MATS LUNDÄHL

A STUDY OF HAITI

PEASANTS AND POVERTY
Several issues presented as well and according to the President, the plan was followed up and the downward spiral of the stock market continued by the government network of public enterprises and public sector enterprises is a significant problem. Few companies, governments, and public sector enterprises are severely affected by the downturn. The President mentioned that the government will continue to maintain its stance with regard to the economy, even though the current conditions are challenging. The government will focus on stabilizing the economy and implementing policies that can help the country recover from the current crisis. The government will also continue to work closely with international organizations to ensure the country receives the necessary support to overcome the challenges it faces.
The Occupation: First Efforts of Economic Development

Some excerpts:

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THE PASSIVE GOVERNMENT

The redistribution of government land which converted Haiti from a plantation economy to a peasant country was the outstanding exception to a pattern which was to crystallize during the nineteenth century. The dominant attitude of the Haitian governments towards the agricultural sector was to become one of non-intervention or, rather, passivity (except in matters of taxation). In the present chapter we will examine the historical evidence behind this contention, and begin an attempt (to be continued in Chapter 8) to trace the reasons behind the reluctance to initiate agricultural change.

The first part of the chapter provides the appropriate factual evidence. It shows that the period up to the American occupation in 1915 was characterized by an almost total lack of government action in the agricultural sector, that half-hearted attempts to initiate change were made during the occupation years, that neglect, lack of interest and at best, ad hoc measures took over after 1934, and finally, that this tradition of passivity has continued to dominate Haitian governments up to the present time.

To understand why the most important sector of the economy has received nothing but neglect from the authorities we subsequently go on to sketch four different trends in Haitian social and political history which together have acted as formidable obstacles to positive government intervention in agriculture: (1) the formation of the social class structure; (2) the lack of peasant interest in politics; (3) the lack of government and upper-class identification with the peasantry; (4) the development of the economic goals of the Haitian governments.

We will begin with a description of the characteristics which traditionally have separated elite and peasants in Haiti. This description is followed by an analysis of how these differences developed out of the colonial social structure leaving, in the early 1840s, a fairly rigid class structure. The analysis then goes on to discuss the consequences of the land reforms by Pétion and Boyer, where the peasants lost all interest in national politics, and the ex-landowners simultaneously turned their back on agriculture to engage wholeheartedly in politics instead.

The latter half of the chapter traces the consequences of the separ-