

Aristide – the people's choice – returns to a bitterly divided political arena.

photo by Leah Gordon

Aristide is back

Ten years since he was first elected President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide has returned to power following an election in November that was boycotted by all the main opposition parties. They refused to take part, claiming that, far from being independent, the council that organised the poll was controlled by Aristide's Lavalas Family Party. Their absence left Aristide, and his party's candidates for a third of the Senate seats, to stand virtually unopposed.

The run-up to the November 26th poll was marred by over a dozen small explosions when homemade grenades were deto-

nated by unidentified individuals in different parts of the capital, Port-au-Prince. The explosions killed two children and injured many others. Fear of further violence, and the lack of a genuine contest, contributed to a relatively low turnout in the capital, but local media reported high rates of participation in many of the city's poor areas, and in the provincial towns.

In the absence of international election observers, the voter participation rate was hotly contested – the official tally was 62%, but the Democratic Convergence opposition coalition estimated a turnout as low as five per

cent. Whatever the reality, it is clear from the first round results in May's Parliamentary elections that Aristide's Lavalas Family Party commands considerable support across the country. Most independent analysts agree that, as Aristide remains by far the most popular politician in Haiti, he would have easily won a free and fair election. The country's poor and downtrodden majority still looks to him as the one leader they believe will respond to its demands.

Whether he will be able to implement his essentially populist

programme of job creation, improved social services, and partnership between the State and the private sector, remains to be seen. On the one hand, unlike in 1991 when he faced a hostile legislature, this time he will govern with a Parliament dominated by his Lavalas Family Party – it has 26 out of 27 Senate seats, and 73 of the 83 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Neither will he have to contend with the military, which overthrew his first administration. On being restored to office by a United Nations invasion in 1994, he disbanded the entire institution the following year.

On the debit side, despite some two billion dollars of international aid over the past five years, the economy has failed to recover from the effects of the international sanctions against the 1991-94 military regime. Future aid is now in doubt as the major donors continue to question the legitimacy of the 2000 **page 2** ➤

**Former allies
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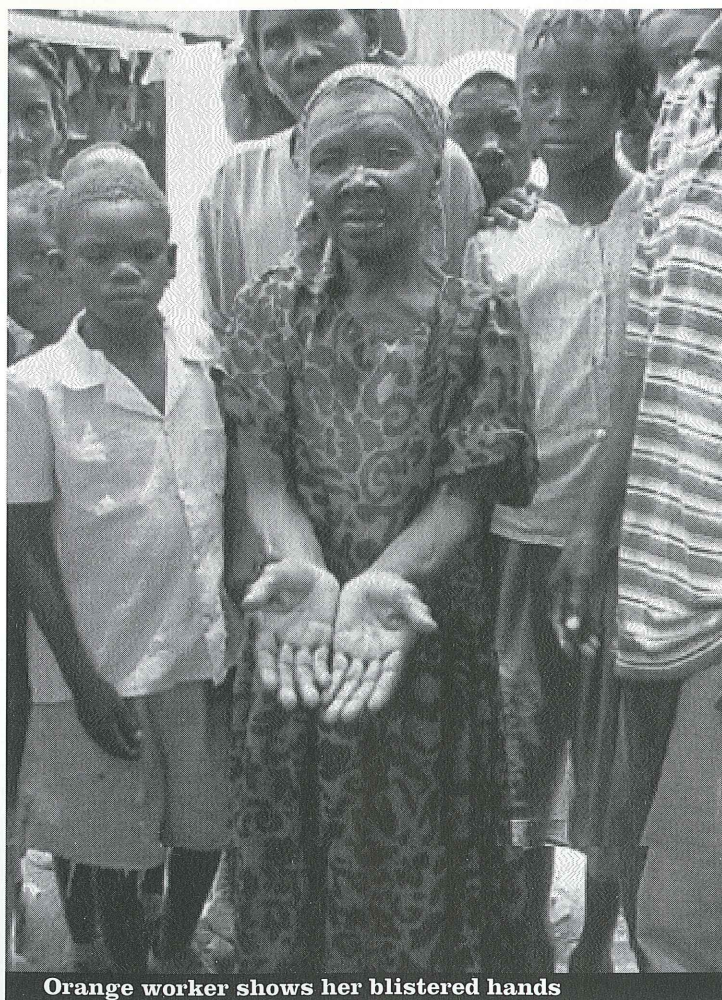
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◀ page 1 election results. Although the International Monetary Fund has made sympathetic noises about further loans (if the privatisation programme goes ahead), the European Union in early February announced that because "respect of democratic principles has not yet been re-established", a projected US\$49 million grant to the government would be withheld, and existing grant allocations would be redirected to projects directly benefiting the population, and supporting civil society and the private sector.

