# BEFORE AND AFTER BABY DOC

The effect of twenty-eight years of dictatorship and its downfall on Haitian art and artists.

By Maks Westerman

The rumor began spreading shortly after daybreak; like most Haitians, Dieudonné Cedor at first refused to believe it. But by seven A.M. television and radio confirmed that what Haiti desperately awaited for twenty-eight years had finally occurred: the brutal, repressive regime of the Duvaliers—Papa Doc and his son, Baby Doc—had come to an end. Most Haitians came out into the streets to celebrate the flight of Baby Doc and his wife into exile in France, and to hunt down their hated secret police, the Tonton Macoutes. But Cedor, a painter long in the forefront of Haitian art, merely went to his hillside studio to retrieve a picture from the place he'd hidden it fifteen years ago.

"I would have risked my life had I shown this while Baby Doc was still here," Cedor told me. The painting, *Eye of God*, represents a man chained to a tree, a despondent boy looking up at him. It is a bold representation of the cruelties the Duvaliers inflicted on their countrymen. The shackles also symbolize the stunting effect of three decades of dictatorship on the development of Haitian art. "The artist has to develop in an environment that encourages free expression," Cedor said. "Under Duvalier we were forced to keep our dreams to ourselves."

Political and social dreams, that is. But dreams as unpredictable and often bizarre flights of fancy have always been the lifeblood of Haitian art. Rarely does one find a painter who renders an accurate representation of reality. Dreamlike escapism is typical of Haiti, and is the reason why so many foreigners fall in love with the country, despite the heartrending poverty around them.

Haiti is today the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere; in the streets of Port-au-Prince people still die of starvation and disease. Ninety percent of Haiti's 6 million people are illiterate and impoverished, subject to a caste system that divides the Creole-speaking, black majority from the French-speaking, mulatto minority. But their African, Indian, and Western roots have combined to produce a vibrant culture with overtones of gaiety, fantasy, and mysticism. The manifestations of Haitian creativity are everywhere: in the brightly painted tap-taps—buses—that crowd the streets of Port-au-Prince, in the ornate, colorful flags

Maks Westerman is a foreign correspondent who arrived in Haiti a few hours before Baby Doc fled.

*Hector Hyppolite (above), the most legendary Haitian artist, was a* houngan, *or voodoo priest. Haitian artists continue to incorporate voodoo elements in such paintings as Edouard Duval-Carrié's 1979* Azaka: Agro Rex *(left).*

