



Photo by Leah Gordon

In the shadow of the sweatshop

Haiti is a country laid waste by decades of dictatorship, and years of economic sanctions. There is a desperate need for reconstruction and development, and millions of dollars of aid money have been promised. But will the development programme currently being initiated benefit the 85% of the people living below the margin of absolute poverty?

Two events in May suggest that plans are moving ahead to base Haiti's economic future firmly on the exploitation of its extremely cheap labour pool. First, the Aristide government announced a new legal minimum wage that would not upset the private sector - US\$2.57 or £1.65p a day.

Then, in mid-May, the Haitian government held an economic summit meeting with private investors. This revealed just what sort of 'phoenix' will rise from the ashes as a result of the structural adjustment programme (SAP) favoured by the World Bank, the IMF and USAID.

The government announced a series of measures and proposals to benefit the assembly plant sector. These include exemptions from paying import duties and export taxes, the elimination of export inspections, and plans for new industrial zones in Port-au-Prince and Gonaïves. The millionaire Brandt family, which allegedly supported the 1991 coup, was given the go-ahead to begin the construction of a commercial port and free trade zone in northeast Haiti.

Haitians need jobs and the sweatshop assembly plants will pro-

vide them, but to work long hours in atrocious conditions to support a family of eight or nine on £1.65p a day... The assembly plant industries won't even produce goods for consumption in Haiti. Rather, raw materials for such items as electronic parts, radios, clothes and baseballs will be imported, processed, assembled, and then exported to the US. Tax and duty exemptions will mean the assembly plants will make next to no contribution Haiti's economy.

The agricultural sector that 'supports' 70% of the population is under threat from another main part of the SAP - the removal of import tariffs. This will have the effect of opening the Haitian market to foreign food imports that will undercut foodstuffs such as rice produced by Haitian peasant farmers. Nearly all commentators, even a United Nations Development Programme spokesperson in Haiti, Paul Paryski, believe that this will have a disastrous effect.

Cheaper foreign food imports will destroy the livelihoods of peasants who produce food for the domestic market. They will have to try to produce crops for export to the US or, more likely, move to the cities to look for work in the assembly plant industries.

Some see the development of the rural economy as the key to Haiti's future economic well-being and, in particular, to the repair of catastrophic environmental degradation. Instead what can be expected is increased concentration of land ownership, increased rural unemployment, and deepening rural poverty.

HAITI'S ELECTIONS: Farce, tragedy, landslide

by Charles Arthur

Parliamentary and local elections - 1995. Campaigning is under way for elections to be held on June 25, with a second round run-off, if necessary, scheduled for July 23. Thousands of candidates are contesting all 83 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, two thirds of the 27 seat Senate, and positions for 133 mayors and 565 township councils.

The Lavalas Political Front, which is supported by President Aristide, is expected to sweep the board. Other parties challenging include the FNCD, led by former Aristide ally, Evans Paul; KONAKOM, a social democrat grouping; and a host of centre-right parties led by traditional politicians such as Leslie Manigat and Serge Gilles.

Some 2,000 candidates were judged ineligible because they lacked proper documentation or were deemed to have close links with the Duvalier dictatorship. A number of neo-Duvalierist parties have threatened to sabotage the elections following their exclusion. There have been many reports from outlying areas of violent attacks on Lavalas candidates and supporters.

Given the presence of thousands of UN troops and Washington's wish for a credible electoral process to justify the invasion, a greater threat to the elections than widespread violence would appear to be the reported theft of 800,000 voter registration cards. This represents approximately a quarter of the total number of registered voters. Provisional Election Council president, Anselme Remy, said, "There

is a sector that doesn't want elections to take place. The aim of the people who have stolen the cards is to prevent people who want to vote from voting."

Whether the elections are deemed free and fair or not, the whole question of democracy in Haiti is overshadowed by the US/UN intervention in all its shapes and forms. As long ago as February the Haitian Conference of the Religious questioned the presence and influence of USAID, and other US organisations such as the National Democratic Institute, the Centre for Free Enterprise and Democracy, and the Centre for Democracy: "By distributing money right and left to political candidates and organisations, some non-governmental organisations from outside the country are creating division and encouraging corruption...under these conditions, is there any way we can have free elections that will benefit the people?"

In the longer term the ability of Haiti's elected bodies to control the country's future development would seem to be negated by the implementation of the IMF/World Bank structural adjustment plan (SAP). Aid and development agreements are tied to the SAP so whoever is elected President and whichever party wins a majority will find it impossible to govern unless they maintain the SAP. What is more, the Haitian economy will, to all intents and purposes, be controlled not by the elected government but by foreign investors and the same tiny group of elite Haitian families which have plundered the country in the past.

ELECTIONS PAST

In the two centuries since independence the majority of Haitians have been almost completely left out of electoral politics. As sections of the country's elite vied for power, political parties were formed, presidents and governments came and went, but most people remained uninvolved and unrepresented.

During this century the US occupation (1915-34), and the Duvaliers' father and son dictatorship (1957-86) established the pretence of an electoral procedure to legitimise wholly undemocratic decisions.

