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Haiti: Journey to the heart of the anti-Ariel Henry mobilization, part 2

written by Catherine Charlemagne
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In the capital, it's at the crossroads of the airport, under the viaduct or Nazon crossroads that one also calls Kafou rezistans, that the protesters meet.

Part 2

It's undeniable that Ariel Henry's days in power in Haiti are numbered. As we write the second part of this column on Tuesday afternoon, nobody knows where the Prime Minister is. He is neither in Kenya nor in the United States. Rumor had it that he was in France for a so-called Café festival. But no one has seen him. What is certain is that he is not in Haiti either, as the country's two international airports –

Toussaint Louverture in Port-au-Prince and Hugo Chavez in Cap-Haïtien – are being watched like milk on fire by the population to prevent the plane carrying him from landing. Even regional airports such as Jacmel, Jérémie and Cayes have been put on alert by the population, who have decreed Ariel Henry “persona non grata” in Haiti. In other words, the mobilization against the regime that began over a month ago continues unabated. As was the case under the presidencies of Martelly, Moïse, and, before them, Aristide, Port-au-Prince remains the bastion of anti-Ariel Henry protests, while the police do not hesitate to make excessive use of tear gas and even live ammunition.

As a result, many people have been killed since the start of the anti-Ariel Henry protest movement, such as journalist Jean-Marc Jean, who lost an eye on February 8, 2024. On Monday February 5, 2024, all the capital’s neighborhoods – Canapé-Vert, Solino, Bel-Air, Bourbon, etc. – came under fire. Hence, the numerous victims recorded since the start of the protest movement against the ruling power, such as journalist Jean-Marc Jean, who lost an eye on February 8, 2024. On Monday, February 5, 2024, all the capital’s neighborhoods – Canapé-Vert, Solino, Bel-Air, Bourdon, Nazon, Champ de Mars, Lalue, Delmas, Delmas 32, etc. – were in an uproar, burning tires all over the city in anticipation of February 7. On the same February 5, former Prime Minister Claude Joseph, leader of the EDE party (Les Engagés pour le Développement), and his supporters took to the streets, notably in front of the Villa d’Accueil serving as the Primature in Musseau, to stage a sit-in demanding the departure of the head of the Transition, Ariel Henry. But the police, who seem to have been given firm instructions, showed no mercy. No one was spared. They intervened even before the protesters had time to unfurl their banners. They used tear gas and fired from all directions at the demonstrators, who were dispersed after the former Chancellor, Claude Joseph, had been sprayed with copious amounts of gas. The same happened to Pitit Dessalines party leader Jean-Charles Moïse on Sunday, February 4 and Monday, February 5.

The former Mayor of Milot nearly lost his life during the demonstration on Monday, February 5, 2024, in Delmas and around the Primature in Musseau. Caught under heavy fire from police and armed civilians on the route of the demonstration on Route de Delmas towards Pétion-Ville, the former senator's life was saved only by the skill and vigilance of his supporters, who quickly extricated him and drove him into a ravine below the road, where he took refuge with the inhabitants of this shantytown. Haggard and unsettled, the political leader emerged in shock and was unable to complete the route of the demonstration, as the regime's police made a show of force with their riot gear, whereas the former candidate for the presidency of Haiti and the population were merely demonstrating calmly at the time.

It has to be said that the forces of law and order were on their toes, given that Guy Philippe's arrival in Port-au-Prince had been announced in the run-up to the major demonstrations on February 7, 2024. Admittedly, all the provincial towns were also on the move against the government, in particular against Ariel Henry. Nevertheless, it's obvious that the capital took the spotlight from them on D-Day, i.e. February 7, the day on which, according to the opposition, Ariel Henry was supposed to leave the Prime Minister's office. Indeed, the week before, Guy Philippe's arrival was announced in the capital. In truth, the whole of Port-au-Prince was holding its breath. The government was wondering how to react if the leader of the protest movement managed to penetrate the power environment and took the lead of a procession of angry protesters. It was a false alarm.