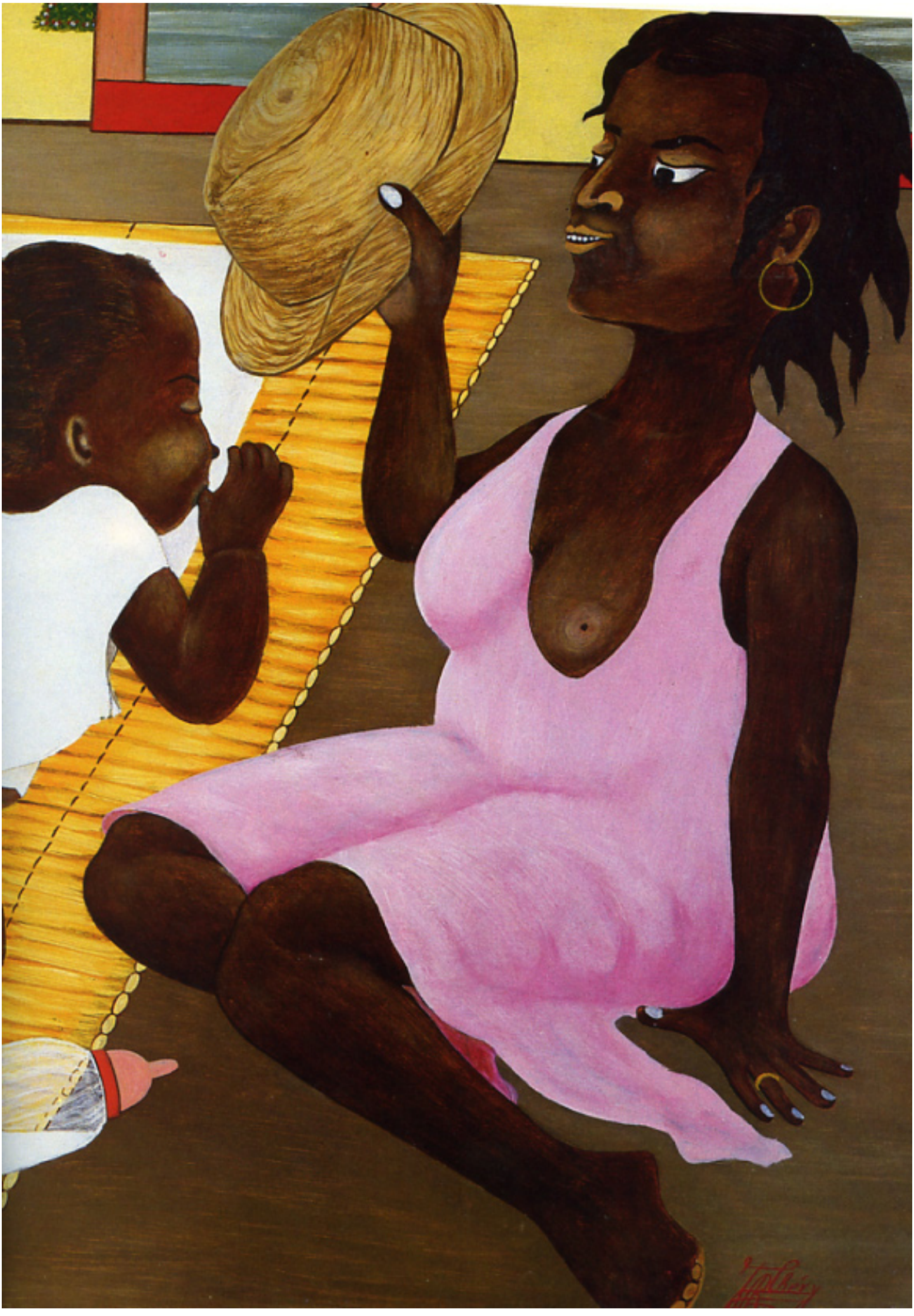
*Haiti is "90 percent Catholic and 100 percent voodoo."*

used in voodoo ceremonies, and in the cartoons of Baby Doc sold all over Haiti in the days following his downfall.

Most of the pictures of Haiti's 4,000 "naïve" and twenty-two academically trained artists are set in paradisiacal landscapes and radiate cheerfulness. Yet, ironically, it was a painting with a realistic theme that led to the "discovery" of Haitian naïve art in 1944. Shortly after opening a "Centre d'Art" in Port-au-Prince to foster native talent, DeWitt Peters, an American painter, received *The Arrival of Franklin Roosevelt in Cap Haïtien*. He reacted at first with indifference. "At the time," Peters later recalled, "I was not at all interested in primitive art. However, and by a fortunate chance, we bought the picture (for $5 worth of art materials and $5 cash) and wrote an encouraging letter to the artist."

That artist was Philomé Obin, a barber, coffee-bean trader, and clerk. Obin has since become the patriarch of Haitian art; his pictures now sell for up to $10,000. At ninety-four, he's still prolific, and his tiny second-floor studio

*Jacques-Richard Chery, who painted* Mother and Child *(right) in 1960, went on to produce tourist ware. Paul Claude Gardère's* Madonna *(above) is also a portrait of Mme Duvalier.*



*Bishop Voegeli, who had been an important inspiration to artists, was forced out of the country at gunpoint in 1964.*

in Cap Haïtien, a picturesque village on Haiti's northern coast, is one of the town's main tourist attractions. "It's far preferable to being unknown," Obin told me as he sat behind his easel in a room cluttered with recent work and waited patiently for me to pull out my camera.

