

*Bel-Air, Port-au-Prince, 1995. Plus ça change....*

*Photo by Leah Gordon*

## Chickens come home to roost

**F**ollowing several weeks of shootings and bomb threats, former soldiers from the disbanded Haitian Army are threatening more violence if their demands for back pay and the release of imprisoned colleagues are not met. Under pressure from so-called friends in the international community, the Haitian government has promised to remedy the ex-soldiers' grievances. This reaction to the current wave of insecurity and violence says a lot about the state of the country on the second anniversary of the US-controlled return to democracy.

As was predicted at the time of the US/UN intervention, failure to move decisively to disarm former soldiers and paramilitary thugs, and to break their organisational capacity by arresting and trying their leaders was a recipe for future violence.

A comprehensive and rapid reform of the justice system should have been another top priority. Sadly what efforts there have been, can only be described as a pathetic failure. Since the month of April, 50 people have been arrested on subversion, conspiracy and illegal arms charges, yet none have been brought to trial, and many have already been released. And the farcical trial in July that resulted in the acquittal of those accused of murdering former Justice Minister, Guy Malary, was another example presumably not lost on criminals and victims alike.

In this atmosphere of virtual impunity, ex-soldiers and Duva-

lierists groups are able to sow terror in support of outrageous demands, and the Préval government seems set to capitulate. Apparently while there isn't even enough money to publish the findings of the Truth and Justice Commission, the government will be able to pay off the ex-soldiers. A new report issued by Human Rights Watch warns, "As Haiti's tumultuous history amply shows, a government's decision to forsake accountability for political expediency only encourages further abuse and instability."

Two years down the road of reconciliation, the government finds itself more distanced than ever from the people that brought Lavalas to power in the first place. When inaugurated, Préval claimed he would be the 'President of the peasants', but now his future seems tied ever closer to that of his US counterpart.

The increasingly symbiotic nature of the relationship between Presidents Clinton and Préval deepened in September when 31 US security agents were flown to Port-au-Prince to take-over and "retrain" Préval's presidential security unit. According to the newspaper, *Haiti Progrès*, the move was less to do with protecting Préval from attack, and more to do with removing Aristide loyalists from the National Palace and putting the current President on an even tighter rein. A Latin American diplomat told the *New York Times* "This place really is becoming more and more of an American protectorate."



# Whatever happened to... THE COUP LEADERS

**T**wo years on since the US military intervention, and the return of President Aristide, the criminals of the coup regime enjoy continued impunity from justice. Nowhere is the extent of this impunity better highlighted than in the case of the main coup leaders. A key part of the US-brokered compromise bringing an end to the three years of military rule was that the regime's strongmen would be allowed to leave the country. For those who gave the orders that resulted in the deaths of some 5,000 Haitians, and the torture, rape and wounding of thousands more, there was to be no settling of accounts, no trials, no justice.

## Cédras: jazzing it up in Panama

The head of the Haitian Army, Lt. Gen. Raoul Cédras, and his chief of staff, Brig. Gen. Philippe Biamby, left Haiti for Panama on 13 October 1994, two days before the return of Aristide. As part of the deal, the US agreed to rent three properties owned, and left vacant by the departed Cédras. The US government paid, and is still paying, the General US\$60,000 a year for his villa in Petionville, his beach house and his mother-in-law's property in Port-au-Prince. This income supplements the estimated millions he made from black-market petrol sales and drug deals, and then stashed in overseas bank accounts.

According to *The Guardian's* Phil Gunson, Cédras lives with his wife, three children, and Biamby, in the exclusive Punta Paitilla district of Panama City. When not frequenting a classy restaurant in the old town where he can indulge a passion for jazz, he is, friends say, writing his memoirs.

## François: holiday in Honduras?

Former Police chief and reputed leader of the notorious paramilitary attachés, Michel François, fled Haiti for the Dominican Republic two weeks after the US troops arrived. There he joined Haitian thugs from previous regimes who had hot-footed it across the border and found a haven in Balaguer's dictatorship. Dominican rights groups protested that François could be seen driving around the capital, Santo Domingo, in a car with diplomatic accreditation.

François was still in the Dominican Republic when in

by Charles Arthur

September 1995 a court in Port-au-Prince found him and 13 others guilty of involvement in the 1993 murder of Antoine Izmay, a wealthy businessman and Lavalas supporter. In their absence they were sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labour.

Nothing was heard of François again until April this year, when the Dominican authorities arrested him and infamous Duvalierist leader, Franck Romain, accusing them of plotting against the Haitian government. The arrests appeared to be part of a secret deal between the two countries, as, a short time later, the Dominican police rounded up and forcibly deported several thousand Haitians and second-generation Haitian-Dominicans in an attempt to influence the imminent presidential election. The dumping across the border of large numbers of deportees met with no protest from the Préval government.