The population has decreed Ariel Henry “persona non grata” in Haiti.

Guy Philippe is not here. In the end, the population, who had been demonstrating daily, finally got fed up and decided to dispense with the rebel leader’s presence. He wanted February 7 to be a symbolic day, if ever there was one, to make a lasting impression. So he devised a strategy and a schedule for his visit to Port-au-Prince. Knowing that the authorities would do everything to prevent him from touching down in the capital, he took everyone by surprise. First, he booked a seat on a Jérémie/P-au-P flight for February 7, 2024. But since he knows the system and what he’s capable of, on Monday 5th, in the company of a few loyal followers and his bodyguards, he embarked incognito on a small boat bound for Port-au-Prince. With his journey planned down to the last detail, he avoided taking the large ships making the Jérémie/P-au-P route, where government agents might have recognized or discovered him and raised the alarm. On this frail boat, they sailed through the night, arriving in Port-au-Prince at dawn on Tuesday, February 6. After arriving in the capital, Guy Philippe took the usual precautions and made his presence felt at the scene of the crime, in Pétion-Ville, where, almost 7 years earlier, the Senator from Grand’Anse had been “kidnapped” by agents of the American DEA and the Haitian BLTS on charges of complicity in drug trafficking.

In fact, on the morning of Tuesday, February 6, 2024, as thousands of demonstrators prepared to set off from the airport crossroads at bas Delmas, the usual gathering place known as Kafou rezistans, Guy Philippe paraded around Place Saint Pierre in Pétion-Ville, shaking hands with onlookers and passers-by who couldn't believe their surprise. Immediately, news of Guy Philippe's presence in Pétion-Ville went viral on social networks, particularly in the country and in Port-au-Prince. Instantly, hundreds of motorcyclists waiting to take part in the demonstration took to the road towards Pétion-Ville, causing understandable panic in the capital and in Pétion-Ville. But very quickly, a wild rumor spread among the demonstrators and throughout the Republic, particularly in the Cité: Guy Philippe is in town! Guy Philippe marches on the Palais National! Guy Philippe is on his way to the Primature to arrest Ariel! Such were the shouts heard during this moment when everything seemed to stand still.

At the same time, the flood of images of a smiling, calm Guy Philippe on social networks continued to annoy members of the government, some of whom, as a precaution, were already taking cover, according to sources close to the government. To be sure that the videos circulating on social networks were indeed of him, the daily Le Nouvelliste, out of professional ethics, contacted the former leader of the 2004 armed struggle for authentication. Guy Philippe confirms that he is indeed in the flesh in the capital to accompany the population in its fight against the regime: "I promised the population that I would be in Port-au-Prince before February 7. I have never lied to my people. I'm here for the February 7 demonstration", he proudly declares, reassured.

So Guy Philippe was able to keep his word by coming all the way to the capital with the revolutionary credo he has been trying to sell to the population since his expulsion from the United States. The Pestel native's presence in Port-au-Prince would enliven and revive protesters across the country, particularly those in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area, who staged a demonstration of force on Wednesday, February 7, 2024, but without Guy Philippe, for security reasons, he

told the media the following day.

Everywhere in Delmas and Pétion-Ville, crowds were shouting their displeasure at the government, and particularly at Ariel Henry and Me André Michel. The latter seemed, at the time, to be holed up in a villa somewhere in Pétion-Ville or Debussy or even in a large hotel on the Place, according to some sources. But it was in Pétion-Ville that more victims were to be deplored. This was also the day when the Brigade de Sécurité des Aires Protégées (BSAP) counted the first deaths in its ranks. It all started very early with a contingent of agents from this state structure demonstrating on the Delmas and Pétion-Ville roads, accompanied by thousands of demonstrators shouting “vive BSAP, abas la police” all along the route. This merry-go-round lasted most of the day. Except that, just as they were about to return to their base on the Kenscoff side of the Thomassin road, the national police suddenly decided to intervene for no apparent reason. When UDMOs (police officers from a specialized unit) summoned a white pick-up bearing the initials BSAP and carrying a group of officers to stop, the latter didn’t react and naively even shouted: don’t shoot, BSAP and the police are brothers.