Furthermore, and much more of an immediate problem, many of Aristide's former allies and supporters in Haiti – in particular, the small group of educated intellectuals – have turned against him, criticising what they perceive as his dictatorial tendencies. The political opposition, united only by their hatred of Aristide, is grouped together in the Democratic Convergence – a 15-strong coalition of small parties ranging from social democrats to supporters of former dictator, François Duvalier. With the support of foreign friends and, according to one source, funding to the tune of US\$3 million from the US International Republican Institute, the Democratic Convergence has rejected all attempts to find a compromise solution. It demands that the current Lavalas Family-dominated Parliament is disbanded, and that all last year's elections are re-run. In the meantime, it proposes that Aristide be part of three-member presidency, and that an opposition Prime Minister governs by decree.

The Democratic Convergence's provocative proposals do nothing to resolve matters, and everything to increase political tensions and the likelihood of more violence. Meanwhile, the majority of the Haitian people who, for whatever reasons, appear to have again voted for Aristide, continue to sink deeper and deeper into misery. It is nothing less than a tragedy that over the last ten years so much energy has been expended, both within Haiti and abroad, in an effort to prevent Jean-Bertrand Aristide from implementing his ideas on governing the country.

For up-to-date news see:
http://gn.apc.org/haitisupport/fea_new_s_index.html



Orange worker shows her blistered hands

The Rémy Cointreau web site waxes lyrical about how the subtle harmony of bitter and sweet oranges makes every sip of Cointreau an extraordinary, multi-sensory taste journey. It proudly relates how the bitter oranges are grown in the Caribbean, how the peel is separated from the pulp by hand, dried in the sun, and then shipped to the Cointreau distillery in Angers, France. We are told that, once distilled, the liquid is blended with water and alcohol using a secret recipe that has remained unchanged for almost 150 years.

What the web site doesn't tell us is that the workers in Haiti who so carefully harvest and then separate the peel from the pulp must endure pay and conditions that are also unchanged in almost 150 years.

At two locations in the north of Haiti, men and women employed by a Haitian company, in which Rémy Cointreau owns a minority share, labour all day to make the minimum wage of 36 gourdes – a pitiful amount that represents just US\$1.50! At

St. Raphael, around 300 plantation workers harvest the oranges that are then sent to be cut and peeled by 32 workers at a processing plant in the village of Madeline. The Madeline factory is in a squalid condition – toilets and showers are disgusting. Working without gloves or protective clothing, the workers are soaked in the orange spray and inhale the citric acid vapor – fingernails are corroded away, and lung complications are common.

Union-busting

In October 2000, the Cointreau workers formed a union to press for basic rights, such as respect for the law in relation to the Labour Code, negotiations regarding a wage increase, and recognition of the union and the principle of collective bargaining. However, the Haitian company, Guacimal, that is owned by the same managers that represent the Marnier-Lapostolle company in Haiti, not only refused to even enter negotiations with the union but have engaged in a series of union-busting moves.

As soon as the union was formed, and a list of grievances presented to the management,

COINTREAU WORKERS ORGANISE – SOLIDARITY NEEDED

Following the success of the 1999-2000 solidarity action on behalf of workers at the Grand Marnier plantation near Cap-Haitien (see *Haiti Briefing* No 40), workers producing orange peel for the Cointreau liqueur have launched a similar campaign. Readers of *Haiti Briefing* are urged to support the new Cointreau Workers' Union in Haiti by contacting the Rémy Cointreau company (see end of article for details)

the latter summoned the police and a local Justice of the Peace in an attempt to have the union disbanded. The workers refused to be intimidated and stood up for their legal rights. The management then contacted the government Ministry of Labour which sent a delegation to the plantation and ruled that the union structure was illegal and would have to be reconstituted before negotiations could begin. Undaunted, the union complied with these conditions and formed a new committee.

Physical harassment

Having failed with legal intimidation, the Guacimal management resorted to old-fashioned physical harassment and intimidation. Throughout November, workers at the plantation identified as union members were either beaten up or prevented from working. Later, the plantation supervisor prevented the collection trucks from picking up oranges harvested by workers thought to be sympathetic to the union. New squads of 'scab' workers have been recruited.