In 1918 the US proposed a new Constitution for Haiti, (Franklin D Roosevelt claimed to have written it while Secretary of the Navy) but met with opposition from many Haitian congressmen. The occupying forces resolved this dilemma by dissolving parliament and putting the question to a plebiscite. Voters were marched to voting stations and handed a white ballot marked Oui. The Marines noted that they could have asked for a pink ballot marked Non but very few did. The result: 99.9% of Haitians consulted approved of the Constitution which abolished the famous law adopted by Dessalines in 1804, that forbidding foreign ownership of land.

In 1957, in acknowledgement of his popularity with the poor of Port-au-Prince, military power-brokers appointed as president the populist, Daniel Fignolé. But when he attempted to follow through on promised reforms the military leaders promptly put him on a plane to New York, and massacred thousands of his supporters in the capital's slums. In the election that followed, the military's new favourite, François Duvalier, who enjoyed some genuine support for his espousal of black nationalism, was declared winner. In the absence of Fignolé, and with massive irregularities in the casting of votes, Duvalier's victory was far from free and fair.

● Elections as farce

Under the Duvaliers all political opposition was crushed but the dictators continued the charade of accountability by staging a series of referendums. In 1964 a referendum approved the election of Papa Doc as President-for-Life. On the ballot papers there were only spaces for the oui vote. In a subsequent referendum in 1971 asking the Haitian people to approve his choice of his son Jean-Claude to succeed him as President-for-Life, the result given was 2,391,916 votes in favour and no one opposed.

In 1985, following anti-government riots, a referendum on the Baby Doc presidency was held. It was patently a sham ballot, engineered to lend the dictatorship the appearance of political pluralism for the benefit of the US State Department. With the subtlety one had come to expect of the Duvaliers, who had no doubt taken their cues from the 1918 US Marine

plebiscite, the Ministry of Information announced that 99.8% of the voters had approved the referendum.

A few months later, in February 1986, after a period of sustained popular protest against the dictatorship, the US pulled the plug on Baby Doc and he fled to France.

A progressive new Constitution, approved in March 1987, included a provision prohibiting known Duvalierists from political office for a ten-year period, and many Haitians hoped that elections would be the way to bring about urgently needed change.

In his book, *In the Parish of the Poor*, published in 1990, Jean-Bertrand Aristide expressed his cynicism about elections in the 1980s. "Haiti had to prove it was 'moving towards democracy'. Only if we elected a government would the cold country to our north, and its allies - other former colonizers - send us more money and food. Of course that money and that food corrupt our society: The money helps us maintain an armed force against the people; the food helps to ruin our national economy; and both money and food keep Haiti in a situation of dependence on the former colonizers."

● Elections as tragedy

But if the US was ready to see a transition from dictatorship to controlled democracy, the Duvalierists and the

Haitian military were not. On election day, November 29 1987, truckloads of Tonton Macoutes and soldiers attacked voters outside polling stations. At a school in Port-au-Prince voters were butchered by men with machetes and machine guns. In *The Rainy Season* Amy Willentz wrote, "Under an almond tree in the school's front yard, the attackers hacked a screaming woman to death. Two more women were killed in the bathroom. One family who came to vote, grandmother, daughter and grand-daughter, were all killed. Voters who piled up in a corner of a classroom were massacred. The attackers left, then returned and bore down on the journalists who had come to record the results of the massacre." The election was cancelled.

Under military supervision a new election was held the following January. The four popular candidates boycotted the poll and less than 5% of the electorate voted. The conservative Christian Democrat, Leslie Manigat, was declared the winner. Four months later he was ousted by the military leader, General Namphy, who assumed full dictatorial powers.

■ Sources: *The Uses of Haiti* - Paul Farmer (Common Courage, Maine, 1994), *The Rainy Season: Haiti since Duvalier* - Amy Willentz (Vintage, London, 1994)

THE LAVALAS ELECTION-1990

In late 1990 preparations began for presidential elections to be monitored by the United Nations. The mass of the Haitian electorate, presented with a choice of Roger Lafontant, former head of the Tontons Macoutes, and Marc Bazin, former World Bank official and US favourite, showed little enthusiasm for the election.

The US poured money into the campaign of Bazin, who planned to implement neo-liberal plans to benefit the assembly plants and foreign investors. Things were looking good for the strategists at the US Embassy until just 60 days before election day when the immensely popular and radical priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide was persuaded to enter the race.

A powerful symbol of anti-Duvalierism, and anti-imperialism, Aristide's candidacy transformed the election as tens of thousands of Haiti's peasants and slum-dwellers registered to vote. His campaign became known as the 'Lavalas', or the flood, referring to the purifying

and sweeping nature of the popular uprising that would rid the country of Duvalierism and foreign domination.

Kim Ives in NACLA's *Dangerous Crossroads* wrote, "The result was perhaps the greatest malfunction of all the US election engineering done since the early 1980s throughout Latin America. Despite the money Bazin distributed throughout the country in an attempt to buy votes and \$36 million spent on his campaign, thousands of Haitians poured into the streets during Aristide's gigantic campaign rallies chanting "I'm not here for money, it's of my own free will."