But it seems these police officers didn’t think so. In a split second, they opened fire, officially killing 5 BSAP officers and arresting 3 others. The victims were Mackendy Veillard, Dorvil Jean Fontange, Zéphyrin Daniel, Clersain Thomas and Chrisner Désir. This action caused widespread panic in the Laboule 10 area, all the more so as Guy Philippe, according to his own statements to the press, was following the procession of BSAP agents who were killed in another vehicle a few meters away. He claims to have been present throughout the operation and that he was the target of the attack, as the authorities had information that he was part of the motorcade. Officers from the Pétion-Ville UDMO were behind the operation, which was undoubtedly orchestrated by the President of the CSPN, none other than Prime Minister Ariel Henry, and the Director General of the PNH, Frantz Elbe.

Following this carnage, the police seized the vehicle in which these BSAP agents had been protecting the population, demonstrating against the regime in the morning. In the course of this deadly operation, not only was the vehicle seized, but a motorcycle also belonging to BSAP and carrying other agents was also confiscated. All these items were taken back to the Pétion-Ville police station to the jeers of angry demonstrators. That same evening, the bodies of the 5 agents were buried in a mass grave after authorization from the Government Commissioner, after he had been informed by the Pétion-Ville Police Commissioner that 5 bandits had been killed in clashes with the forces of law and order, without ever mentioning that they were five BSAP agents. The following day, the OPC (Office de Protection du Citoyen) issued a press release calling for a “thorough investigation into the circumstances of the violent death of the five agents of the Protected Areas Security Brigade in Laboule 10 on Wednesday, February 7, 2024, in circumstances that remain troubling”.

The Association des Militaires d’Haïti (AMH) has also issued a warning to the government following the incident in which 5 BSAP agents lost their lives. According to a press release, the association said:

“(…) As a reminder, the current Commander-in-Chief of the FAd’H, certain officers of the Military High Command and all demobilized BSAP soldiers are members of the Military Association of Haiti. Some 500 non-military members of the BSAP have been trained by the AMH and this list has been forwarded to the Grand Quartier General and the Ministry of Defense for possible incorporation into the Army. A confrontation between FADH and BSAP is a confrontation between brothers-in-arms from the same Haitian Military Association.

Dr. Ariel Henry is therefore invited to put everything on the table, firstly to prevent a fratricidal 2-level confrontation between BSAP and FADH, a confrontation which he would certainly not survive, and secondly to issue the necessary instructions for BSAP to be transferred without delay to the command of FADH.

(...) Finally, the Military Association calls on all political actors to rise above their status as elites and warns against any infiltration or instrumentalization of the BSAP in provocative actions with the FADH and the PNH (...)".

Finally, there is the statement from the Syndicat national de la police nationale d'Haïti (SYNAPPOHA), which, through the voice of its General Coordinator, Lionel Lazarre, called on police officers to exercise caution and ask them to avoid manipulation by politicians. Lionel Lazarre said he was aware of the fierce criticism leveled at the police following the attack, which left 5 BSAP officers dead, but also claimed other victims among the population, notably almost a dozen journalists who were simply doing their job.

Speaking on Thursday, February 8, 2024, on Radio Magik9, the union leader called on police officers to pull themselves together:

"At Synapoha level, we are affected by the criticism of the PNH. We understand the concerns and frustrations expressed by the population in relation to what is taking shape. However, the PNH must exercise its function within the limits of the law. Any excesses must be corrected. The PNH must not give the impression of being effective in controlling demonstrations and weak in other areas, or worse, give the impression that it is protecting a power rather than accompanying the population. Today, the PNH must be at the service of all," declared Lionel Lazarre, Coordinator of the Syndicat national de la police nationale d'Haïti.

During the day, there were countless scuffles between the police and the population across the country.

To be continued...

Source: [*Haïti Liberté / Translation by Internationalist 360°*](#)

