



Lavalas cocks upside down.

Photo by Leah Gordon

What a foul-up

In the April elections for nine Senators and 700 seats on new local assemblies only 5% of the registered electorate cast their votes.

Commentators proffered various explanations for the pathetic turnout, ranging from the absence of a tradition of meaningful elections, to election fatigue, this being the fifth set of elections since 1994. Most though agreed that it was a boycott of the electoral process by voters passively protesting against continued hardship and poverty.

While most Haitians turned their backs on a system that had failed to deliver, the two main Lavalas parties fought over the spoils of the meagre first round vote. The threat to the ascendancy of the ruling government party, the Lavalas Political Organisation (OPL), came from the Lavalas Family (FL), the new party of former president Aristide. The FL had out-pollled the OPL, winning over 50% of votes cast, and therefore the seats, in two of the Senate contests, and well-placed to win the second round run-offs in the rest.

The OPL cried foul, complaining that the blank ballot papers should have been counted as valid votes and therefore part of the overall percentage, in which case the two FL candidates would not have passed the 50% victory mark. Not so, said the Electoral Council, pointing out that not counting them was accepted practice in previous elections in which the then Lavalas coalition had triumphed. As the date for the second round approached, the OPL refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Electoral Council, accused it of rigging the vote in favour of Aristide, and withdrew from the contest.

With the second round postponed, and with Aristide and the OPL trading insults, the Prime Minister, Rosny Smarth, himself an OPL member, dramatically resigned in June. Enter the US, blatantly tram-

pling all over a sovereign country's internal affairs. Having previously declared the election free and fair, Washington took fright at Aristide's increasingly forthright opposition to the government's neo-liberal reforms. Summoned to the US Embassy, President Préval was told either to have the second round of voting cancelled, or US aid to Haiti would be stopped. Needless to say the election was cancelled.

As the US State Department warned Aristide to back off and give Préval a chance to govern, a stalemate ensued with neither the OPL nor the Electoral Council backing down over the disputed April election. Meanwhile, Préval searched for a candidate willing to accept the poisoned chalice and agree to be nominated Prime Minister of a deeply unpopular government.

The twisted political scene took a new turn in mid-July when the US ambassador to the UN visited Haiti, and secured Aristide's support for an extension of the UN force's mandate in return for US acceptance of the April results. However, the UN special envoy to Haiti continued to question the credibility of the Electoral Council, and suspended technical assistance to it.

By the end of August, Préval had finally come up with a nominee for PM. Eric Pierre, a former employee of the US Embassy and the Inter-American Development Bank, was apparently selected because he was familiar with the requirements of the international lending institutions. His nomination was rejected by the Haitian Parliament.

After three years of the international community's attempt to 'uphold democracy' in Haiti, there is a government with no Prime Minister, and no popular support, and an electoral system regarded with understandable disdain by the vast majority of voters.

At the end of July, the United Nations Security Council agreed to extend the mandate of its military mission in Haiti until the end of November. The UN force, which numbered some 6,000 when it took over from the US intervention force in March 1995, has steadily been reduced in size. Its latest incarnation, authorised to remain in Haiti until the end of November, now consists of 50 UN military commanders, 700 Canadian and Pakistani soldiers, and 250 police monitors.

As the third anniversary of the UN-authorised intervention to restore democracy approaches, Haitians are questioning the continued presence of the foreign troops.

On July 28 a nationwide general strike was called by a coalition of a dozen popular organisations to demand the immediate withdrawal of all foreign military forces and an end to the Haitian government's neo-liberal policies. Three days earlier, popular organisations had also organised a "sit-in" of about 150 people in front of the UN headquarters in Port-au-Prince. Samuel Madistin, one of Haiti's 18 serving Senators, said, "I have always said the foreigners should leave...This (the Haitian government's request for the UN presence) was all done in an unconstitutional manner, in the complete disrespect for Haitian norms and laws."

In the other house of Parliament, the Chamber of Deputies, 25 (out of a total of 81) elected deputies formed a new 'anti-neo-liberal and anti-occupation' bloc. On August 29, the bloc announced that it would struggle against all governments which support the structural adjustment programme, and called for the end to the occupation of the country by foreign troops.

Why Haitians are turning against the UN

One explanation for the growing resentment of the UN forces (and the 500 US troops stationed in Haiti under a bi-lateral agreement) lies in the nationalistic spirit of the Haitian people. Two



UN troops making Haiti safe and secure for who?