At Madeline, the management also appears determined to punish the workers for unionising. Traditionally, employment at the Made-

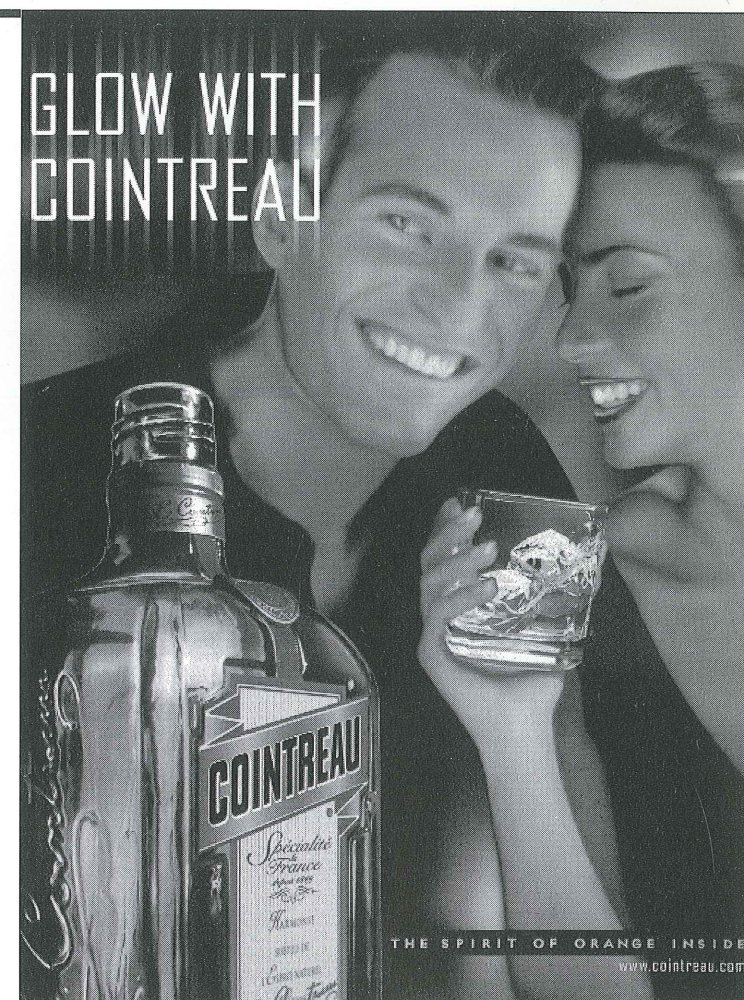
line plant has been passed on from father to son, and from mother to daughter. This allowed sick workers to be temporarily replaced by family members during their illness. On November 20th, the plant supervisor suddenly declared that this practice would now longer be allowed, and that absent workers would be replaced by new recruits. When the Madeline union put forward a demand for a wage increase from 11 cents to 80 cents per container of oranges processed, the management offered a 5 cent per container increase!



Members of the union at Guacimal Madeline

Rémy Cointreau profits

The union of workers at the Guacimal company has called for international pressure to be put on the French shareholders, Rémy Cointreau. The drinks giant, which has a portfolio of prestigious brands such as Rémy Martin cognac, Mount Gay rum and Piper Heidsieck champagne, recently expanded with the US\$460million acquisition of the Dutch firm, Bols. In the financial year 1999-2000, it recorded a net operating profit of US\$61 million, a 163% increase compared with the previous year. Chairperson, Dominique Hériard



Dubreuil, was recently ranked fifth in the Fortune list of the 50 most powerful women in business in the world.

Solidarity groups in France and the US have already contacted Rémy Cointreau but, rather than instructing Guacimal to play ball with the new union, the company has embarked on a bizarre public relations offensive. In replies to letters raising the issue of workers rights, Rémy Cointreau press officer, Joelle Jézéquel, has claimed that a company representative has already visited Madeline and concluded an agreement with the union.

However, Elimene Micheline Toussaint, Secretary of the Union of Workers at Guacimal, rejects this claim out of hand, and in a published reply wrote, "Your company's representative, Mr Morineau, did not even bother to greet us, and even less to meet with us or to ask us about our grievances...We wish to state clearly and unequivocally that there was no communication of

any kind between the union, the workers and Mr. Morineau." She continued, "The union would like nothing better than to meet in Haiti with Cointreau representatives at the earliest possible date."

■ Please respond to the Haitian union of Cointreau workers' appeal for help by writing to Dominique Hériard Dubreuil, chairperson of Rémy Cointreau, and ask her to persuade the Guacimal managers in Haiti to open sensible negotiations with the Union.

Please note that the Cointreau workers' union is not making a threat of a consumer boycott of Rémy Cointreau products. Therefore, please do not mention this in your letter. Just ask Rémy Cointreau to instruct Guacimal to recognise the Union's right to negotiations, in line with Haitian labour legislation, and express your hope that meaningful negotiations regarding the Unions' demands will start immediately.

