

The **HAITI** *Support Group*



Mayor of Port-au-Prince
to address

Haiti Conference in London on Saturday 27th March

Just what is happening in Haiti? What are the prospects of a return to constitutional and democratic government? What is the lot of the poor people of Haiti?

The Haiti Support Group is holding a one-day conference where these questions, and others, can be looked at. They have succeeded in bringing **Mr Evans Paul**, mayor of Port-au-Prince, and a key supporter of deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, to speak at the conference.

Mr Paul has represented the cause of democracy throughout the period since September 1991, often at great personal cost. His courage is considerable and few people are better placed to analyse current happenings and hopes in Haiti.

The conference will be on Saturday 27th March at Heythrop College, 11 Cavendish Square, London W1 (2 minutes from Oxford Circus tube). Further details and registration form are available from Shweta Otiv, Haiti Support Group, Trinity Church, Hodford Road, London NW11 8NG. Tel: 081 201 9878

Andy Kershaw
to host club night
on **Sunday 28th March**

BBC Radio DJ and current affairs
journalist Andy Kershaw is hosting
a Haiti Support Group club night
at
HQs, Camden Lock, Chalk Farm Road,
London NW1

Appearing live:
Abdul Tee-Jay's Rokoto

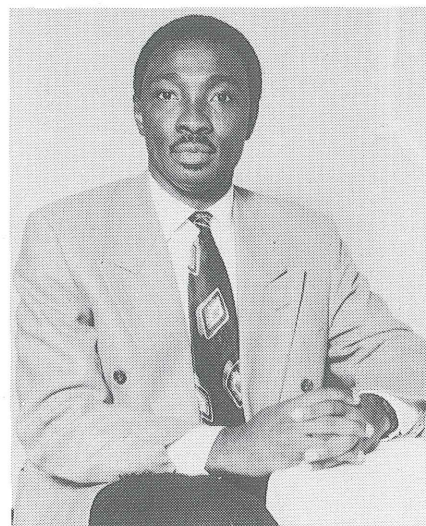
A message of solidarity will be delivered by
Evans Paul, mayor of Port-au-Prince.

For further details contact the HSG office (081
201 9879) or HQs club (071 485 6044)

Evans Paul is a founder and a leading
spokesman for the FNCD (Front for National
Change and Democracy), Haiti's
most popular political party. The FNCD's
candidate in the 1990 presidential election
was Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Mr Paul was elected mayor of Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, with 85% of the votes cast. As mayor he began literacy and food aid programmes, and conducted open and responsible city government.

An outspoken critic of the coup, Paul has been forced to live in hiding while in Haiti since October 7th 1991, when he was nearly beaten to death by soldiers. Yet he has been a key participant in all international negotiations to end the crisis in Haiti. He is the symbol in Haiti of organised, rational and peaceful resistance to tyranny.



Evans Paul – a courageous human rights champion.

Clinton breaks his promise to Haiti

Noam Chomsky once observed a phenomenon he termed the political economy of human rights. Relative media coverage convinced him that one Cuban refugee was worth the same column inches or airtime as 250 Haitians.

Sometime before Christmas about 380 Haitians drowned when an old freighter taking them to Florida sank. What Lloyds of London described as "one of the worst losses of life at sea in the post-war period" spawned what *The Observer* called: "Barely a ripple of concern in the world's press." Yet throughout the Christmas period the *Miami Herald* ran front page stories about a few courageous Cubans who reached Florida after taking to rafts or inner tubes.

Double standards

It now seems clear that President Clinton will be applying the same double standards as the press. Clinton broke his promise to lift George Bush's Exclusion Order on Haitians fleeing continued political repression - documented in frightening detail by yet another US State Department report in January - before even taking the presidential oath.

If this is some kind of political record for broken promises, it seems all too typical that Haitians should be the victims. But wait, this was different the press was told in mid-January. Clinton's U-turn on Haiti was part of a breakthrough agreement with the military government to accept Aristide's return as head of state.

As the days dragged on into February it became clear that it was nothing of the sort. The one concession supposedly extracted from the Haitian military, permission for some 400-500 UN human rights observers to enter

the country, was in dispute as we went to press.

It now looks as though the press was duped as part of an effort to prevent thousands of Haitians sailing for Florida. But it seems that President Aristide may have been duped too. Along with Clinton, he broadcast an appeal to his countrymen on the Creole Service of Voice of America, to stay put. His return, he claimed, was imminent.