Photo by Leah Gordon

Insecurity justifies UN presence

The activities of armed gangs, and a sharp increase in criminal activity are attributed to the military regime's thugs and to others who, in the absence of a functioning judicial system, see that crime does pay. When waves of violence have broken out each and every time the UN mandate has come near to expiring, thus providing justification for the mandates' renewal, conspiracy theories abound. What is the invisible force that can somehow unleash a burst of killings and shootings so that the Haitian government requests the UN forces to remain - the CIA, the Haitian business elite, the Macoute sector, or the Lavalas government itself? Without venturing a guess as to who is behind it, Father Triest suggests that "there is perhaps a strategy of creating low-intensity conflict as a smoke-screen for more fundamental political and economic issues."

The UN Special Representative to Haiti, Lakdar Brahimi, helpfully outlined his idea of the fundamental issues in a radio interview before he stood down from his post in February 1996. He gave his analysis of the new order established by the UN intervention in Haiti. "The 20% [sic] who are privileged, know two things: that the political changes are inevitable, but that, on the ideological, economic front, they have the sympathy of Big Brother, capitalism. That's all one can keep now. You can't keep both the political power and the economic power. You have to share, to perhaps lose the political power and accept that the economic power you hold will only be retained with some adjustments."

Brahimi then went on to issue a warning. "What happened in this country is that you had 80% of the population which gained their citizenship status for the first time, but this ascension itself is a generator of disorder...That's the problem. I prefer to tell this 80% and their representatives in the popular organisations that if the liberty you have gained is to be translated into blockades and

The United Nations in Haiti

hundred years ago the Haitian nation was forged in the epic revolutionary struggle against French, British and Spanish attempts to restore slavery. More recently, the US occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 stirred both armed resistance from Haitian peasants, and an intellectual 'black power' movement.

While antipathy towards a foreign military presence in Haiti was, in most cases, set aside when US forces intervened to restore President Aristide in 1994, this was a bitter pill swallowed only because it was perceived to be the only way to end the coup regime nightmare. To say that the three years since then have not been what the majority of Haitians hoped for is a massive understatement. Continuing violence and insecurity, and worsening economic hardship are attributed to the failures of the Haitian government, but blame is also attached to the UN and the international financial institutions that are identified as the power behind the throne.

Officially the UN forces, initially a predominantly US operation, came to Haiti to establish a safe and secure environment. The question is 'safe and secure' for who? For Father Hugo Triest, a co-ordinator of the Platform of Haitian Human Rights Organisations, the answer is clear, "The US came down here to protect the bourgeoisie from the people, not to protect the people."

From the earliest days of the intervention it became clear that disarming supporters of the old regime was not a priority. Father Daniel Roussi re of the Gona ves Justice and Peace Commission maintains that "there would have been nothing easier than to disarm the Macoute-military system, because the UN Civilian Observers Mission was here [during the coup]. They had all the names of the FRAPH, the attach s, the soldiers - and the U.S. soldiers themselves had all the information. Nothing would have been easier than to cull, quietly, those macoutes and soldiers who, for their part, were not particularly courageous individuals."

An activist from the popular organisation, Batay Ouvriye, makes a connection between the UN presence and the demobilisation of a previously dynamic civil society.

"The UN troops are not actively involved in repression, but I think their presence makes people ashamed, because when you lose

your sovereignty you feel hopeless. You feel you don't have any capable leader who can control your country. They are right inside your country, observing whatever you are doing. You don't feel free. You are not free to do whatever you feel is in the interests of the masses, for the country as a whole."

"Their physical presence underlines just how dependent you are. Your freedom is very limited, so, psychologically, you feel put down, that you have been betrayed by your own people."

"It's very difficult to fight against them. They control all the different factions. If they want them to fight, they fight. If not, they don't."

Partial list of strikes and demonstrations in Haiti over the last year:

1996

28 August - Popular organisations demonstrate in Port-au-Prince against continuing insecurity and the high cost of living.
26 September - Nurses at the state hospital in Port-au-Prince begin 48-hour strike after no pay for 12 months.
30 September - Popular organisations mark anniversary of the 1991 coup with demonstrations calling for justice and

protesting the high cost of living.
14 November - Doctors at the state hospital, Port-au-Prince, begin four-day strike for two months back pay and for a wage increase.
16 December - In J r mie, 1500 people demonstrate against the government.
1997
9 January - Anti-IMF demonstration in Port-au-Prince attacked by the police rapid reaction force.