Write to :

Dominique Hériard Dubreuil, Rémy Cointreau, 152, avenue des Champs-Élysées, 75008 Paris, France. Email: joelle.jezequel@remy-cointreau.com

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Debt payment: immoral and profoundly unjust

The Haiti Support Group has been participating in the international campaign for debt relief for Haiti. However, the letters sent to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) by our supporters have yet to convince these institutions that Haiti should be included in their list of countries eligible for debt relief.

Only 22 countries have been listed to take part in the much hyped, but disappointingly ineffective, heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative. Haiti is not one of them, despite the fact that it is paying US\$60m a year to service its debt. Camille Chalmers of Haiti's Jubilee 2000 campaign told *The Guardian*, "While conditions for ordinary people are getting worse every day, this debt payment to the rich is immoral and profoundly unjust."

In November 2000, the World Bank, responding to questions about Haiti's omission from the HIPC, said that in order to be included, "Haiti needs to make significant strides in strengthening governance and institutions, and show a commitment to reducing poverty". Behind this rhetoric, they mean that the Haitian government should do what it is told, and accept the neo-liberal policy demanded by the the international financial institutions, and then, and only then, might debt relief be considered.

The IMF's report on Haiti published in early January 2001 recommended a reinforced structural adjustment policy, and said that "a good performance is an essential condition for new negotiations with the Haitian authorities

and the reduction of Haiti's debt". The Haitian Platform to Advocate for Alternative Development (PAPDA), a prominent backer of the Haitian Jubilee 2000 campaign, noted a change in the IMF's discourse concerning Haiti's external debt, and wondered optimistically if, at last, the IMF seemed to accept that Haiti is one of the most heavily indebted poor countries.

Even if there are signs of a move-

ment on this, the PAPDA called it absurd to bind the cancellation of Haiti's debt to the conditionalities of reinforced structural adjustment. The debt, the PAPDA pointed out, had to a large extent been created by the very policies dictated by the international financial institutions in the first place.

■ For more see: http://www.gn.apc.org/haitisupport/fea_campaigns_index.html

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Impunity battle: progress at last

The struggle to end the climate of impunity for those who have committed human rights abuses made significant progress late last year. Two important trials took place leading to convictions for atrocities committed in 1994 and 1999.

In May 1999, Haiti was shocked by the news that eleven people in the capital's Carrefour Feuilles district had been shot dead by members of the Haitian National Police. The Haiti Support Group, together with the development aid agencies, Action Aid, Save the Children Fund, and Christian Aid, wrote to President Préval and the Justice Minister demanding that a proper investigation be held in order to establish the facts about the incident. Human rights organisations also petitioned for the rule of law to be upheld. In the end, a hitherto unprecedented investigation did take place, and in September 2000,

after a three-week trial, the former Port-au-Prince police commissioner and three other policemen were found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to three years in prison. Two other policemen were acquitted.

The second key trial was that of former army officers and paramilitaries implicated in the April 1994 Raboteau massacre. This long-awaited trial was based on several years of preparation by a mixed Haitian and international prosecution team. Beginning in September 2000, the trial concluded in November with the conviction of sixteen former soldiers and their cohorts. Twelve defendants – eight of them ex-soldiers – were sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labour. Another four defendants received prison terms of between four and nine years. Six defendants were acquitted. The judge also ruled that all the convicted men's property would be confiscated if they fail to pay US\$2,275 each in damages to fifteen victims – an amount 10 times the average annual income in Haiti.

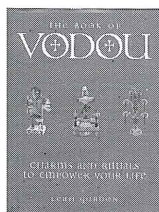
A week later, the same court convicted thirty seven in absentia defendants of premeditated murder in connection with the Raboteau massacre. Those convicted include former coup leader Raoul Cédras and his close associate Philippe Biamby, who received asylum in Panama; former Port-au-Prince police chief Michel François, who is in Honduras; and paramilitary leader Emmanuel "Toto" Constant, who lives in New York City.

The Book of Vodou

by Leah Gordon

Published by Barron's Educational Series. ISBN 0-7641-5249-1
Price £10.50

'The Book of Vodou' is an engaging and colourful introduction to the much maligned Haitian religion. Illustrated by a combination of documentary photographs and fascinating art works, artifacts and sacred objects, the book provides an overview of the intricate ceremonies and rituals that make



"Attractive and accessible"

up the practice of Vodou.

The religion has a pantheon of spirits who reign over different aspects of life, each with their own identity, ritualistic objects, songs and dances. A large part of the book is devoted to a captivating guide to the dominant spirits, tracing their characters and symbols, and relating their stories, songs and myths. This book is an attractive and accessible precursor to any in-depth study of Haitian culture.