US pressure

Speculation on a possible deal had increased throughout January following a visit to Port-au-Prince by US Marine Lt. General John Sheehan. Although officials in Washington insisted that there was no threat of US military intervention, the dispatch of a senior military officer carried overtones.

According to sources on the ground, Sheehan temporarily put the wind up General Cedras and company by reaffirming that there would be no US military transport planes to take them into gilded exile à la Duvalier if Haitians rose up as they did in 1986. The "you're on your own" message seemed to hit home. When Cedras and his cronies turned up at a meeting with black civil rights leader Jesse Jackson some days later, their jeep was laden with a shoulder-held rocket launcher, two mounted machine guns and 500 rounds of ammunition. They feared being "necklaced", they explained to Jackson.

But the Orwellian world of US policy on Haiti was confirmed by what followed Clinton's reversal of policy. The new US President had the gall to defend his decision to continue forcible repatriation on the grounds of the potential for "tragic loss of life". Clinton's press office later announced that a flotilla of US naval and coastguard vessels would blockade the Windward Passage between Cuba and the north-western tip of Haiti.

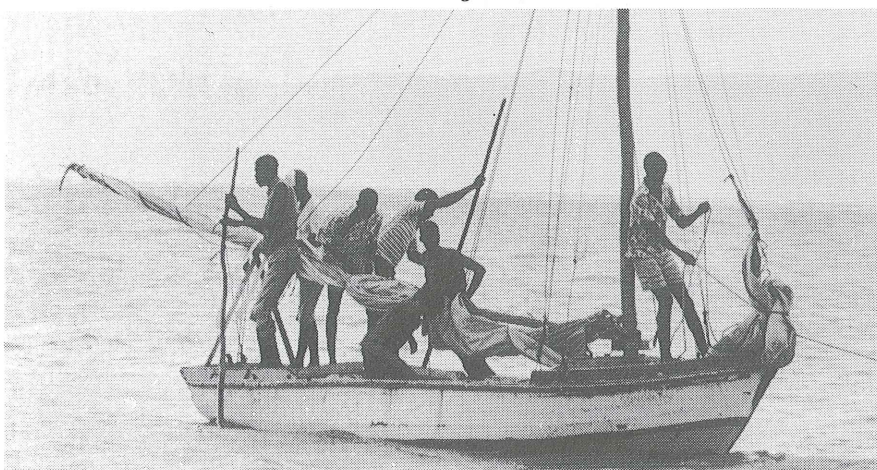
This flotilla could at any time be turned into a "marine blockade" if the Haitian generals reneged on their agreement to accept Aristide's return as head of state - the press was told. To older hands it sounded all too reminiscent of President Reagan nicknaming the inter-continental ballistic missile the MX, as the "peacemaker".

What agreement?

But what agreement with the Haitian generals was the White House talking about? Statements from Cedras made it clear that he did not believe he had agreed to anything, least of all Aristide's return. Even if he had, who is Clinton kidding? Does he think Haitians are likely to accept the word or even the signature of people that even Clinton administration officials describe privately as "uniformed thugs"?

By the end of January the policy climbdown had become a farce. White House briefings for journalists suggested that some US\$50 million in suspended US aid would be released if the Haitian military accepted the return of Aristide. The press, quite rightly, portrayed the announcement as a bribe.

Clinton has bought some time but the only beneficiaries will be the Haitian military. They know, as the Bush administration has taught them, that the longer they hang on to the status quo, the greater their chances of survival. Meanwhile, precisely because the situation remains unresolved, thousands of Haitians are still preparing to sail for Florida. Whatever tacky fudges Clinton puts together the impoverished masses and the illegality of the regime that oppresses them will not go away.



A boat on its way to Tortue Island in northern Haiti, where a bigger boat will take refugees on a hazardous 800 mile journey to Florida. For many Haitians the situation is so bad that they would rather risk their lives at sea than stay in the country. (photo: Julio Echert)

Aristide and democracy: nothing less will do.

On December 5th soldiers arrested Jean Sony Philogène, a 20-year-old student, and six other young men at a concert in Port-au-Prince. They were taken to Titanyen, an area frequently used for army executions, where the soldiers shot and buried all seven. Philogène, although badly wounded, managed to drag himself from the hole and crawl to a nearby highway. The next day, as he lay recovering in a hospital bed, a group of soldiers burst into the room and shot him dead with bullets in the heart and head.

This gruesome story is yet another example of the repression in Haiti. For many Haitians escape to the US is the only hope of avoiding a similar fate. Yet, according to Cantave Jean-Baptiste, a Haitian agronomist who recently visited Britain, in spite of the violence many more Haitians remain deeply committed to the task of restoring democracy to their country.