The acceptance of Obin's work by Peters's Centre d'Art, and Obin's subsequent emergence from years of poverty, obscurity, and the mockery of neighbors for his "childish" pictures, led a number of other naïve artists to come forward. Among them was Hector Hyppolite, a house painter and *houngan*—voodoo priest—who had been using chicken feathers as brushes and leftover house paint for his pictures, and had been literally starving in the small town of St. Marc. One of Hyppolite's paintings has since fetched the highest price ever paid for a Haitian work of art: $48,000. The hundreds of pictures he painted before his death in 1948, all done with intense religious zeal, show a dazzling imagination and richness of color and composition. According to André Breton, Hyppolite was "the guardian of a secret"; had he been known in France, Breton said, he would have altered the course of French art.

As international praise grew, tourists started flocking to Haiti, particularly after 1949, when the Episcopal bishop, Charles Alfred Voegeli, had local artists adorn Sainte Trinité cathedral with murals. Besides depicting the central events of Christianity—the Nativity, the Crucifixion, the Ascension—the murals also incorporate elements of voodoo, Haiti's dominant religion. Voodoo has no formal theology, but belief in *loas* (spirits) and in the ability of the *houngan* and *mamba* (priestesses) to summon *loas* at will is widespread. The cliché has it that Haiti is "90 percent Catholic and 100 percent voodoo."

### *Where to see and buy*

- The Davenport (Iowa) Art Gallery has the best collection of Haitian naïve art in America. L. G. Hoffman, the director, has published *Haitian Art: The Legend and Legacy of the Naïve Tradition*, $25 plus $5 postage.
- The best place to buy Haitian art is in Haiti. Though prices abroad have recently plummeted because of the political turmoil, they are still much higher than at the source. Port-au-Prince's Centre d'Art, which introduced Haitian naïve artists to the world in 1944, still operates, and holds profits in escrow for the artists. The Cohan Gallery also carries art not produced by "assembly line."

Voodoo gods, in various guises, pop up in the work of most Haitian artists. Edouard Duval-Carrié's *Azaka: Agro-Rex*, for example, portrays the god of growing things. Because "Papa Azaka" never rests, he has one red eye to enable him to see in the dark. Most Haitians picture him in rags, but Duval-Carrié, the scion of a wealthy colonial family, has made him one of "the happy few."

The attention that was suddenly focused on Haitian art in the early Fifties sowed the seeds of its decay as well. Responding to the demand for their work, many artists began assembly-line production, painting at breakneck speed and copying their own pictures and those of their competitors. Jacques-Richard Chery was one painter who got caught up in the drive to produce commonplace ware *continued on page 88*

*Hector Hyppolite's work, such as* Birds, Flowers, and Pink Basket *(above), was motivated by voodoo symbolism. The work of his successors, such as Felix Bryoche, who painted* Jungle *(left), is often merely decorative.*

**Favorite target:** Tourists, with expensive jewelry and purses stuffed with cash, attract thieves to Rio's beaches.

# Crime takes no holiday in Rio

## Murder common in city -- 15 people are killed on average day

By Maks Westerman
Special to The Star

RIO DE JANEIRO — In her tiny apartment near Copacabana beach, a Brazilian widow chats cheerfully about her grandchildren and the weather.

Only when a foreign visitor broaches the topic of crime, does she think of relating what happened to a neighbor, just the day before.

"I was taking a nap, but woke up hearing muffled screams," she says. "When the noise died away, I went back to sleep. It later turned out the woman downstairs had been strangled by her maid.

"I must say, though, it was partly her own fault. She hired the maid without asking for recommendations. That way you're sure to get a thief — or worse."

Murders have become so commonplace in Rio that people discuss them, if at all, in a laconic, matter-of-fact manner suggesting they're talking about minor traffic accidents.

### 78 corpses

On average, 15 people a day are killed in Rio, one of the world's most violent cities. One in about every 3,000 citizens died violently last year — twice the number of just four years ago.

The situation has become so worrisome that the U.S. government is deliberating whether to label the city unsafe for tourists.

