

Chapter 14

THE LOUVERTURIAN STATE

*What we want is not a circumstantial freedom granted to us alone,
but the firm adoption of the absolute principle that no human being,
born red, black, or white shall be the property of another human being.*
—Toussaint Louverture

1- One Island, One Country: The Conquest of the Eastern Territory

The Antecedents

Since the Bâle Treaty (July 22, 1795) the eastern two-thirds of the island was French. However, it had not been reunited to Saint-Domingue because Roume desired to return it some day to an official agent of the French Government. Jacmel was still besieged when Toussaint (December 28, 1799) began pressuring Roume to occupy the Eastern part of the island (roughly the present Dominican Republic). Though he could not know exactly when and how, Toussaint had enough perspicacity to know that some day France would come in force in Saint-Domingue. In the case of a violent attempt to retake Saint-Domingue, the eastern territory could serve as a base from which the European troops could operate.

Toussaint did not explain that to Roume. Instead, he complained of the slave trade that was still going on in the East. But Roume would not go along. Then, suddenly, an insurrection broke out in the North. Thousands of farmers threatened to destroy Le-Cap if Roume did not come and listen to their complaints. When Roume went to talk to them they made three requests a) Half of the properties on which they were working b) The right to work for themselves and not for the property owners 3) Permission to take over the eastern side of the island.

The first two requests were probably not inspired by Louverture (a staunch defender of large estates system). The last one certainly was. Roume was threatened,

but he remained firm and would not grant the farmers' demands. Eventually, he was shut away in a chicken coop.

When Toussaint arrived, he pretended to have nothing to do with what happened and pressed Roume to grant at least the last request. It was not so much the ambition of property that motivated the people, he explained, it was the slave trade taking place in the East. Roume would not budge from his stand. So Toussaint washed his hands: "I can protect you," he explained, "but I don't have enough power to prevent the people from taking over the East and kill the Europeans". Roume appeared to yield...but did not. The order he issued specified that General Agé (a White) should take over the East.

Agé went to Santo-Domingo with a few officers. The population refused to receive him. He was insulted, ridiculed, threatened. Governor Don Garcia would not hand the Government over to him until he received orders from Madrid to do so. A humiliated Agé returned to Saint-Domingue to tell his story. And Roume... cancelled his order to occupy the East.

Louverture was furious. But it was April 1800; the Civil War was raging and Louverture was too busy. By August 1800, the Civil War was over and Louverture, who seemed to know only too well where he wanted to go, made his next move: the conquest of the East.

The Invasion of the East

Until the Civil War, Toussaint had always managed to keep at least the appearance of legality, making sure that the French Government was officially on his side. Even after expelling Hédouville, he had welcomed Roume and made sure that Roume was on his side. Louverture fought the Civil War with Roume's approval and in the name of the French Republic. But when Toussaint, at the end of 1800, invaded the East, he did it without anybody's approval.

On December 20, 1800, Toussaint wrote a letter to Don Garcia to let him know that General Moyse was on his way to take possession of the Eastern territory. To avoid the repetition of Agé's experience, Moyse was accompanied by his troops. Roume had been confined to Dondon since November 26 to protect him, said Toussaint, from "the evil influence of intrigants*"

At the end of December 1800, Toussaint left Port-au-Prince to join his troops in Mirebalais. At the beginning of January, Toussaint Louverture accompanied by Daut, Charles Bélair and Paul Louverture entered the Eastern Territory through Lascahobas and Las-Matas, as Moyse was doing the same through Ouanaminthe and the Massacre River.