As the vote was being counted at one Port-au-Prince polling station and it was becoming clear that Aristide had won a landslide victory (67% to Bazin's 13%), a US Embassy official turned to a British journalist and said, "The people have spoken - the bastards." Less than eight months into his presidency Aristide was overthrown by a military coup d'état.

Waiting to vote for the first time-Cité Soleil, 1990
Photo by Marc French

UK releases for new Boukman and Boukan Ginen



The third album by Boukman Eksperyans, *Libète - Pran Pou Pran'li* (Freedom - Let's Take It), is now available on Mango Records. Recorded at Bob Marley's old Tuff Gong studios in Jamaica, it's a more melodic effort than their previous releases, with the vocals weaving in and out of a drum-heavy mix.

Since returning to Haiti last October members of the group have been protesting against the army and ele-

ments of the government they regard as holdovers from the military regime.

Singer Lolo Beaubrun told New York's *Newsday*, "Things are more cool than during three years the generals were in power, but it's dangerous. There's a lot of killing in Port-au-Prince. We pray in the street with drums, we play some concerts and we do radio interviews to advise people to continue the struggle."

Reflecting the confusion that the Aristide/US alliance has created among those who backed the original Lavalas project and now see it being abandoned, Lolo said, "I can't say I'm not an Aristide supporter, and I can't say I am."

Boukan Ginen, tipped by many to become Haiti's premier racines (roots) band, release their debut, *Jou a Rive* (The Day Has Come), on Xenophile Records. *The Guardian's* Robin Denselow described it as an "entertaining, accessible and wildly energetic set."

The band was formed by two former Boukman Eksperyans members, including the singer Eddy François whose soaring vocals power the album's politically charged songs. Denselow writes, "Performing against a tight, rattling rhythm section, he (François) mixes African style, reggae and soul balladry in an exuberant blend of carnival dance styles and protest."

Both releases available on CD and cassette from Stern's African Record Centre - 0171 387 5550

Harold Pinter opens Haiti exhibition and slams US invasion

At the opening night of the exhibition, *Haiti: Photos, Paintings, Ironworks*, the internationally renowned playwright, Harold Pinter, condemned the US for undermining democracy in Haiti.

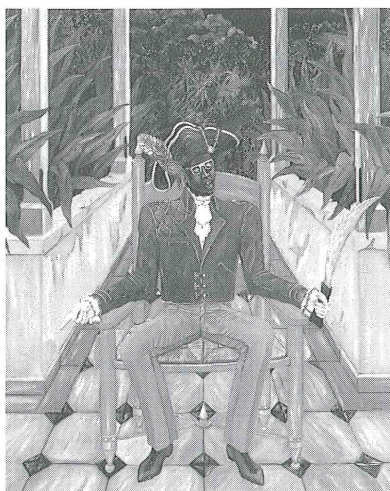
The exhibition at the October Gallery, staged in conjunction with the Haiti Support Group, featured the work of Haitian artists, and US and European photojournalists who have worked in Haiti in the years since the collapse of the Duvalier dictatorship.

Pinter, a member of the Haiti Support Group, formally opened the exhibition by praising the assembled works for embodying "the extraordinary spirit of the Haitian people." He went on to criticise the United States policy in Haiti calling it "a masquerade" and claiming that "a democratic procedure, a democratic election, has been totally undermined and sabotaged...by a military coup supported in fact by the United States."

Referring to last September's US military intervention in Haiti, he remembered President Clinton's contention that "a new dawn has arisen", but remarked that all that had been restored was the status quo. He continued, "All of Aristide's endeavours to perform what he was actually elected for have been totally undermined, and he himself, in a sense, I must say with great regret, seems to have been strangled and emasculated."

The opening night of the exhibition was attended by over 400 invited guests, including the Haitian painter, Edouard Duval-Carrié, and US photographer, Michelle Frankfurter, who recently won a World Press Award prize for her photo of a Port-au-Prince street demonstration.

Other artists featured in the exhibition included Stevenson Magloire, Prosper Pierrelouis, Frantz Lamothe, and Serge Jolimeau. The photographic part of the exhibition was curated by Leah Gordon and included photographers Maggie Steber, Les Stone, Chantal Regnault and Roger Hutchings.



Le Nouveau Familier, by Edouard Duval-Carrié

Published by the **Haiti Support Group**, Trinity Church, Hodford Road, London NW11 8NG

● Phone & fax: **0181 201 9878**

● Email: **haitisupport@gn.apc.org**

Printed by **East End Offset Ltd**, London E3
Phone: 0171 538 2521 Fax: 0171 538 0018

Eyewitness in Haiti

American socialist Ahmed Shawki will be speaking at a public meeting about Haiti as part of the *Marxism 95* conference. It is at 7pm on Sunday, July 9 at University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1.

■ Phone 0171 538 2707 for a free timetable of the full week and more details.