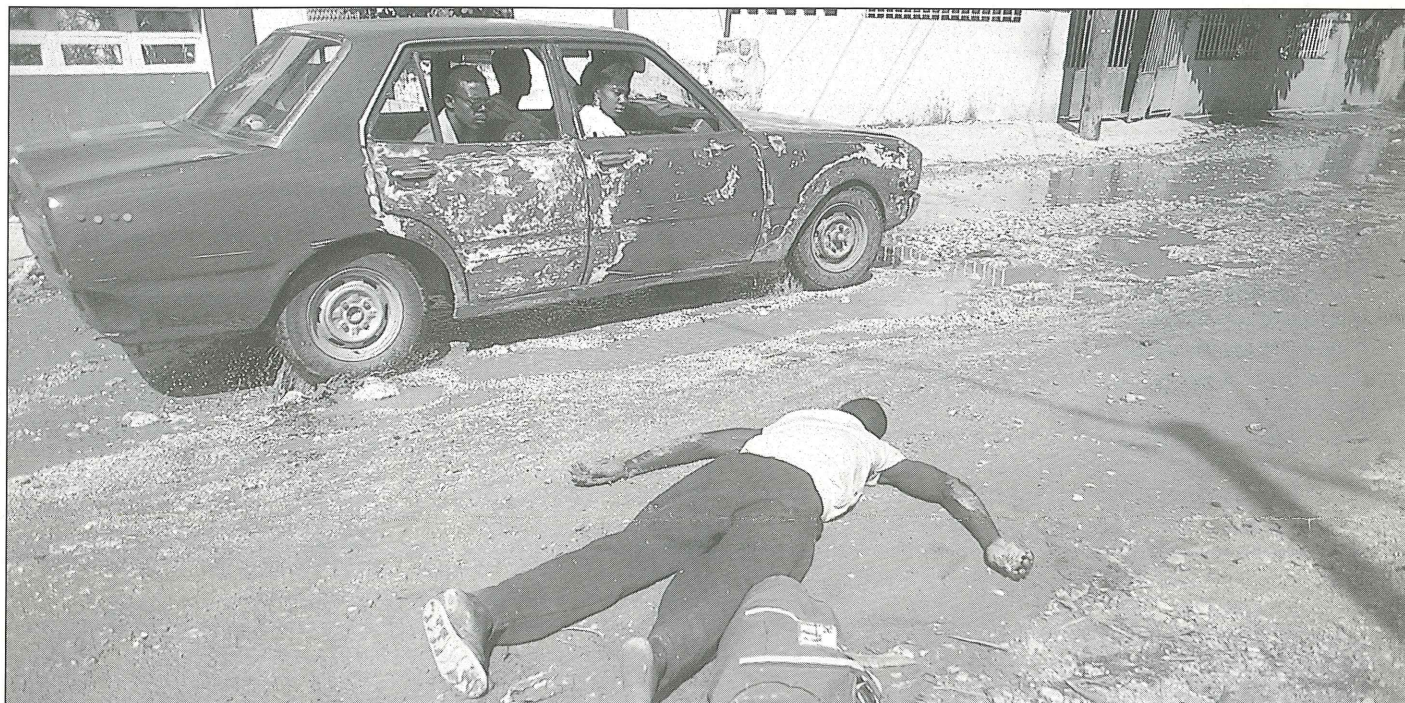
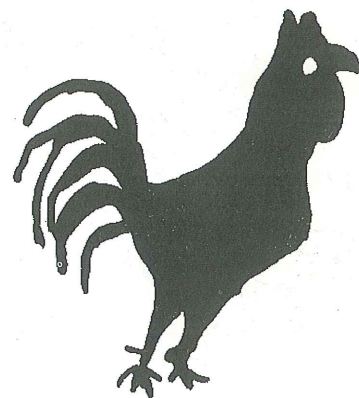


# *The* **HAITI** *Support Group*

APRIL 1994



## **Hundreds slain in new wave of terror**

Body in Port-au-Prince street, October 1993. Violence and killings by the Haitian army and armed civilians are aimed at destroying all support for genuine democracy.  
(Photo by Leah Gordon)

\* The body of a well-known Aristide supporter, Dady Pierre, murdered on 10 March in Cité Soleil, was found with his skull sliced open by a machete and his face cut off. Witnesses identified the attackers as a soldier, two attachés who work closely with the police, and two members of the new Duvalierist group, FRAPH.

