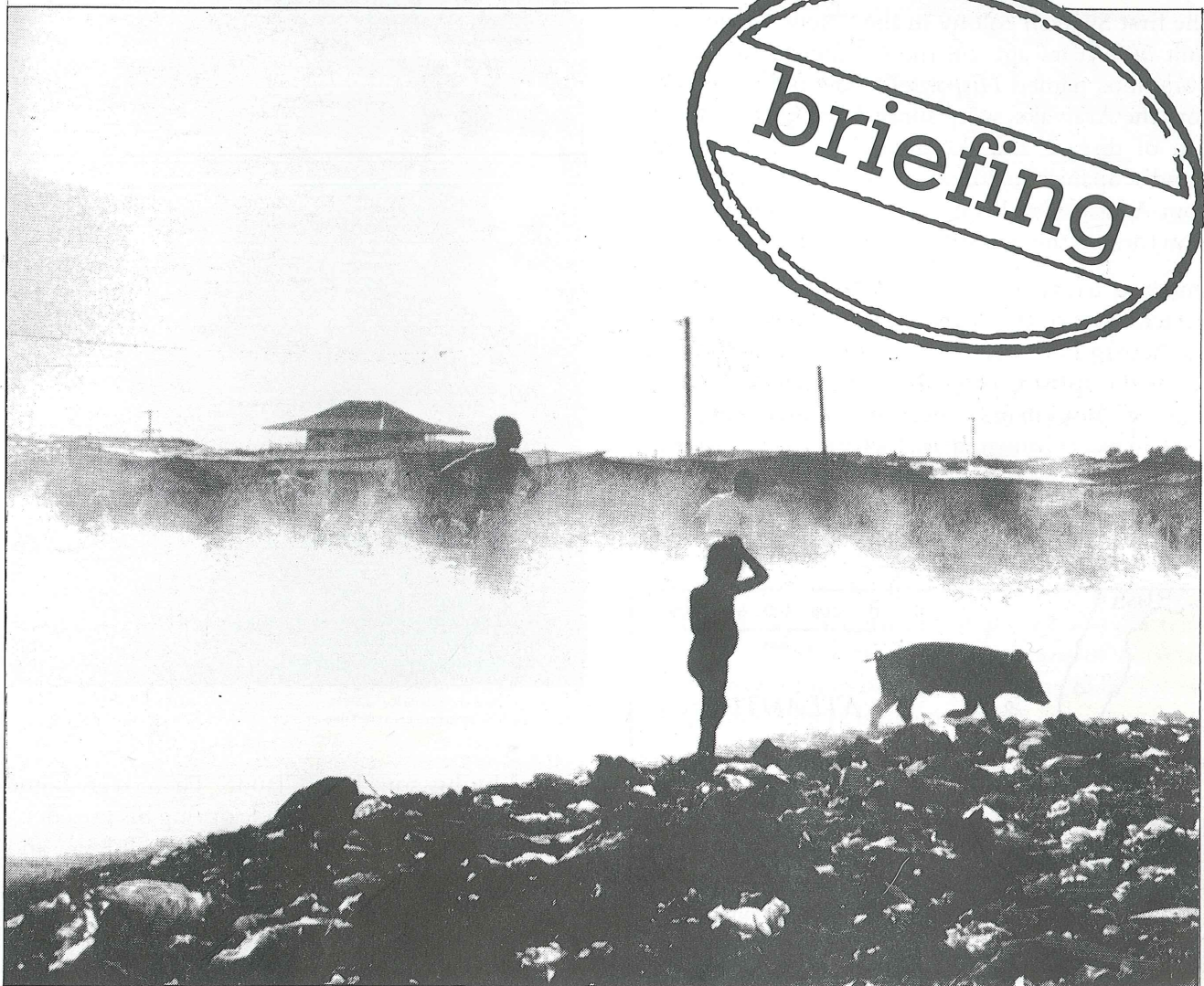


Haiti Support Campaign



Scavenging for food at the Cité Soleil slum, Port-au-Prince. One Haitian child dies every five minutes from malnutrition, dehydration or diarrhoea. (Photo: Jenny Matthews)

The Haiti Support Campaign

Haiti is so close to the enormously rich United States of America – a plane ride from the capital, Port-au-Prince, takes a mere 90 minutes to complete the trip to Miami. Yet Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas. Its population is at the mercy of disease, illiteracy, drought and political repression. Countless numbers of Haitians die of malnutrition, preventable disease or the oppressor's gun. Thousands attempt to flee their misery by taking to the waters in small boats. Their plight is one born of total despair.

