵⁴ 'Cadres de techniciens et état technique' *La Relève* août 1937 4 f.

⁵⁵ 'L'enquête de Réveil' *Le Réveil* 3 février 1940.

⁵⁶ 30 octobre 1935.

As with the political theory of Edmond Paul, this technocratic ideology of Blanchet had definite élitist implications. 'Power to the most competent' had been the slogan of the Liberal Party in the late nineteenth century. A suspicion of the masses is characteristic of this type of socialism in the Occupation period and after, and contrasts strongly with the romantic populism of Brouard and the *Griots* school (which was to some extent shared by Roumain). 'The people is incapable of directing itself', wrote Max Hudicourt in 1926. In a similar vein Etienne Charlier lamented that,

Today we are witnesses to a veritable crisis of demagogy. The people is everything. The people is the god to whom we must offer sacrifice.⁵⁷

Writers like Blanchet, Charlier and Hudicourt led the PSP in 1946.

From what has been said, it is clear that the socialist protest in Haiti presented by no means a united front, nor a single ideology. Roumain was more influenced by the ethnological movement than were Blanchet, Hudicourt and Charlier, and was consequently less élitist in his political ideology. The racialism of the *Griots* group was incompatible with the marxism of Roumain, but it was compatible with the Saint-Simonism of Blanchet, as is suggested by the journalistic alliance between Piquion and Blanchet in the thirties.⁵⁸ This alliance between technocrats and *noiristes* was to re-emerge as a significant factor in the presidential campaign of 1956–57, with the Parti Unité Nationale, and the journal *Panorama*, which helped to organise the electoral campaign of Duvalier. The technocratic position was also compatible with nationalism, and was able to come to terms with the Vincent regime, and also at a later date with Magloire.

⁵⁷Hudicourt 'Coup d'oeil sur la démocratie' *La Nouvelle Ronde* janvier 1926 150; Charlier 'Gouvernants et gouvernés' *La Nouvelle Ronde* novembre 1925 106.

⁵⁸Blanchet was not himself a racialist, and appears to have been influenced only marginally by the ethnological movement.

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WHILE VINCENT HAD BEEN ABLE TO SECURE a fairly wide basis of support, Lescot failed in this respect. Charlier spoke of the *mulatification* of the administration after 1941; politics became almost a family affair. Discontent increased, and in January 1946 Lescot was forced out of office by civil disorders and by a military take-over. A committee of public safety was formed, including men of differing political views and of different classes; there were seven blacks and four mulattoes. The most pressing problem was to avoid a return of Lescot, and to organize elections. The mood was radical; establishment groups like the church and the business community were on the defensive. The details of the conflicts, confrontations and compromises of the months which followed are complicated, and only some of the principal trends can be outlined here.

Political groups were divided by two main factors: colour and social policy. Yet it became clear fairly soon that colour was to constitute the significant line of confrontation. The Front Revolutionnaire Haïtien (FRH) was formed in early February from radical marxist and non-marxist black groups under the leadership of Emile St. Lot, *noiriste* politician and director of *Flambeau* who became president of the Front. The most important of these groups was the Parti Populaire Nationale (PPN), which was the political arm of the Mouvement Ouvrier Paysan (MOP), a trade union movement led by the urban populist Daniel Fignolé, supported by Duvalier and by Clovis Desinor. The FRH embraced the small Parti Communiste d'Haïti (PCH) (headed by Juste Constant, an anglican priest from Arcahaie, Max Maynard and Edris St Amand), and the group of young marxists associated with the journal *La Ruche*, which called itself the Parti Démocratique Populaire de la Jeunesse Haïtienne (PDPJH) (led by Depestre, Alexis and others). A number of other black groups were included in the FRH. The marxists in the FRH – that is the PCH and the PDPJH – favoured the election of Constant as president of the republic, but were realistic enough to see that this was an unlikely event, and were therefore prepared to accept a moderately radical black candidate like Dumarsais Estimé. The non-marxists in the FRH, led by the MOP, were mostly in favour of D. P. Calixte, the former Commandant of

the Garde d'Haïti, who had been dismissed in 1937 for plotting to overthrow the Vincent regime.⁵⁹ Many Haitians, including the army leaders, feared that Calixte was nothing more than a mask behind which Fignolé and the MOP would act. Less radical black groups, together with a wide cross section of politicians from the countryside (particularly from the Artibonite and the North) supported the candidature of Estimé, an ex-school teacher from Verrettes in the Artibonite. His supporters included former fascist journalists like Jean Magloire and Max Bissainthe, and occasional mulatto marxists like Jean F. Brierre.

