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To Haiti and Back

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In Port-au-Prince, under General Cedras' rule, the reign of terror began each night around midnight, when gunshots filled the air.

Only once, though, did we hear human screams following the gunshots. During Ron's visit to Haiti a year ago, a doctor in his group delivered a baby in a one-room house. The cramped dwelling was a few yards from the well-appointed guest house where we American visitors stayed in an affluent neighborhood of Port-au-Prince.

Days later, a nurse from the group went into the same shantytown neighborhood and examined the body of a young man killed during the night and left in the street by supporters of Haiti's military regime.

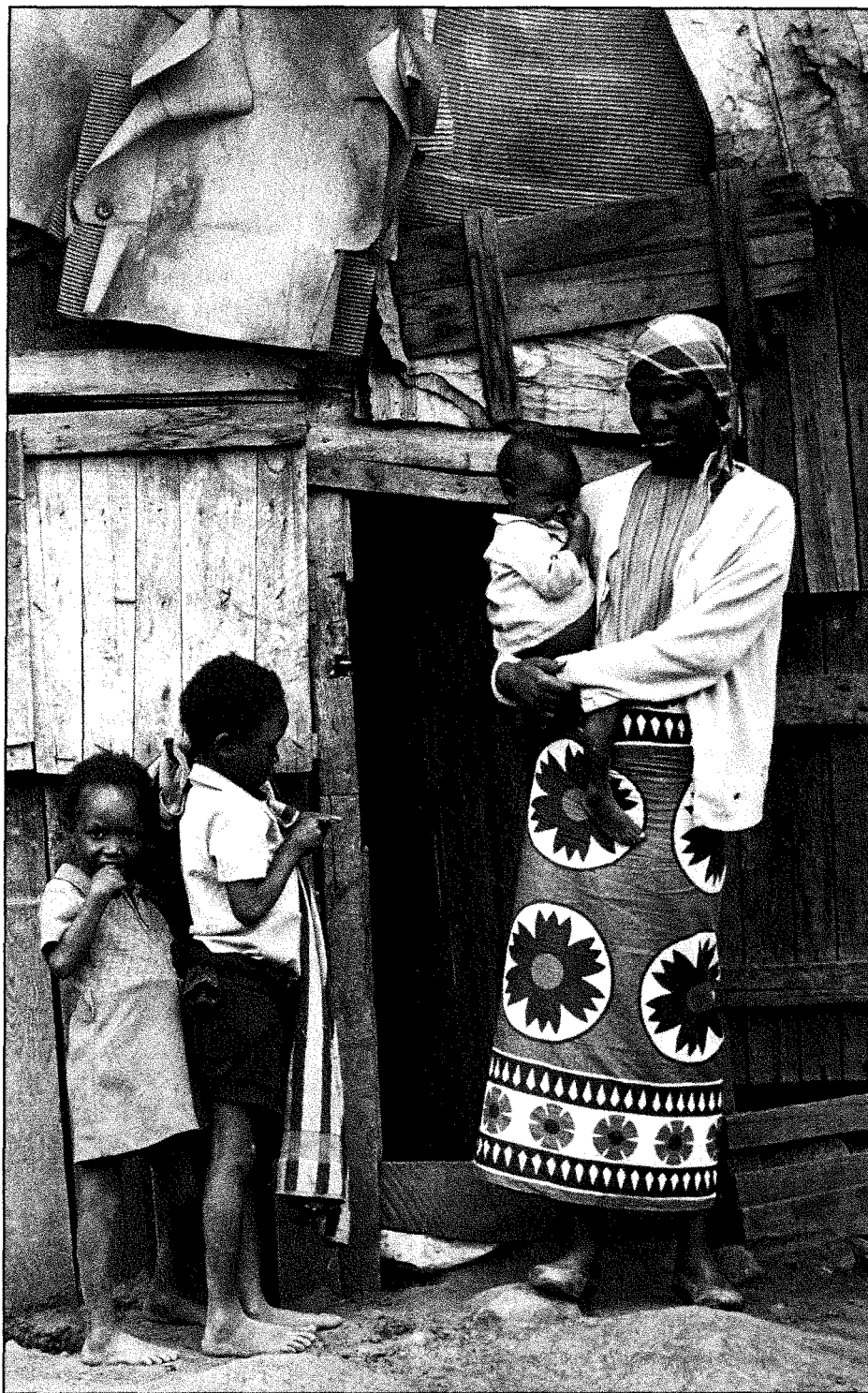
Haiti Is a Desperate Country

Normally, neither of us would have considered going to that tiny nation in the Caribbean, usually called the Western Hemisphere's poorest country. Ron had been there twice, and we both knew a little of the pain and suffering, but it seemed very far away to us. And besides, what could we do?

Then we read a newsletter by Gene Stoltzfus, the director of the Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), detailing his trip to Haiti in May, 1993.

Gene described the CPT and their support for those working nonviolently in Haiti, struggling against repression from the military government. His words gave us a sense of calling to that desperate place. Ron followed that call in October of 1993, and John in April, 1994.

