



Aristide, as seen by the mural painters of Port-au-Prince

Photos by Leah Gordon

So it's farewell to President Aristide, who hands over to his successor, René Préval, on February 7th. As the living embodiment of the Haitian people's aspiration for the creation of a new society, Aristide has been a quite incredible phenomenon. After five years as President, what is his legacy?

The abolition of the Army, and the advent of a fairly elected Parliament are plus points for which Haitians can be thankful. Yet these are only blocks on which to build. The country continues to be beset by a whole range of fundamental problems and difficulties. Perversely though, it is perhaps in the very inability of the Aristide presidency to remedy these ills that the best hope for Haiti's future lies.

Throughout Aristide's period in office there has been a tendency for Haitians to believe that he himself, by himself, could sort the country out. There was a wildly unrealistic, yet often expressed, expectation that Aristide, once installed in the National Palace, could single-handedly overturn the cruelly exploitative system created over two centuries. This expectation encouraged first a passivity, and then, when Aristide inevitably failed, a despondency among sections of the population.

The coup, and Aristide's three years in exile, robbed the Haitian people of the chance to experience the limitations facing a President with a radical programme in a country where the levers of power continued to be held by a small elite hostile to any change. Yet in the sixteen months since the restoration of Aristide these limitations have been clearly revealed, albeit in a markedly different context.

On his return Aristide proposed a project stripped of its for-

mer radicalism and based on a reconciliation with the country's elite and the implementation of a structural adjustment programme. It was underwritten by the international community in the form of UN troops to provide security, and the promise of millions of dollars of aid money to rebuild the economy. So far the failure of this project is also only too clear.

The lack of any lasting security has been underlined by continuing attacks on both Lavalas MPs and community leaders, and has been acknowledged by President-elect Préval who will ask the UN to extend its mandate in Haiti for a further six months.

As for the much-heralded influx of aid, research by the Inter Press Service has revealed that 40% of the money disbursed in 1995 was used for balance of payments and keeping the government ministries running, and that over 40% was used to pay for police training, organising elections, and for short-term job creation schemes. Very little aid has been made available for long-term investment projects that could provide domestically-produced food, long-lasting employment, schools, drinking water and sanitation.

With the end of Aristide's presidency and the scaling down of the UN troop presence, Haiti begins a new chapter. Recent events suggest that many Haitians are coming to realise that the President does not have the capacity, nor does the international community have the will to carry out the necessary restructuring of Haitian society. This is a task for the Haitian people themselves. Aristide's old slogan "Alone we are weak, together we are strong, all together we are unstoppable" is more relevant now than ever.

women in haiti

by Kathie Klarreich

"Lapli demokrasi tombe, lavalas espwa desann, li le pou nou organize" - "The rain of democracy is falling, the flood of hope is running, it's time for us to organise." That was the refrain many Haitian women spontaneously broke into as they participated in a historic, three-day conference on women's issues, held in January 1995 in the town of Dame Marie on Haiti's far western coast.

Jammed on tiny benches for up to five hours at a stretch, with the sun's rays streaming through the windows, the 380 women tirelessly exchanged ideas and experiences. They heard lectures on the role of women in Haitian history, on human rights, on AIDS. And at the end, they elected a board to help promote their needs.

"If women fight to change the situation they can organise themselves, create work and a place for themselves in the society," boasted Sourveni Dorset, representing the Women Are Life organisation. "We have so many problems," said a weary-looking Velia Ville Fran. "I have 12 kids, and I can't send eight of them to school. In our area there are no resources. Some of us borrowed clothes just to come here. But we're not discouraged: President Aristide is back and we're sure things will get better."

When President Jean-Bertrand Aristide opened up the Ministry of Women's Rights and Conditions as one of his first official acts after he was restored as president in October 1994, he became the first president in Haiti's 200-year history to make a commitment to improving the lot of women. "President Aristide wanted this in 1991, but at the time only eight of the 25 women's groups he met felt the need for it," said Lise-Marie Dejean, who was asked to lead the ministry. "They reasoned that the country should first get its footing and we could come in after."

But Dejean explained that following the 1991 military coup d'etat, women were systematically persecuted, which may in part explain the President's strong commitment to the ministry, and the rural women's motivation in gathering in Dame Marie.

The goals of the women's ministry,

symbolically located in the former headquarters of the Haitian military, range from legalising women's rights to creating a national advisory council for families. Soon it will open offices in each of the country's 135 communal districts. Resources, however, are scarce. The government allocated only US\$1 million, although the ministry requested US\$9 million. Still, Dejean believes that much of what her ministry cannot accomplish can be done in collaboration with other ministries and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Changing the way women are perceived in Haitian society is crucial to the success of improving their condition. Most NGOs working with women's issues have followed the traditional agenda of family planning and domestic training. Yet the average family size - 6.2 children per family in the countryside and 4.8 in the capital, Port-au-Prince - hasn't changed in decades because there is no educational follow-up to the programme. Despite several national literacy campaigns, the 25% literacy rate remains the worst in the Western hemisphere.

Many training programmes for women focus on culinary skills instead of academics, but graduates are unable to find jobs or apply what they have learned in their family environment.