Rio's new police chief Helio Saboya has been unable to solve the crisis of crime. In fact, during one September weekend after he took over from a notoriously incompetent predecessor, a total of 78 bullet-riddled corpses — some showing signs of torture — were found in the streets of the city.

Most were victims of the growing number of death squads, made up principally of former or off-duty cops who are disillusioned with the legal and logistical restrictions placed on Rio's demoralized police force.

Individual citizens have also begun to shoot back. In September, a 15-year-old boy was gunned down after holding up bus passengers. The bullet hit him as he got off. A fortnight later, bus riders summarily executed two robbers.

"The magical image of this city definitely gives people a wrong impression," says Charles Ooms, a Dutch diplomat.

Last summer police tracked down a bank robber to the garage of the Dutch consulate, where he was trying to hide his gun behind Ooms' car.

"I'm scared, I admit it," says the diplomat. "When I'm outside at night, I constantly glance over my shoulder."

Some diplomats have bought guns to protect themselves. More will undoubtedly follow suit after hearing the hair-raising story of a Hungarian colleague.

Last month, gunmen invaded his apartment. Encountering his wife, they put her head through a noose, threatening to hang her and rape her 15-year-old daughter, unless she gave them her valuables.

Foreigners are considered prime targets — they're richer and often ignorant of the preventive measures taken by most natives.

Tourists are the only ones who stop at red lights after dark — thus extending an invitation to robbers to jump them. More than 700 cars a month are stolen under the threat of arms, while thieves make off with 1,800 parked cars.

On the beaches, a favorite stakeout of *pivetes* — "thieving kids" — some tourists announce their presence by wearing expensive watches, purses loaded with cash and even jewelry.

"Despite many warnings, women often insist on decking themselves out like Christmas trees," says a foreign diplomat.

Last summer, after gunmen raided two hotels of Copacabana's expensive Othon Chain and emptied their safe deposit boxes, the U.S. State Department threatened to issue a "travel advisory" for Rio, ranking it among such hotspots of violence as Beirut.

Rio leaders, fearing the loss of many of the million tourists (including 15,000 Canadians) who visit annually, trooped to the U.S. embassy and promised to hand out brochures, advising travellers how to avoid the city's dangers.

The city also promised to put 1,400 extra police in beachside neighborhoods.

But the measures have had little impact. In November, at least 20 visitors to an international Red Cross convention were mugged; one was forced by robbers to undress, right outside his hotel.

A few weeks later, gangsters stormed a third Copacabana hotel. In addition to machine guns and grenades, they brought along French and English interpreters to translate their demands to tourists.

The widening gap between rich and poor Brazilians — already the largest of any major country — is boosting crime rates in all major cities. But Rio has a firm lead, in part because of the dispersion of *favelas* — hill-side slums — throughout some of the poshest neighborhoods.

"The poor only have to look down to see what is possible in terms of the quality of life in Brazil," says economist Rogerio Werneck.

The *favelas* are home to a fifth of Rio's 10 million people. They lack basic government services, and the vacuum is increasingly being filled by narcotics traffickers, who distribute food, provide jobs and basic health care, and even build makeshift schools.

In return, the gangsters, some of them former policemen, are treated like modern-day Robin Hoods.

Police rarely enter the mob-ruled neighborhoods; poorly equipped and poorly trained, they're almost invariably outgunned by the gangsters.

In September, after days of dithering, an "invasion force" of hundreds of police preceded by helicopters finally broke up a war between rival *favela* gangs. The rifles with infra-red sights they confiscated turned out to have come from their own arsenals, and 15 officers were dismissed on corruption charges.

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# Paraguay's dictator faces rising tide of discontent

**President Stroessner has guaranteed his re-election — but made yet more enemies, as Maks Westerman writes from Asunción**

ACCORDING to popular wisdom, one out of three Paraguayan men is either a cop or a soldier. Whatever the exact number, President Alfredo Stroessner apparently considers it insufficient.

In recent weeks Paraguayans have seen the emergence of a vigilante force, designed to quell the rising tide of opposition against the dictatorship General Stroessner established 33 years ago. Equipped with sticks and bicycle chains, the toughs first appeared six weeks ago, thwarting a rally organised by the opposition. What initially seemed an isolated incident soon turned out to be junta policy; the mobilisation of members of the ruling Colorado party to defend what was called their "ideological interests."