\* A report published in the newspaper, "Haiti en Marche", stated that a plastic sack containing 11 human legs was found in the Vallières market on that same day, 10 March.

\* The students' union FENEH reported that Macilia Mésadiéux, a young student activist, was repeatedly raped and tortured before being shot dead at her parents house on 5 March in Delmas, Port-au-Prince.

\* Neither do the children escape—a young boy from an orphanage, Saurel Guerrier, was shot in the heart by a well-known member of FRAPH. The attack happened in the street in broad daylight on 19 January.

\* In Cité Soleil, the Port-au-Prince slum, where the majority of recent killings have taken place, dismembered corpses are left in the streets for hours and sometimes days where they are gnawed at by pigs and dogs.

The chronology of horror is but a tiny illustration of some of the recent crimes committed with impunity by the Haitian army and their civilian cohorts. They include at least 50 murders in January and a further 71 in the six weeks from the beginning of February. And this was just in the Port-au-Prince area—there is little information on what's happening in the rest of the country.

Two and half years since the military ousted President Aristide, the Haitian people are still suffering from torture, rape and murder. These barbaric acts are intended to terrorise the population, to destroy the will of the people trying to work together to make a better life. Yet, while each new wave of terror will make organising and resistance more difficult, and make the return of Aristide still more remote, the essence of the turmoil in Haiti remains unchanged.

Raphael Yves Pierre, Oxfam's programme coordinator in Haiti, visiting the UK in March, put it this way—"The crisis is not restricted to the return or not of Aristide, but is focused on the establishment of democracy. Even if the Aristide dossier is indeed closed then sooner or later the same conflict will start again. The entrenched middle class supported by the United States and the Haitian army will still be in conflict with the poor majority."





# Independent radio under threat

Beleaguered radio journalists, already worried about potential arrest, beatings or murder, are now worried about getting on the air at all. The disappearance of radio transmissions, one of the few domestic sources of information, may be another unfortunate side effect of the UN embargo.

Due to fuel shortages the nine major radio stations in Port-au-Prince are limited to only nine hours of broadcasting a day. Richard Widmaier, the director of Radio Metropole, now prophesies total close-down. "Sanctions are bankrupting our advertisers and we are losing all our revenue."

Diplomats fear that soon the country's only source of information will be Radio Nationale, which is controlled by the military and is suffering no shortages. As a response to the situation the UN have proposed transmitting from one of the ships currently in Haitian waters to enforce the embargo.

The US Embassy has also offered one of its offices to be used as a common radio station. The latter idea is greeted with little enthusiasm by Widmaier who said, "Who would provide security for us when we go home at night?"

by Leah Gordon

It would be seen by the military as support for the embargo."

In Haiti over half the adult population cannot read or write and those who can are ill-served by the newspapers which are written not in the common language, Creole, but in French. The one weekly paper in Creole has recently suspended publication because of the repression. This makes radio the most common means of communication. Poor people have radios or access to one and the price of batteries is the only draw-

back to receiving news. As Ti Pierre Elmond, a tap-tap driver said, "Radio is king in Haiti".

## Radio Soleil

Radio has been the catalyst for the social movements in Haiti which have allowed the poor and the peasants to organise and fight corruption and repression.

Historically, one of the most effective radio stations was Radio Soleil, after which the slum area, Cite Soleil, was named in 1986. Radio Soleil was started by the Catholic bishops conference in 1975, and was a new voice in Haiti because it broadcast mainly in Creole.

When Father Hugo Triest became director in 1985 the country was in a state of transition because the people were organising themselves against the Duvalier dynasty. Radio Soleil became the voice of these people and their movement. Father Triest was arrested in July 1985 and two days later issued with expulsion papers. The station was closed down in December but reopened in March 1986 after Duvalier left. Father Triest returned but was effectively gagged by the Papal Nuncio who told him to broadcast exclusively religious programmes and not to deal with social and political issues. Father Triest did not renew his contract in 1989.