A few days after their arrest, François and Romain were flown out of the country to the Honduran city of San Pedro de Sula, 125 miles north of the capital, Tegucigalpa.

The Honduran president announced that his offer of political asylum for three months was a humanitarian gesture. Their current whereabouts are unknown.

## Constant: walking free in NYC

Emmanuel 'Toto' Constant, leader of the death squad paramilitary force, FRAPH, left Haiti in December 1994 when accusations of his involvement in murder, torture and rape reached a local court. He travelled first to Puerto Rico and from there entered the US on a tourist visa. Two months later the visa was revoked and the Haitian government formally

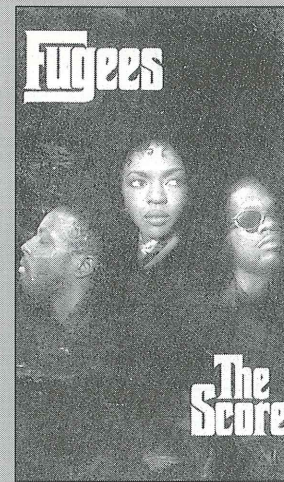
asked for his return, but US authorities claimed they were unable to find him even though he was regularly spotted in the Queens area of New York city. Eventually he was apprehended by the US Immigration Service in May 1995.

A long process of hearings, judgements and appeals culminated with the issue of a final order of deportation last December. At this point Constant contacted several US journalists promising to reveal more details of his work for the CIA. Within days he changed tack, withdrawing his offer to 'spill the beans'. The failure of the US authorities to execute the deportation order suggested that an 'understanding' had been reached.

Then in June this year the US released Constant to live freely in the New York City area. A State Department official said Constant would not be deported because to do so would "place an undue burden on Haiti's judicial and penal system." While Constant's return to face trial would no doubt highlight the continuing absence of a functioning judicial system in Haiti, most observers concluded that the real reason for his non-deportation was the fear that a trial would reveal more details of US collaboration with the Haitian terror network.



**STOP PRESS: 29 September - Haitian police foiled a coup plot by a group of decommissioned soldiers just hours before they planned to assassinate top government officials, and terrorise schools and residential areas in the capital. Officers arrested a sergeant from the Haitian Army and a leader of FRAPH at the home of Toto Constant. During the arrest, police discovered a cache of automatic weapons and grenades, and documents outlining the coup plans. (Source: Associated Press)**



# THE FUGEES: ready or not

by Leah Gordon

**E**arly this summer a new sound was pushing and shoving itself between the compas and racines music on Port-au-Prince's Tropic FM and Haiti Inter radio stations. A hauntingly melodic rap band with hard-nosed lyrics was infecting the airwaves. The songs ranged from the heavenly "Ready or Not" to the subversive rant about police brutality, "The Beast".

The Fugees had arrived in Haiti and could be heard on every radio in every taxi. Whilst they were conquering the rest of the world with their number one single, "Killing Me Softly", and album, "The Score", they were winning the hearts of their spiritual home - Haiti.

Wyclef Jean and Prakazrel 'Pras' Michel are cousins and second-generation Haitian-Americans. The third member, Lauryn Hill, a 21 year old African-American considers herself 'Haitian by association'.

Their name, the Fugees, is a testament to their roots. Short for Refugee Camp, it both acknowledges the fate of the Haitians interned at the US base at Guantanamo Bay, and also subverts the derogatory connotations that the word refugee has for the Haitian community in the US. When they last played in Miami, Wyclef demanded of the audience "Kote tout Ayisyen-yo ye?" (Where are all the Haitians?), commenting on the invisibility of Haitians in the US. He needn't have asked as the audience was a sea of Haitian colours, an ocean of red and blue with a strong undertow of pure pride.

The Fugees are not just another hip hop band. The Fugees are something new. They offer a conscious alternative to gangsta rap without any sanitization or compromise to their own expression. The Fugees are smart and shrewd, frightening and fearless.

Many rap outfits in the US today are obsessed with guns and crime. From at first portraying the dangers of life on the street for urban blacks, these bands began to glorify it and live it. This was usually in tandem with lyrics that were not only violent but misogynist and homophobic. "You got a lot of kids that look up to those artists, who think that what they're saying is true", says Pras. "Gangsterism, or whatever, will always be in our lives, but it's not what hip hop is all about."

The Fugees have strong religious ties. Pras's father is a deacon, Wyclef's a pastor, so both men grew up with the musical traditions of the church. The Fugees are idealistic and want to see the world change - most importantly the world for black kids in the ghetto. They have recently put together a summer camp for underprivileged children.

They are trying to offer something more than the nihilism of gangsta. "I want to do something deeper than that, which would have more lasting value when it comes to community and family and black people as a whole", says Lauryn.

The Fugees are a long-awaited return to the rap basics of found rhythms and street poetry. Their live performances break with current convention too by using guitars, drums, and other organic instruments rather than pre-recorded tape tracks.