But Haiti rarely gets into the news. Haiti is ignored, left to die a long and agonising death while the world is treated to a diet of more eye-catching news items.

The Haiti Support Campaign works to bring the situation in Haiti to the attention of the British people and government.

The Campaign draws support from the whole of the political spectrum. We are deeply convinced that the return of democratic rule to Haiti is a first and vital step towards implementing aid and development programmes that alone can inject into Haiti's syndrome of despair some quickening notes of hope for a better future.

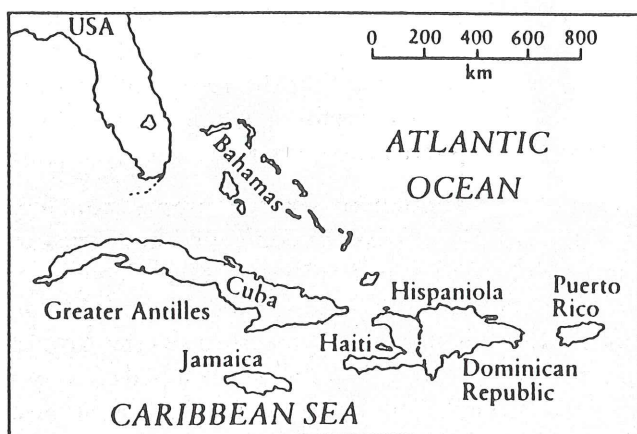
The Haiti Support Campaign will be organising a number of events, and seeking to win space and time in our media, to highlight the character and the needs of one of the loveliest peoples in the whole world.

Haiti's History

Early history

The first Spanish colony in the "New World" was built 500 years ago on the Caribbean island that Columbus named *Hispaniola*. The native population, the Arawaks, were annihilated by a combination of disease and the genocidal policies of the island's Spanish colonialists. In their place slaves from Africa were brought in by the thousand and soon formed the majority population.

Under a treaty signed in 1697 Spain ceded the western part of the island to the French Crown. It was here in 1791 that the struggle for independence began. An uprising of black slaves, under the leadership of Boukman, Toussaint Louverture, and Dessalines, culminated in victory over a mighty French army in 1803. The world's first independent black republic, taking the old indigenous name 'Haiti', was declared on January 1st 1804.



The new republic suffered from both the hostility of the colonial powers and internal disputes. During the nineteenth century military dictatorships and civil wars led to great instability. The invasion of US marines in 1915 and the subsequent occupation, which lasted until 1934, led to the consolidation of power in the hands of the mulatto elite. The resultant resentment among the black population gave rise to a black nationalist movement in which Francois Duvalier became prominent.

The Duvalier Years

Francois (Papa Doc) Duvalier won army-controlled elections in 1957 and then imposed his rule with utter ruthlessness. His corrupt and repressive dictatorship crushed political opposition and any attempt at popular organisation. His special forces, the Tontons Macoute, terrorised the population and guaranteed that on his death in 1971 he was suc-



Mass burial ground found outside Port-au-Prince. During Papa Doc Duvalier's 14-rule more than 50,000 Haitians are estimated to have been killed through state-sponsored terror. (Photo: Jenny Matthews)

ceeded by his son, Jean-Claude. There were some small economic advances made during his presidency but it was a rule that became self-indulgent and aimless. Under the Duvaliers the exploitation and impoverishment of the predominantly rural population increased and Haiti became the poorest country in the western hemisphere.

1986-1991: the window of opportunity

February 6th 1986 was a glorious day in the history of Haiti. Following a popular protest movement, Jean-Claude Duvalier left for exile, ending a thirty year period of dynastic dictatorship.

There followed a five year period during which various factions of the army jostled for power. Then in December 1990, fair elections returned members of two houses of parliament, mayors for all the major municipalities of Haiti, rural leadership and a massively endorsed head of state, elected with 67% of the popular vote.