16 January - Popular organisations stage a nationwide general strike against the government.
20 March - Popular organisations in Port-au-Prince and Cap-Ha tien demonstrate against the government's neo-liberal economic policies.
7 April - State cement company workers demanding reopening of the factory block the main road north of Port-au-Prince.

10-15 April - Demonstrations against the government and the cost of living in Gona ves.
5 May - A national strike of state-employed teachers begins after no pay for over a year.
12-16 May - School students and popular organisations stage violent protests in support of teachers' strike.
16 June - Health workers employed by the state stage sit-ins and strikes for

back pay and a wage increase.
28 July - Popular organisations call one-day anti-occupation, anti-neo-liberal strike.
21 August - Medical staff at the state hospital in Port-au-Prince begin unlimited strike.
29 August - State telephone company workers begin unlimited strike for better pay and conditions.
Source: Haitian Press Agency

burning tires, be careful! You are in the process of putting your own liberty in danger."

Who is in control?

In other words, Lavalas can have control of the government, but that does not mean it can carry out radical changes to the economic structure. The only adjustments allowed will be of the structural variety in order to further integrate Haiti into the global capitalist system. According to Brahimi then, if the poor majority think that the election of its representatives to political office should be accompanied by measures to address popular demands for fundamental economic changes in a country of widespread abject poverty, it is wrong. If its organisations protest against the application of structural adjustment measures that have made the poor poorer still, they are in danger.

In the light of Brahimi's extremely candid and blunt remarks, it comes as no surprise that, when the current mandate was extended at the end of July, it was announced that the UN force would be staying to concentrate on training Haiti's national police in crowd control, rapid reaction, and palace security. That is, control of crowds protesting against government policy, a rapid reaction force of police heavies that has already intervened to disperse demonstrations and road blocks, and security for the head of the government that is enthusiastically implementing the structural adjustment programme.

Is it any wonder that more and more Haitians are asking whether the UN is in their country to provide security for the population, or rather to keep the poor majority in check so as to guarantee the stability needed for the successful application of structural adjustment?

Sources: 'Disarmament Derailed' by Laurie Richardson, NACLA Report on the Americas, May 1996; Haiti Info; Haiti Support Group study tour notes June 1996.

'A pig's tale'