The band are due to play soon in Port-au-Prince where they are bound to enrich and inspire as they entertain. As Pras rapped on their first album, "People say you're Haitian, you'll never get nowhere, But I swear on my mother's grave we'll still be here." Hopefully their mixture of anger, sense, and pride will be the perfect antidote to the tension caused by the recent violence in Haiti.

● The Fugees play Manchester Apollo - October 17, Brixton Academy - October 18 and 19, Wolverhampton Civic Hall - October 21, Glasgow Barrowlands - October 22.





# In memoriam

DAVID NICHOLLS died suddenly in June. He was 60. David was a major authority on Haiti and wrote the classic English-language study of Haitian history, "From Dessalines to Duvalier". He first visited Haiti during the years (1966-73) when he taught political science at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad. He was one of the original members of the Haiti Support Group, and we will miss him.

## From Dessalines to Duvalier by David Nicholls

### Reviewed by Bob Corbett

David Nicholls' fine history was first published in 1979. A third edition in paperback with a lengthy preface update was published earlier this year. The book is a carefully documented history of Haiti

from the revolutionary period (1791-1804), through Papa Doc Duvalier's years (1957-1971).

Nicholls focuses on the question of race and class and argues that a particular sort of racial question is dominant over class interests in determining Haiti's history. Nicholls' view is that race is closely related to culture in Haiti.

The mulattoes (mixed race), in order to set themselves apart from the slaves, turned to France for their identity and culture. While this caused mulattos to emphasize whiteness, more importantly it caused them to emphasize Europeaness. The blacks, however, most of whom were freed from slavery via the revolutionary struggle, hated the French and the whiteness they associated with the French. Since the mulattoes were united with the white French, the blacks opposed, even hated the mulattoes.

Again, however, Nicholls returns to the theme of culture. In this black rejection of whiteness what the blacks rejected was western culture. Thus the ultimate battle lines of Haitian history were cultural issues. Nicholls does not deny the place of colour and class, but argues this cultural racism (the mix of colour and culture) is the dominant causal element in Haitian history.

Thus we have: mulattoes - blacks; Catholic religion - Voodoo religion; French language - Haitian (Creole) language; French/Western customs - African customs; plantation system (proprietors) - subsistence farming. For any serious student of Haiti this work is an excellent investment in your growth in understanding the complexity of Haiti's current reality through a deeper grasp of her tortured history.

● "From Dessalines to Duvalier" is available from the Haiti Support Group priced £15 including post and packing.

## SAP UPDATE



Demonstrators against privatisation with banners which read "The people are not going to sell". Photo by Leah Gordon

**S**tructural adjustment legislation to privatise nine state-owned enterprises, and reduce the number of state employees has finally been passed by the Haitian Parliament. The actual casting of votes on these two controversial laws did much to discredit the image of parliamentary democracy. Some highly principled parliamentarians participated in the debates and voted or abstained in the votes. Sadly a much larger number (approximately 40% of the total number of parliamentarians) did not present themselves at all at the time of voting, presumably because they did not want take a position on laws that have been strongly promoted by the executive and strongly criticised by progressive organisations from the popular movement.

The passing of the legislation should see the International Monetary Fund (IMF) release some US\$100m, which should be followed by the disbursement of loans from other multilateral finance agencies. However a recent report by the InterPress Service suggests that the IMF may only release the full amount when it is satisfied that private capital is coming into the country. The same report hints that the World Bank would like to see the private sector move into at least one state enterprise before it begins to release funds.

"This is sheer cynicism," said Jonathan Pitts of the Haitian Platform to Advocate for an Alternative Development, who pointed out that the government has largely followed the dictates of its funders. "They went ahead with the process. Now that there is a bill, it is not good enough."

\* Thanks to those of you who wrote to your MPs about structural adjustment. The Overseas Development Administration has replied. See next issue for our response.

## HSG benefit, films, report

**November 2, 7.30pm** - A Benefit Concert for the Haiti Support Group at Loughton Methodist Church, Essex. Hazel McConnell and the McConnell Trio present a programme featuring the music of Schumann, Schubert and Haydn. Tickets £10 (£7 concessions) from the HSG 0181 201 9878.

**October 19, 12.30pm** - Chronicling Haiti, three documentaries showing at the ICA, London, as part of the Human Rights Watch International Film Festival. "Dreams of Democracy", "Tonbe/Leve", and "Courage and Pain" show different aspects of the struggle for genuine democracy in Haiti over the last 10 years. Phone the ICA for details 0171 930 3647.

**"Haiti - Thirst for Justice: A Decade of Impunity"**. A new report produced by Human Rights Watch/Americas, available for £2.95 plus 50p for p&xp from Human Rights Watch, 33 Islington High Street, London N1 9LH. Phone 0171 713 1995.

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