Peasants resist

At a *Haiti Support Group* public meeting last December Jean-Baptiste said that the majority of Haitians continue to believe that Aristide must, and will, return from exile as President. Jean-Baptiste, who has worked with peasant and Church groups in the countryside for fourteen years, described how he had been affected by the wave of terror.

"It has been impossible to work with

the peasants as they are unable to organise or operate freely. I can't go back to my village because my family and I are known to be involved with peasant associations in the town. It's too dangerous.

"It is extremely difficult to assess the number of peasant organisations still operating because they can't do so openly. However, they are not defunct. Although they cannot hold meetings they are still maintaining contact with their members and circulating leaflets. For example, I know that every Saturday night in my home village newsletters with Aristide's photograph are distributed."

Only one answer

After over a year of repression, and of severe economic hardship caused by the Organisation of American states embargo on trade with the de facto



Cantave Jean-Baptiste – "Haitian people will react".

government, Jean-Baptiste was asked to account for Aristide's continuing popularity.

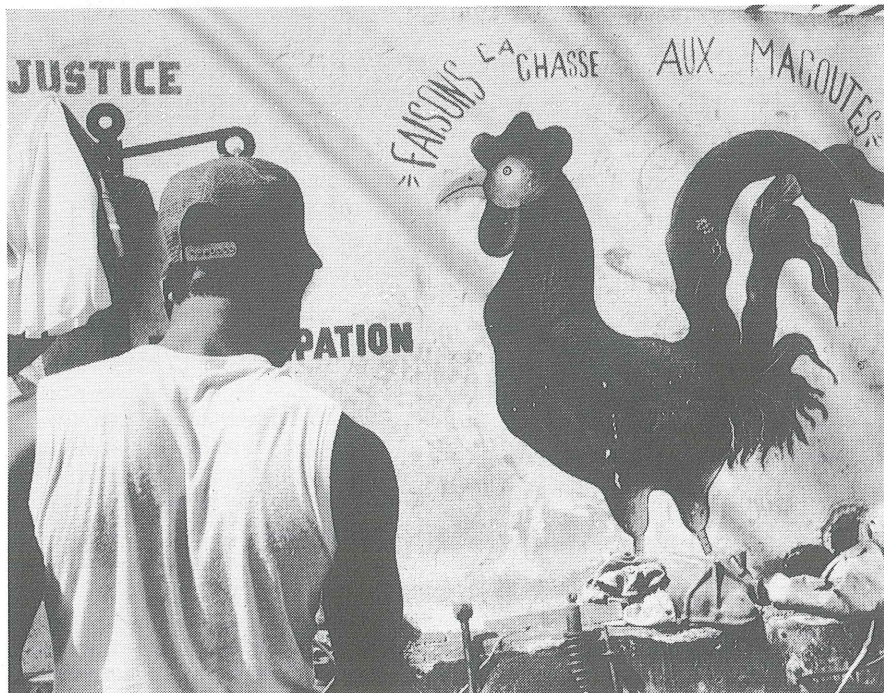
"The people in the fields have only one answer to the question of Aristide. They are just waiting for his return. It's not difficult to understand this reaction. The Haitian people suffered thirty years of the Duvalier regime. Then, between 1986 and 1990, the people mobilised to press for democracy, and all the popular movements found in Aristide a spokesman for their demands. The population has tasted the democratic process."

Time for action

Jean-Baptiste explained that Haitians still believe in the democratic process with which they elected Aristide but if he does not return there will be anarchy.

"Do the British public and decision-makers know how the Haitian people will react if they know Aristide is not going to return? Do they think they can halt the reaction of the Haitians when they discover this? If a dictatorship had killed your father, mother, brothers, sisters and friends, how would you react if you met their murderer?"

"It is important to imagine how a Haitian lives repression and dictatorship every day. The UN, the OAS and the US must stop talking and take action, and if they cannot help Aristide return they must say so... and then leave the Haitian people to solve their own problems without interfering. If the international community abandon Haiti then the Haitian people will react very quickly."



Port-au-Prince street vendor by liberation mural which reads "Macoutes Out". The cockerel is the symbol of the National Front for Democracy and Change (FNCD) whose candidate Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected president in the December 1990 election. (photo; Julio Etchart)

RESISTANCE GOES ON

News direct from the people and organisations of Haiti's grassroots movement confirms that resistance to the military and the de facto government is continuing.