The bulk of the mulatto marxists, however, together with most of the technocrats, formed the Parti Socialiste Populaire (PSP). In its manifesto of January 1946 the group stated:

The PSP exists to assume the effective direction of the movement for the emancipation of the worker and peasant masses, and of the genuinely democratic portion of the Haitian intelligensia, in the struggle which has begun for the inauguration of a New Society in which class privilege founded on the private ownership of the means of production and exchange will disappear.⁶⁰

As its presidential candidate the PSP – a predominantly marxist mulatto party – chose a rather conservative black senator from the South, Edgard Numa. They claimed that Haiti was not ripe for a proletarian revolution, and that an honest liberal regime ought to be established in the country. They clearly recognized the importance of the colour factor in choosing a black candidate. To the opponents of the PSP this looked very much like *la politique de doublure*. Numa came from the city of Les Cayes, and was closely associated with Louis Déjoie, the dynamic and ambitious grandson of President Geffrard, who himself was elected to the senate as a representative from the South in May 1946. This southern connection of the PSP introduced a regional factor into the election campaign. The South had traditionally been the stronghold of the mulatto élite, from the revolutionary era,

⁵⁹ For his account of the incident see D. P. Calixte *Haïti: le calvaire d'un soldat* (New York 1939).

⁶⁰ *Le Nouvelliste* 28 janvier 1946.

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when Rigaud had established his base in this region. At one point in the electoral campaign of 1946 Max Hudicourt suggested transferring the assembly from the excited atmosphere of the capital to the southern city of Jérémie. This was denounced by the *noiristes*; Jérémie was 'the cradle of Rigaudism, the city of the most ferocious sectarianism which kindled the first fratricidal war in Haiti'.⁶¹ The spokesmen of the PSP, for their part, attacked Estimé as a representative of the black bourgeoisie, acting in the interests of this new élite. Battle was joined by the *noiristes* and colour loyalties took precedence over all else.⁶² *L'Action Nationale*, supporting Calixte, issued a series of bulletins, calling for the election of a black president, an authentic representative of the masses. The class question and the colour question cannot be separated, they insisted.

Whether we want it or not, these two questions in Haiti are only one. We can wrangle endlessly about historical materialism and other things of the same kind, but the colour question will still remain for a long time at the basis of the Haitian social problem.⁶³

The blacks are in a majority, they argued, they should therefore control political power.⁶⁴ 'What is the mulatto?' demanded *L'Action Nationale*,

A man who thinks, in everything and in every way, of his 'clan'. The mulatto is a mulatto before being a Haitian.⁶⁵

In the elections of May 1946 there were 866 candidates for the 37 seats in the lower house, and 21 seats in the senate. The president was to be elected by an over-all majority in a joint sitting of the two houses. The election results made it fairly clear that the new president, in order to secure a majority, would have to be (a) black, and (b) moderately

⁶¹ *Demain* 28 juin 1946.

⁶² cf. Max Hudicourt in *La Nation* 25 mai 1946; and Love Léger 'Le PSP enragé' *La République* 28 mai 1946; M. Vaval 'Max Hudicourt au pilori' *La République* 28 mai 1946.

⁶³ *L'Action Nationale* 'Bulletin 57' 6 mai 1946.

⁶⁴ *L'Action Nationale* 'Bulletin 44' 11 avril 1946.

⁶⁵ *L'Action Nationale* 'Bulletin 60' 13 mai 1946.

radical. Dumarsais Estimé was elected on the second ballot in August 1946 – a victory for the moderate *noiristes*. Although the MOP had maintained its support for Calixte until the eleventh hour, it accepted the result, and Fignolé became Minister of Education. Calixte issued a statement accepting the result and offering his support to the new president. The PCH and the PDPJH also backed Estimé, who was thus able to rely upon a fairly solid block of support from black groups.⁶⁶ Estimé also attempted to secure the support of the PSP by including Dr Georges Rigaud in his cabinet, but the alliance was short-lived. The PSP, with its journal *La Nation*, became the centre of opposition to the regime, and welcomed the military coup of 1950.⁶⁷ It claimed that the president had given all the important posts to blacks, and that his government represented only a section of the nation.⁶⁸ On the other hand *Chantiers*, the journal of MOP, claimed that the fault of the government was that its ears were still too open to the voices of the mulatto bourgeoisie, who had lost none of their real power; 'History proves', cried *Chantiers*

that, in spite of the good will of the black towards the mulatto, he is always the victim of mulatto hypocrisy and cynicism.⁶⁹

Looking back over the months and years following the fall of Lescot, Etienne Charlier stated that the chief characteristic of the period was the 'sharp resurgence of the colour question'.⁷⁰

THE POLITICAL EVENTS OF 1946, from the demise of Lescot in January to the election of Estimé in August, can be understood only in the light of the ideological conflicts of the preceding period, which themselves are related to the

⁶⁶cf. statement by Odnell David on behalf of the PCH 'Le parti communiste et le gouvernement actuel' *Combat* 28 novembre 1946, and R. Depestre 'Notre combat' *Flambeau* 19 Octobre 1946.

⁶⁷cf. statement by PSP in *La Nation* 4 juillet 1950.

⁶⁸*La Nation* 26 juin 1947.