The idea for Christian Peacemaker Teams grew out of a discussion among Mennonites and Brethren started in 1982



A mother and her children in the Cite Simone slums of Port-au-Prince. Photo by Jeffrey S. Dowers

This article was submitted prior to the U.S. Army occupation of Haiti.

To Haiti and back with

Christian Peacemaker Teams

by John Wish and Ron Mock

by Ron Sider. He urged Christians to create special teams to respond to violent situations. The teams would travel to areas of violence, placing themselves in harm's way, opening lines of communication, and encouraging the use of non-violent strategies to resolve the conflict and achieve justice.

When we first talked about going to Haiti, we both had friends and family urging us not to go. As a result, when we decided to make the journey, hundreds of people who were nervous about our welfare began praying for Haiti.

When Ron visited Port-au-Prince, its first democratically-elected president was scheduled to return from the two-year exile imposed on him by Haitian Army leaders. But a wave of intimidation was organized against supporters of President Aristide, and against foreign observers in Haiti. The observers left, except for a couple of small groups like Ron's Christian Peacemaker Team. And Aristide could not return.

An embargo on fuel imposed by the United States restricted supplies badly enough to make it impossible for Ron's team to leave Port-au-Prince. But by the time John arrived the following spring, things had changed.

"The first thing we noticed when we arrived in the capital, Port-au-Prince, from the airport was the traffic jam," John recalls. At the time, an embargo on fuel and weapons was supposedly in effect. Nevertheless, cars and trucks filled the streets while beefy, well-dressed young men in civilian clothes were commonly seen on the street with automatic weapons or hand grenades.

The price of gasoline on the black market had risen to \$8 per gallon in U.S. dollars. Gas stations were closed in re-

sponse to the embargo, but fuel was readily available for those who brought gallon jugs to the side of the road. There, gas was dispensed from 55-gallon storage drums hauled in by truck across the border with the Dominican Republic, which shares the other half of the Isle of Hispaniola, between Cuba and Puerto Rico, with Haiti.

Physically, Port-au-Prince is like San Francisco, with hills surrounding a beautiful bay. However, it no longer feels like a 20th-century city.

In the fall of 1993, services for more than a million people who live in the Haitian capital were sporadic. By the spring of 1994, virtually all services had stopped. The people had no electricity, no running water, no garbage collection, and the sewers worked only occasionally.

In the tropical climate, the stench of rotting garbage and raw sewage became overpowering. Health hazards were obvious.

(Ironically, as the United Nations tightened the fuel embargo in the summer of 1994, electricity and water sometimes were available in Port-au-Prince.)

Haitians are more than inconven-

ieniced by their political situation. Most look gaunt and their clothes hang on their spare frames. Medicines are expensive. Unemployment is running over 50 percent. For those who can find jobs, the average wage has fallen from 41 cents per hour (U.S. \$) to 14 cents since the military took over in 1991. Airline flights have stopped and the U.S. Navy patrols the waters picking up refugees. Haitian refugees are forcibly returned to Haiti, where they face more abuse, or are sent by the U.S. military to Guantanamo detention camps for indefinite stays in Cuba. (*New York Times*, September 1, 1994, reported "at midday...[August 31], there were 14,308 Haitians and 15,176 Cubans at Guantanamo.") And more were arriving daily.

On top of the physical and economic hardships is the daily terror. In the first three months of 1994, United Nations observers documented over 100 political deaths, mostly at night and mostly among supporters of Father Jean Bertrand Aristide, elected president in 1990.

On our visits to Haiti, we met with church leaders, development workers, pro-democracy activists, soldiers, scholars, merchants, diplomats, and members

Uncollected garbage completely fills the streets [above left].

The U.S.-initiated fuel embargo seems to have little effect on the traffic flow through Port-au-Prince [inset].

At the market an undernourished woman picks over tomatoes [opposite page].



Photographs by John Wish

of Parliament. At each meeting, we listened to Haitians' hopes and fears for themselves and their country. Where appropriate, the teams urged the people to use nonviolent means to achieve their goals.

We also held public prayer vigils as a means of helping Haitians under threat of death make public their pleas for justice and democracy.

John's group had a two-hour dialogue with a physician who also was a senator, elected along with Aristide. Despite pressure from the military, he has refused to resign. A respected gynecologist in a medium-sized town, he was encouraged by friends and family to get into politics. Since the election, his family has received death threats and his medical practice has suffered. Last year, his chauffeur was murdered, presumably by the military.

He lives in fear, but he doesn't want to leave his country.

The nature of his fear became real to our group during a required debriefing with the military's local civilian chief. The chief made clear he did not like Aristide or his supporters. He berated the group for even talking to the prominent physician whom he described as "scum."

Although most foreigners have left Haiti, some remain. These include seven Christian Peacemaker Team members and some other foreign missionaries, despite provocations from the military governments.