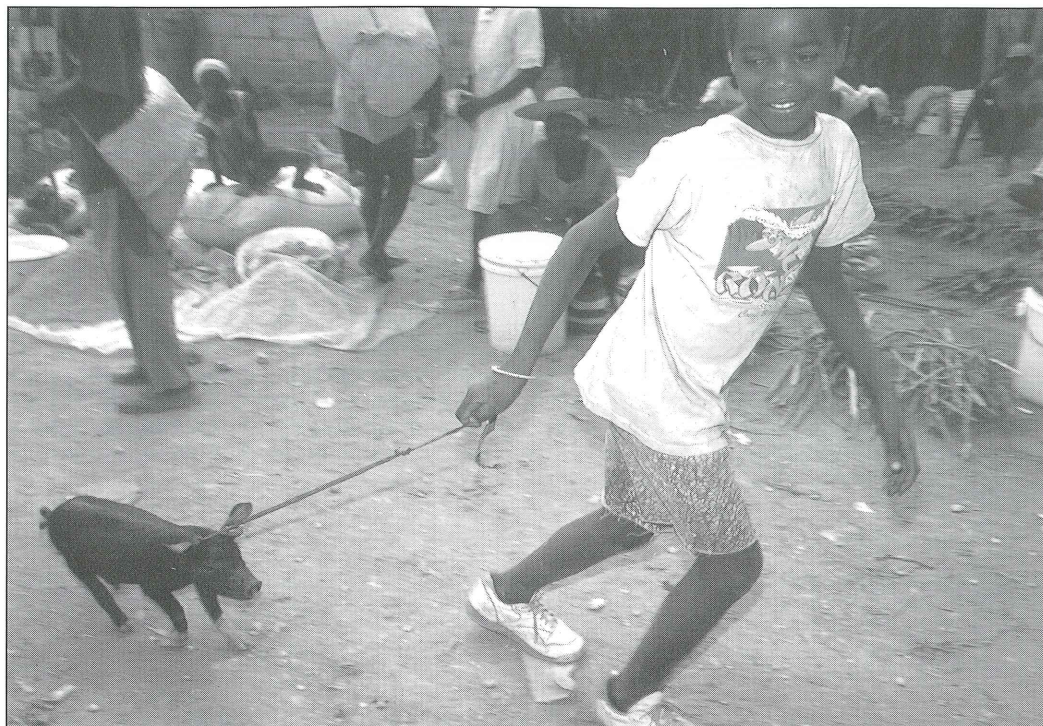


Photo by Leah Gordon

A documentary film that explores the fall-out from the US-backed eradication of Haiti's creole pig population in the early 1980s will be shown on Channel Four television at 11.30pm on Thursday, 23 October. Check press to confirm details of transmission time.

The film, made by Haiti Support Group members Leah Gordon and Anne Parisio, follows a voodoo priest and a Haitian Rasta on their separate journeys across Haiti in search of the few creole pigs rumoured to have survived. The priest needs a genuine Haitian pig to placate Erzulie Dantor, his spirit mistress, and to honour the slaves who rose up in revolution. The Rasta wants to know if it was part of the fabled 'American Plan' to kill every last swine, and so crush

the peasants' independence.

From the air-conditioned offices of US development 'experts', to the smoky charcoal pits of put-upon peasants, and through the dusty rara street parties and voodoo ceremonies of the urban poor, it's a head-spin-

ning trip into the heart of Haiti. *A Pig's Tale* is conspiracy theory, a story of cultural and political resistance, and a biting critique of US arrogance and self-interest, all rolled into one pacey piggy-back ride.

EVENTS

An Enchanted Land

Dessaline presents *An Enchanted Land* by Dale Wasserman, directed by Joseph Blatchley, at Riverside Studios, Hammersmith, London, from 11 September until 11 October, at 8pm (Sundays at 7.30pm)

Dale Wasserman's play, loosely based on the novel, *Le Crayon de Dieu*, by the Haitian writers, Philippe Thoby-Marcelin and Pierre Marcelin, is described as "a compelling, tense and complex journey of sexual jealousy, betrayal and revenge."

In a small town in Haiti, Zeline, a former prostitute, is desperate to keep her past behind her. She plans to entice the fiercely individual Diogene, a seductive womaniser, into marriage, but he rejects and humiliates her. Without warning, Lourdes, her virginal young daughter, returns from life spent in a Catholic convent.

When Zeline discovers that Diogene and Lourdes are lovers her fury turns her to voodoo, with disastrous consequences.

For details and bookings telephone the Riverside Studios theatre box office: 0181 741 2255

Onè, Respè

Exhibition of Haitian art that includes paintings, sculptures and flags. A celebration of the spiritual and cultural connections between Miami and Haiti at The Garden Gallery, Pallant House, Chichester, West Sussex, from 27 September until 8 November. Phone 01243 774557 for details.

New books on Haiti

● *A Day for the Hunter, A Day for the Prey: Popular Music and Power in Haiti* by Gage Averill (University of Chicago Press) £14.25

● *Haiti in the New World Order: the limits of the democratic revolution* by Alex Dupuy (Westview Press) £13.95

Gage Averill's fascinating social history of Haitian music between 1915 and 1995 blends historical narrative, firsthand accounts by musicians, and song lyrics. The development of Haitian jazz, meringue, troubadour, *konpa*, and the *rasin* (roots) music movement are explored in the context of their relationship with evolving resistance and power struggles. This is a must for anyone with an interest in Haiti's vibrant music scene, and the synergy of culture and politics.

Haiti in the New World Order provides a comprehensive and succinct analysis of the neo-liberal model for Haiti's economic development in the context of the momentous political events of the last ten years. Alex Dupuy argues forcefully that the IMF/World Bank free market strategy will reinforce Haiti's underdevelopment and dependence, and details the alternative approach proposed by the Aristide government before the 1991 coup d'état. The US/UN military intervention to return Aristide to power in 1994, argues Dupuy, has ensured the application of the neo-liberal plan resulting in the denial of true democracy in the sense of an economic programme prioritising the interests of the majority.

Both books are welcome additions to the growing body of literature on contemporary Haiti.

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