In recent years there has been little freedom for any radio stations. Even those wishing to report objectively are forced into self-censorship by the current circumstances. Since the 1991 coup four journalists have been murdered, and one, Felix Lamy, the news director of Radio Galaxie, was kidnapped by ten armed men and has never been seen again. At least twenty three journalists have been assaulted and thirty have fled the country.

# REFUGEES —THE SYMPTOM AND THE CURE

The issue of Haitian refugees bound for Florida—the one concern that above all else focuses US attention on what's happening in Haiti—looks to be coming to a head now that President Aristide has cancelled the 1981 refugee treaty. Since the treaty was signed by 'Baby Doc' Duvalier and US President Reagan, the US Coast Guard has been permitted to repatriate refugees picked up at sea.

Tens of thousands of women, men and children who set to sea in desperation to escape the violence of their homeland have been intercepted and forcibly sent back. In six months time, when the treaty becomes officially annulled, the legal cover for this policy will be removed.

The interceptions have had the desired effect from the US point of view and the number of boat people attempting to flee has dropped since the first year after the coup when over 30,000 were returned. However there is mounting evidence that the continuing

turmoil in Haiti is persuading people it is still worth risking the long trip in unseaworthy vessels. In February this year the US Coast Guard returned another 346 people—the highest number in a single month since the passing of the 30 October date for Aristide's return.

And, according to diplomats and human rights

by Charles Arthur

officials, unknown numbers are now choosing an alternative route to the States by island-hopping up through the British-owned Turks & Caicos Islands, and the Bahamas. 92 Haitians were discovered early in March on a remote cay near Acklins Island in the Bahamas. These were the survivors from a boat, containing 140 passengers, which hit a reef and sank two days after leaving northern Haiti. After a month on the cay without food, fresh water or shelter, many were on the point of death.

The growing influx of Haitian refugees is causing serious problems for the government of the Bahamas which is hard-pressed to provide sufficient health and processing facilities. The High Commissioner in London estimates that there are now 30,000 Haitians illegally resident in the Bahamas, a country with a total population of only 250,000.

Meanwhile, the fate of those who don't make it past the US Coast Guard has been highlighted in press reports stating that in recent months plainclothes agents have been arresting returnees on the Port-au-Prince quayside. The body of one was recently found near the international airport, his eyes plucked out, a rope around his neck, and his hands tied.

Together with Aristide's abrogation of the 1981 treaty, stories like this increase the pressure on the Clinton Administration to deal with the source of the refugee problem—the absence of democracy in Haiti.

## Silence of the Lambies

A few weeks after the coup Radio Enriquillo, a Catholic station in the Dominican Republic, initiated twice-a-day news in Creole obviously aimed at Haitians. The Dominican authorities then banned the broadcasts. But if speaking the news in Creole was forbidden, singing it was not. So, starting in February 1992, the news was sung.

Five months later this too was forbidden. The power of radio is illustrated by the fact that even now some daring individuals set up clandestine radio stations and make short broadcasts to boost the morale of Haitians living under the hammer of military rule.

Recently the Lambi Fund has been set up in the US to raise money for, amongst other things, a new community radio project in Haiti. Blowing the lambi, or conch shell, has been used since the time of slavery to sound warnings of impending danger and to call communities to mobilise.

Radio in Haiti is the modern day version of the rallying call of the Lambi shell and should not be silenced.

● For more information on the Lambi Fund contact: P.O. Box 18955, Washington D.C. 20036, USA. Tel: 0101 202 833 3713



Late last November senior officials from the US, Canada, Venezuela and France issued an ultimatum to army leader, General Raoul Cedras, saying that if he did not step down by 15 January then the UN would impose severe new sanctions. The deadline came and went and nothing happened. Instead the US has been involved in attempts to force new concessions from Aristide. This occurred despite the fact that Aristide has fulfilled his obligations under the Governor's Island Accord.

Cartoon by Alex Milner



# A troubled island

by Tim Exton

Like worker ants they toil unceasingly, more than 1,000 of them. They earn a few gourdes every time they swim the river, smuggling a gallon or two of petrol in defiance of United Nations sanctions. The river in question, the Rio Dajabon, divides the northern part of the island that Columbus christened Hispaniola. On its western bank, Haiti. And to the east, the Dominican Republic. But the divide is much greater than a course of running water.