Throughout 1992 **high school and university students** across the country were at the forefront of protests against the de facto government. The army has responded to pro-Aristide graffiti, pot and pan beating protests, boycotts and other demonstrations with repeated attacks on students. Since November the state university in Port-au-Prince has been at the centre of the struggle, with students and professors resisting the de facto government's attempts to gain control of what is seen as the vanguard of the democratic resistance.

"Since the coup the forces of darkness have stepped up their activities because they don't want reforms. We don't break under that pressure. Even

though we cannot function openly, each school has a committee of resistance. Even if we have to do it clandestinely and illegally, we are determined to go forward." - a Port-au-Prince high school student, November 1992.

Trade union organising since the coup has been severely hampered as union leaders have been forced to go underground or move to a different part of the country. However **the new unions** that developed in the period between the overthrow of Duvalier and the 1991 coup remain defiant.

In November one of the main new independent union federations, the CGT, sponsored an international conference against repression. In December it organised demonstrations

against privatisation. The CGT's executive secretary, former taxi driver, Cajuste Lexiuste, recently called for more international contacts to help his fledgling union at this crucial time.

Other important foci of resistance are **the churches**, in particular the *Ti L'Egliz* (little church) movement, and **the rural peasant organisations**.

After 16 months of resistance a peasant organiser from the APOEN grassroots organisation in Cap-Haitien, in the north of the country, expressed his frustration with the situation. Although unwilling to give up the right for the return of Aristide, he and many in his organisation are tired of waiting.

"We feel that the politics of 'wait and see' are not right. We know there is a lot of repression but we have to have demonstrations. That is the resistance that comes from the people. In 1986 we threw out Duvalier and we can do that again. We want to pass to the offensive, to attack."

(Extracts from **Haiti Info** published every two weeks in Haiti. Subscription details available from HSG.)

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Write or telephone your MP and MEP

Tell them you're appalled by Britain and Europe's failure to impose effective economic sanctions on the military regime in Haiti. Ask them if they recognise Jean-Bertrand Aristide as the legitimate President of Haiti and if so ask what they are doing personally to restore him to power.

Your MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. Tel: 071 219 3000

Your MEP, The European Parliament, Rue Bellard 97-113, 1040 Brussels, Belgium. Tel: 02 284 21 11

Write or telephone Shell Transport and Trading Company

Tell them you know that Shell owns the only oil storage terminal and off-loading point in Haiti. Ask why they are using it to break the economic sanctions. Mention the human rights record of the military regime and the legitimacy of President Aristide's election. Ask them why they are supporting such a repressive regime.

Sir Peter Holmes, Chairman, Shell Transport & Trading Company PLC, The Shell Centre, London SE1 7NA. Tel: 071 934 1234

Write or telephone the Papal Nuncio in Britain

Tell him you're horrified that the Vatican is the only state in the world to have recognised the military regime in Haiti. Luigi Barbarito is sensitive on this issue - he was once the Vatican's representative in Haiti and may have some influence with Rome.

His Excellency The Most Reverend Mgr. Luigi Barbarito, Apostolic Pro-Nuncio, 54 Parkside, London SW19 5NF. Tel: 081 946 1410

Write or telephone the Foreign Office

Mark Lennox-Boyd is the Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office in charge of Latin America and the Caribbean. Ask what the British government's position on Haiti is and demand to know what specific measures the government has taken to restore President Aristide to power. Ask what other measures he would consider given the failure of the steps taken in the past year.

The Hon. Mark Lennox-Boyd MP, The Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Room 201, Whitehall Building, London SW1A 2AF. Tel: 071 270 3000

Join

We meet every fortnight at Trinity Church, Hodford Road, London NW11 (2 minutes from Golders Green tube station). Ring us on 081 201 9878 for the date of our next meeting. We organise lobbies, visits by Haitian diplomats and publish these bulletins. If you can't be active send us a cheque, however small.

Haiti Photo Exhibition

**Opening night
Monday 1st March, 6-9pm**

A month long exhibition of Leah Gordon's colour photographs, taken in Haiti during the short-lived period of democratic freedom in 1991, at the Metro Cinema, 11 Rupert Street, London W1. (near Leicester Square). Photos will be on sale - 50% of proceeds to the Haiti Support Group. For details call HSG 081 201 9878.

A selection of work from Oxfam's Art for a Fair World exhibition is at the Philip Graham Gallery, 9a-11 Bonhill Street, London EC2, throughout February. It includes work by artists from Haiti as well as forty other countries. For details call the gallery 071 920 0350.