Five of the seven long-term CPT members are in Jeremie, the westernmost city of Haiti. The others, including one Haitian, are in Port-au-Prince. Several of the long-term volunteers are faith missionaries supported by their congregations. CPT would like to have small teams of volunteers in each of the other eight geographic regions of the country, but finances prevent it. (It costs about \$1500 per month to support an American volunteer.) CPT has scheduled training for more volunteers beginning December 29, 1994.

Additionally, CPT supports and encourages short-term trips to Haiti. Its Steering Committee is also considering long term efforts in other trouble spots such as Gaza and Washington, D.C.

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Opportunities for Peacemaking Through Nonviolent Intervention



by John Wish and Ron Mock

1. Christian Peacemaker Teams, P.O. Box 6508, Chicago IL 60608, 312-455-1199. Gene Stoltzfus, Director.

Mission: "Ministry of nonviolent presence and responsiveness in emergency situations and settings where violent instability often no longer permits evangelism, relief or development work."

Where: Haiti, Gaza, Washington, D.C.

Activities: Witnessing, being in tense situations with the poor and the oppressed. Helping people who have been jailed or hurt. Training offered.

2. Balkan Peace Teams, Marien Wall 9, D-32378 Minden, Germany.

Where: Former Yugoslavia.

3. Fellowship of Reconciliation, Box 271, Nyack NY 10960.

FOR is a 75-year-old interfaith pacifist organization committed to the power of wisdom, truth and love for resolving human conflicts. FOR has chapters and affiliates in more than 40 countries.

4. Peace Brigades International/USA, 2642 College Ave., Berkeley CA 94704, 510-849-1247.

Mission: "PBI works to establish justice and peace...through nonviolent action. To do this we send unarmed international

peace teams, when invited, into areas of repression or conflict. Through its activities, PBI learns about, develops, and models forms of nonviolence in the spirit of Gandhi's experiments in truth."

Activities: Accompaniment of locals who are at risk.

Where: Guatemala, Sri Lanka, Native Americans in Canada, and (1995) Colombia. Training offered.

5. Witness for Peace, 2201 P Street, NW, Room 109, Washington DC 20037.

Mission: WFP has a ten-year track record of involvement in Central America. It is a faith-based movement committed to changing U.S. policy. It has a few long-term volunteers backed by thousands of short-term visitors who have witnessed conditions in violent conflicts.

Activities: Accompaniment of locals who are at risk; presence and witness of the use of American weapons and military training.

Where: Guatemala, Southern Mexico, Nicaragua, and Haiti. Training offered.

6. United Nations Volunteers, Humanitarian Relief Unit, c/o Palais des Nations, CH-1211, Geneva, 10, Switzerland.

Activities: Humanitarian relief that might be expanded to more active peacemaking.

Where: Anywhere UN directs.

A Call to Action

Christian Peacemaker Teams is one of several experiments in active nonviolent peacemaking now underway. One other effort of special interest to Quakers is the Friends Peace Teams Project (FPTP). The FPTP, currently being organized under the leadership of Elise Boulding, Mary Lord and others, proposes to act as a source of information to Quakers, and a clearinghouse for Quaker volunteers to join programs like CPT.

For now, CPT may be the best-developed of the projects in Christian nonviolent action. Its leaders have a clear sense of God's call and a desire to be faithful. Both on the field and in the meetings back at home, CPT members seek carefully the mind of God as decisions are made about whether and how to be involved at the scene of violence. CPT leaders are experienced nonviolent activists, working with a sophisticated understanding of nonviolence and how it works.

Ultimately, though, CPT is still an experiment. In Haiti, for example, CPT is still learning. Strategy and tactics have been flexible and responsive, both to changing circumstances and to rapidly increasing understanding of the challenges of peacemaking in Haiti. We cannot say for certain that CPT is on the right track, although it seems promising, especially if its work could be reproduced on a larger scale.

We also cannot say that the work

CPT volunteer is going to be killed in the line of duty, unless God intervenes. But we commonly accept such risks when one of our loved ones joins the military. Can we Quakers also accept this risk if we are called to be peacemakers?

Christian Peacemaker Teams deserves support and participation from Quakers. It is one of several organizations working on new ways to carry the message of Christ's peace to the poor and oppressed.

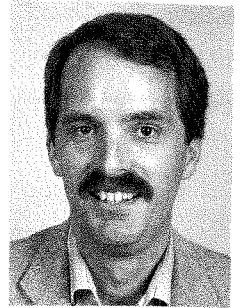
CPT will be better able to carry out its work if it has support beyond the two founding denominations of Mennonites and Brethren. CPT is inviting Friends to join the other historic peace churches in this important nonviolent peacemaking work. Please consider prayerfully in your meetings whether the Spirit is leading you to join this work.

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John Wish is professor of Business and Economics at George Fox College, Newberg, Oregon. Ron Mock is director of the Peace Center and assistant professor of Political Science and Peace Studies at George Fox College. Ron is a member of Northwest Yearly Meeting. Each was in Haiti for ten days as part of a Christian Peacemaker Team witness. Ron has been to Haiti three times. During one of his trips in 1988, he interviewed Father Aristide. John has volunteered to be a CPT Reserve Corps participant.



John Wish



Ron Mock