At the heart of the matter is race. The Spanish-speaking Dominicans, who claim descent from the conquistadors, believe themselves superior to the Creole-tongued Haitians, the descendants of African slaves. Fearing a mass exodus of refugees from the west of the Rio Dajabon, 'the Haitian question' has become a major issue in the Dominican Republic's forthcoming presidential election to be held on 16 May. Anxious to avoid being overwhelmed, the Dominican authorities turn a blind-eye to sanctions-busting, undermining efforts to break the political impasse in Port-au-Prince.

Nowhere can the antagonism felt be more clearly seen than in the race for Santo Domingo's Presidential Palace. The 87-year-old incumbent, Joaquín Balaguer, is seeking a seventh term of office. Running neck and neck in the opinion polls, he faces stiff competition from veteran social democrat José Francisco Peña Gómez. The latter is black and has been the subject to a persistent whispering campaign about his alleged Haitian origins - he is accused by Balaguer of seeking to unite the two countries. Such allegations carry a formidable potency in a poor country whose people are all too aware of the even greater poverty and perceived political chaos in Haiti. The flames of such fear are unashamedly fanned by Balaguer's PRSC.

Incongruously, considering their dread of "haitianisation", Dominicans are happy to allow thousands of Haitians to work cutting sugar-cane on the massive plantations. It is work the Dominicans feel is beneath them. Recruited, often illegally, in Haiti by *buscones* who receive 50 pesos per worker, the Haitians live in barrack-like *bateyes* in conditions of virtual forced labour.

Reports at the beginning of the year

from the southern town of Pedernales claimed that 2,000 Haitian workers had recently passed through on their way to the sugar plantations. Periodic deportations by the Dominican authorities even include the *viejos*, plantation workers who, after decades of service, still have no rights. Amongst those campaigning for a change in their situation is the Dominican-based Haitian Episcopal minister, Edwain Paraison, who is to receive Anti-Slavery International's 1994 Anti-slavery Award.

During his brief presidency Aristide was extremely critical of the Dominican Republic's attitude towards, and treatment of, Haiti and its people. No one was surprised when Balaguer refused to condemn the Haitian 'putschists'.

Now it would seem that nobody in Dominican politics wants to see Aristide's return. His politics are anathema to Balaguer and the Catholic hierarchy with which he consorts. For his part, Peña Gómez, ever sensitive to rumours questioning his loyalty, would prefer to contest the election without having Aristide heighten an already tense racial situation. Instead he talks of improving wages and conditions on the sugar plantations to encourage Dominicans to seek work on them.

In a country where political stagnation has resulted in high voter apathy, Aristide presents the threat of a good example. His Lavalas movement galvanised Haiti's poor into an effective political force. Although lacking any nationwide grassroots organisation, the Dominican Republic is witnessing what may be the first tremors of a new political

movement of its own.

Father Antonio Reynoso - Padre Tono to his supporters - is a priest from the central Dominican town of La Vega. He is also the presidential candidate of the New Power Movement, a grouping of grassroots and left-wing organisations. In a striking parallel with Aristide's experience, he has been banned by his Bishop from carrying out his religious



Petrol being smuggled across Etang Saumâtre lake between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. (Photo by Leah Gordon)

duties. His hopes of a respectable showing depend upon mobilising an increasingly disaffected urban poor, particularly in the capital, Santo Domingo.

But, for now at least, the real political forces remain Balaguer and Peña Gómez. Too close to call, the result is sure to keep the pundits guessing. For Haitians, however, uncertainty has become the only certainty, the one constant in their lives. For any who cross the Rio Dajabon, whether as smuggler, illegal immigrant or deportee, getting through each day is a victory. They are all too aware of the Dajabon's nickname, "Massacre River", commemorating Dominican dictator General Trujillo's killing of thousands of Haitian plantation workers in 1937.

More than fifty years ago Haitians crossed the river to sanctuary in their own country. Today they feel neither safe nor welcome either side of the border.

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