⁶⁹'Le gouvernement et le PSP' *Chantiers* 28 juin 1947, and 'Les mulâtres sont mauvais' *Chantiers* 20 novembre 1946.

⁷⁰'Politique' *La Nation* 7 juillet 1950.

changing class structure in the country. If 1930 had marked the victory of the nationalist protest, 1946 saw the triumph of *noirisme*. As the electoral campaign of 1946 proceeded, colour loyalties came increasingly to take precedence over ideological agreements as a basis of alliance. Black middle class leaders had convinced themselves that colour and class divisions in Haiti were coincident, and their concentration on the colour factor successfully disguised the fact that they themselves formed a class with interests quite distinct from those of the masses. The swift and sharp reaction to the charges made against Estimé by Hudicourt, referred to above, is an indication that these shafts of criticism went close to the bone. The regional factor reinforced the colour factor, in as much as the PSP appeared strongest in the south and west; Estimé's victory over Calixte also had a geographical aspect. The former stood for the country, the latter for the city. The election of Estimé was in some degree a protest against domination of the political life of Haiti by Port au Prince. 'A bas la Dictature de la Capitale' cried the *Artibonite Journal*.⁷¹

The 1946 triumph of *noiriste* ideology is to be seen in the context of a changing class structure in Haiti. One of the principal effects of the US occupation was the growth of a significant middle class group, quite distinct from the old predominantly mulatto bourgeoisie. In fact it was the deliberate intention of the Americans to create a strong middle class, to bridge the gulf separating the élite from the masses, and to provide the basis for political stability.⁷² We have already seen that the *Griots* movement of the thirties was supported largely by intellectuals from this class. By 1946

⁷¹ 7 février 1946.

⁷² A. C. Millspaugh *Haiti under American Control 1915-30* (Boston 1931) 163. This conception of the middle class in Latin America was later developed by J. J. Johnson (*Political Change in Latin America* Stanford 1958), and appears to have influenced the Latin American policy of the United States government, particularly under Kennedy. O. C. Cox, however, refers to the difficulty of exporting the Anglo-American system of oligarchic democracy to conquered territories. It is, he suggests, a hybrid system which has emerged in a specific historical context. 'The tacit assumption seems to be that the balance [of power] existing at home will be transferred to the foreign country . . .' (*Caste, Class and Race* New York 1970 223 n.). A growth in middle class power will not necessarily mean a move in the direction of democracy or stability.

this middle class had become a significant factor in the social and political life of Haiti. American sociologists Leyburn, Lobb and Simpson⁷³ seriously underestimated the importance of this class in the late thirties and early forties. Their mistake is condoned by Wingfield and Parenton on the ground that 1946 was 'the date of the emergence of this class from an embryonic stage into a recognizable stratum'.⁷⁴ The middle class might have been *unrecognized* by these sociologists before 1946, but it was not *unrecognizable*. One of the principal criticisms levelled against Leyburn's book by Price Mars, in a review published in 1942, was the fact that he ignored the existence of a significant middle class. 'It is incontestible that this class exists in respectable numbers', wrote Price Mars.⁷⁵ It was this mistake which led Leyburn to state that 'for the present and the near future it is safe to say that there will be no more black non-élite presidents'.⁷⁶

In a time when the class structure of a country is rapidly changing, and in other periods of crisis, ideologies take on a peculiarly important role in influencing human action, as well as providing 'justification' for courses of action which are undertaken for causes and motives other than the ideology would suggest. A. J. Balfour referred to the doctrines of divine right and of social contract in post-reformation Europe as attempts to 'bolster up by argument the creed which authority had been found temporarily insufficient to sustain'.⁷⁷ Men resort to explicit ideology when they feel the firm ground of prejudice sliding away from beneath their

⁷³J. Leyburn *The Haitian People* (New Haven Conn 1941); J. Lobb 'Caste and Class in Haiti' *American Journal of Sociology* 46, 1940, 23 f. G. E. Simpson 'Haiti's Social Structure' *American Sociological Review* 6 1941 640 f.

⁷⁴'Class Structure and Class Conflict in Haitian Society' *Social Forces* 43, 1964–65, 343.

⁷⁵Reprinted in J. Price Mars *De la préhistoire d'Afrique à l'histoire d'Haïti* (Port au Prince 1962) 210. By 1950, Catts Pressoir estimated a middle class in Port au Prince of 37,000, comprising about 25 per cent of the capital's population. 'Etude sur la classe moyenne à Port au Prince' *Revue de la Société d'Histoire et de Géographie d'Haïti* avril 1950 4. As early as 1930 the Forbes Commission had noted the rise of a middle class, which was seen as a threat by the elite. *Report of the President's Commission for the Study and Review of Conditions in the Republic of Haiti* (Washington 1930) 19.

⁷⁶Leyburn op. cit. 101.

⁷⁷*Foundations of Belief* (London 1895) 217.

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feet. But, having come into being, these ideologies take on a life of their own, and influence in a significant way the course of human history.