On February 6th 1991, the fifth anniversary of the end of Duvalierism, a giant step towards the establishment of a democratic system of government was made. On this day the new President, a Roman Catholic priest, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was inaugurated.

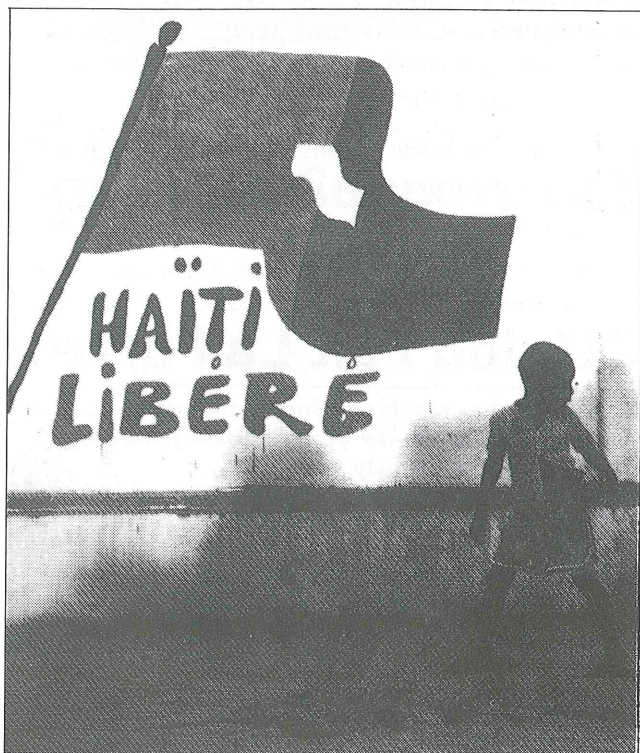


Aristide addressing a meeting of the World Council of Churches. (Photo: Leslie Griffiths)

Aristide

Father Aristide had shown great courage in actively combatting the excesses of the previous period, displaying a deep commitment to Haiti's urban and rural poor. From the moment he assumed office he set about bringing the insights he had gained as a liberation theologian to the realm of politics. He sought to raise the salaries of manual workers, to bring in programmes of land reform, to reduce the cost of sending children to school and to launch a national literacy scheme.

In addition he brought measures before the parliament that would have separated the police from the army. He also set high store by honesty and during his brief tenure human rights abuses dropped dramatically, government corruption was curbed and drug trafficking was reduced.



Liberty banner: the Haitian people's struggle for democracy and social justice goes on. (Photo: Julio Etchart)

The coup and after

Much of this progress threatened vested interests in Haiti, especially in the army and the wealthy middle class. This, together with some rather tactless public remarks by Aristide, convinced his opponents of the need to bring about his overthrow. He had just returned from an overseas tour in search of international aid when he found the army chief, whom he had appointed only three months before, heading a *coup d'état* against him.

Aristide just managed to escape into exile. Since September 30th 1991 Haiti has been a state of crisis.

There have been well over 1,000 deaths at the hands of the military. Arbitrary arrests, beatings, torture and disappearances have become commonplace. The perpetrators of the coup appear unwilling to countenance the return of the exiled President. The world community has insisted on a return to constitutional rule and has backed this demand with an embargo on all but humanitarian aid.

The Churches are floored by these developments. The Roman Catholic hierarchy is deeply divided and unable to offer a lead but priests and churchgoers are united in wanting the return of Aristide and his programmes of reform. Among Haiti's Protestant leaders there is no consensus.

Meanwhile in Haiti there is hunger, oppression, fear and disease. Thousands of people who have tried to escape the country in ramshackle boats have been forcibly repatriated by the United States. Human rights observers fear for their future. As the days of unconstitutional rule turn into weeks, and as weeks become months, the situation in Haiti is at best uncertain, and at worst explosive.

For more information on contemporary Haiti:

James Ferguson – *Papa Doc, Baby Doc: Haiti and the Duvaliers*, Basil Blackwell/Latin America Bureau, 1988.

David Nicholls – *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, Macmillan, 1988.