The move may prove counter-productive. It has emboldened President Stroessner's enemies and alienated some of his staunchest allies. But, says a foreign diplomat in Asunción, "these days there are not many pro-government people left in the country".

The widespread disaffection dates back to early August, when a simmering dispute within the Colorado party led to a serious split. The "Tradicionalistas", who favour a gradual transition towards civilian government, were expelled from the party, and a smaller wing, the "Militantes", took control.

Their unpopular leader, Sabino Montanaro, is now the Colorados' president. Mr Montanaro heads the repressive Interior Ministry, and in 1976 was expelled from the Roman Catholic church because of his involvement in the torture of church workers.

By openly siding with the militants, President Stroessner assured his nomination for another eight-year term — and, because the Colorados control the election process, his re-election in February. But by purging the more moderate traditionalists, the General has antagonised his party rank and file.

Since the assassination of the Nicaraguan dictator, Anastasio Somoza, in Paraguay seven years ago, the General leaves little to chance. Wherever he goes, soldiers line the route. "My opponents will not have the satisfaction of seeing me flee like Marcos or Duvalier," he has said.

While that may not be an imminent prospect, President Stroessner has cause for concern. The Colorado party's strength lies in its penetration of all sectors of Paraguayan society. But its hold is weakening. In the past year, most student associations have abandoned the Colorados and parts of the labour force are also defiant.

The Roman Catholic church has organised hundreds of thousands of peasants who are seeking to increase their share of arable land (80 per cent of the land is owned by three per cent of the landowners — the highest concentration in South America). The church is in a strong position: the President is loath to offend the Pope, who is due to visit Asunción in May.

Half a dozen anti-Stroessner parties, most of them illegal, now compete within the country. In April, President Stroessner lifted the state of siege that had been in force since the beginning of his rule, and he allowed the most important opposition leader, Domingo Laíno, to come home.

Mr Laíno, an economist and novelist, has succeeded in stifling much of the opposition in-fighting, and his Liberal Party has organised joint rallies with other parties. "This is a new phenomenon," says Enrique Bordenabe, editorial writer of *ABC Color*, a newspaper President Stroessner put out of business in 1984. "Opposition leaders meet each other over a beer, they find solutions together — and they go to jail together."

Since his return, Mr Laíno has been arrested three times, and Fernando Vera, head of the social-democratic Febreristas, was recently held incommunicado for 15 days after he protested at the suppression of *Pueblo*, his party's newspaper and, with the exception of the Catholic weekly, *Sendero*, the only press voice unabashedly anti-Stroessner.

The anti-government forces have found a powerful ally in the US ambassador, Clyde Taylor. He maintains that "American policy towards Paraguay has been the same for 40 years: to promote in appropriate ways a transition towards democracy and respect for human rights". But Mr Taylor is the first ambassador to drag that policy out of the closet, frequently meeting opposition leaders and speaking out on their behalf.

His bluntness led to him being declared *persona non grata*; last month he was named Paraguay's "number one subversive" and accused of supporting terrorism. "The junta finds itself confronted with a new level of political activity and has to come up with an explanation," says a Western diplomat, adding that Mr Taylor was "a scapegoat for the turmoil".

The military continue to be the final arbiters of Paraguayan politics, as they have been throughout the country's history. "We have the arguments," says opposition leader Fernando Vera. "They have the guns."

President Stroessner has maintained the generals' loyalty by sharing the spoils of a vast smuggling network, whose proceeds may well dwarf those from agriculture, officially Paraguay's principal economic sector. It is conservatively estimated that at least half of Paraguay rolls on stolen wheels.

Some political observers speculate that, if unrest continues to mount, the military may decide to replace President Stroessner. Opposition leaders warn of civil war if the generals pick one of their own for president. But they may settle for a compromise, such as the president of the Supreme Court, Luis María Argaña, who is on friendly terms with both sides.

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