Amy Willentz – *The Rainy Season: Haiti Since Duvalier*, Jonathan Cape, 1989.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide – *In the Parish of the Poor*, Orbis Books, 1990.

Ian Thompson – *Bonjour Blanc: A Journey Through Haiti*, Hutchinson, 1992.

Amnesty International – *Haiti: Human Rights Tragedy - Human Rights Violations since the Coup*, January 1992.

Comment: Haiti, CIIR, 1989.
Caribbean Insight, monthly.

Where now?

Under no circumstances can the political significance of December 16th 1990 be forgotten. For the first time in its independent history Haiti held elections on the basis of universal adult suffrage. These elections were widely acknowledged to be free and fair. Their results, therefore, are binding. Whether people *like* those who have been elected or not, whether particular policies command agreement or not, differences of opinion must respect the constitution and be hammered out within the democratic process.

The army and their collaborators in the September coup seem totally unaware of this imperative. They have installed a puppet president and appointed a new Prime Minister. They hold the elected chambers of parliament at gunpoint for month after month. Yet no one has elected them, they have no mandate to rule and they impose rather than argue their point of view.

They even talk of their intention to hold new elections. They will not even consider the return of exiled president Aristide. They keep on referring to specious constitutional 'solutions' to Haiti's problems seemingly blind to the utterly unconstitutional basis of their hold on power. This is the fundamental flaw in their position.

They have virtually re-invented the machinery of Haiti's *ancien régime*: rural police, army control, the re-establishment of drug trafficking and smuggling, civilian politicians under their control. Meanwhile, across the republic human rights are denied, press freedom has been smashed, oppression is rampant, thousands have died and tens of thousands have taken to the high seas. There is no credible future for Haiti that allows the perpetrators of this coup to draw a veil over the December 1990 election results.

The Church in Haiti must find a way to swallow its pride, face its own disorder, and press the government and world opinion towards a democratic future. The fact that Aristide is a priest and that he has said harsh things against some of his bishops must count less than solid support for the democratic process. The person holding power is less important than the process itself.

It is deeply sad that in this time of political chaos Haiti's bishops are so divided among themselves, are at odds with their priests and members of religious orders, and are unable to forge an ecumenical consensus with Protestant church leaders. It was ambiguous, to say the very least, for the new nuncio to present his credentials to Haiti's illegitimate head of state. This was an act that has given a degree of comfort to those in power. Haiti

needs church leaders to come off the fence and to insist on the return of constitutional rule.

The International Community (mainly the Organisation of American States and the European Community) must take all action consistent with a return to democracy. The weak, even shambolic, way in which an embargo has been imposed on Haiti has actually contributed to the suffering of its people. A total embargo, rigorously applied from the outset, would have brought the government down very soon. As it is, we have the worst of all worlds – a lingering in-between situation where the rich get by and the poor are hardest hit. In the last few months the half-hearted embargo has led to the massive destruction of trees for fuel, unnecessary suffering by countless poor Haitians, and a rising tide of anarchy and economic chaos. Either an embargo is applied or it is not. It is the only effective tool to envisage short of a military intervention.

Therefore :

- 1) All responsible bodies must make a clear commitment to a future built around the presence of Haiti's democratically elected leaders.
- 2) The governments of Britain, the United States, and all members of the Organisation of American States must condemn publicly and repeatedly the military repression carried out by the coup leaders.
- 3) The economic embargo must be applied with commitment by all countries.
- 4) An aid package must be 'ready to roll' the moment constitutional returns. It must respond to Haiti's needs for food, for skills in public administration and for a concerted drive towards civilian government. Some of these needs are very basic and the aid package should avoid oversophistication in the first, critical phase.
- 5) The Church, trade unions, development agencies and political parties must give Haiti priority status in their efforts to save the Haitian people from disaster.

L'Union Fait La Force

You can help the Haiti Support Campaign. We hope that you'll show your solidarity with us by responding generously.

I enclose a donation of £10	£100
£20	Other
£50	

Name.....

Address.....

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Please make cheques/postal orders payable to *Haiti Support Campaign* and return to The Haiti Support Campaign, Trinity Church, Hodford Road, London NW11 8NG. Tel. 081 201 9878.