"Many women cook outdoors on the street, not in fancy kitchens," explained Dejean. "So our courses should focus on nutrition, or building market stalls for the women. As with everything we are trying to do, we want the programmes to go along with the reality of the country."

by Anne McConnell

The meeting in Dame Marie was just one example of the many initiatives taken by Haitian women since the return of President Aristide in October 1994.

● Women are increasingly forming their own committees within existing mixed and traditionally male-dominated groups. This is true within the Ti Legliz (Christian base community) and the peasant and

urban slum sectors.

● Women have also been active in the creation of new grassroots groups, organising in particular around marketing and economic issues. All speak of violence and the deteriorating economy as major concerns.

● In various areas of Port-au-Prince, women's organisations and women's sections of grassroots organisations are working to form neighbourhood-wide coalitions.

There is broad agreement between grassroots women's groups on the main priorities and demands. First among these is the demand for Justice. This call includes: disarmament of paramilitary forces and the related criminal networks; prosecution of those responsible for crimes against the people, especially rape; damages to be paid to compensate victims; and judicial reform to ensure that crime and impunity end. Then there is an urgent need for credit to

help combat inflation, unemployment and poverty. Three years of a coup and an unevenly applied embargo have left most women - especially the market women who form the backbone of the informal sector - without the capital to conduct business. Women's organisations are also demanding the opportunity to influence government policy and calling for financial support for their initiatives.

The inability of the newly-formed

Women's Ministry to come up with the money to help them has been a source of deep disappointment for many groups. Despite continuing doubts over the provision of an adequate budget, last November the new Minister of Women's Affairs, Therese Guilloteau, outlined the following four priorities:

● A campaign of education and awareness raising among women to be conducted through the Ministry's local offices, and by

radio programmes and the distribution of cassettes and videos.

● The provision of training for grassroots groups in the areas of literacy, employment and health.

● Proposals for legal reform focusing on laws on rape and common law unions.

● A national meeting with women's organisations to coordinate the work of other ministries and to encourage collaboration with non-governmental organisations.

Solidarity among Haitian Women

With the fall of the Duvalier dictatorship in 1986 many new women's organisations were formed. One of the biggest and best known is Solidarite Fanm Ayisyen (SOFA), a mass organisation of about 5,000 women whose goal is to help Haitian women struggle against exploitation and discrimination through education and training. Its slogan is "The struggle of women is the struggle of the people".

Interviewed in 1993 by the Haitian Information Bureau, Evelyne Larrieux, one of SOFA's founding members, remembered early difficulties, "When we had our first SOFA meeting the men would come and they wouldn't let their wives come because they said we were trying to make the women leave the men."

"Some men are afraid that women will become like men are or were, with three husbands and extra boyfriends, and they will beat their men!" she laughed.

She continued, "The women's fight is permanent and has to be fought every day... We believe that you have to fight on the women's issue itself, in conjunction with the people's struggle, but separately. Some sectors have problems with that, but we say when you take a political position, it must be a feminist political position.... We can't put the women's question on one side. The women's question is not secondary because we are part of society as people, not objects."

Socio-economic snapshot

Population (% of total)	53
Age of population 0-14 (%)	40
Age of population 15-64 (%)	57
Head of household (%)	70
Child bearing age (%)	49
Contraception use (%)	10
Population per doctor	7,180
Population per nurse	2,290
Birth rate /1,000	44
Death rate/1,000	25
Infant mortality/1,000	133
Maternal mortality/100,000	340
Life expectancy	57
Illiteracy (%)	87
Labour force (%)	55
Assembly industry (%)	70
Agriculture (%)	49
Commerce (%)	70
Domestics (%)	70
Minimum wage	US\$3/day
Access to water (%)	13
Right to vote (year)	1957

Source: Roots - Special report:

All women are women, but they are not all equal - Vol. 1, No.3, Summer 1995.

Photo by Leah Gordon

Spooks and scoops— US duplicity laid bare

Stories of tip-offs to a former military dictator, secret shipments of US arms to the FRAPH paramilitary, and continued CIA recruiting - the scenario in Haiti is now as twisted as anything that Graham Greene's character, Wormold, could have dreamt up with his warped vacuum cleaner plans in *Our Man in Havana*. But, as always, truth is stranger than fiction, and potentially more dangerous.

Last November, the Washington Post revealed details of a memo sent by the US Secretary of State to the US Embassy in Haiti on October 26th 1995. It cited intelligence reports concerning a previously unknown group, the Red Star Organisation, lead by ex-military dictator, Prosper Avril, and its plans for a harassment and assassination campaign targeting Aristide supporters. This information was never shared with the Haitian government.

Following the November 7th assassination of Lavalas MP, Jean-Hubert Feuille, a Haitian National Police search of Avril's home uncovered arms and ammunition, including a weapon allegedly used in the assassination of Father Jean-Marie Vincent in 1994. The Haitian government was later angered to discover that a US Embassy political officer had visited the house just hours before the search took place, and that Avril himself had fled to the Colombian Ambassador's residence to request political asylum.

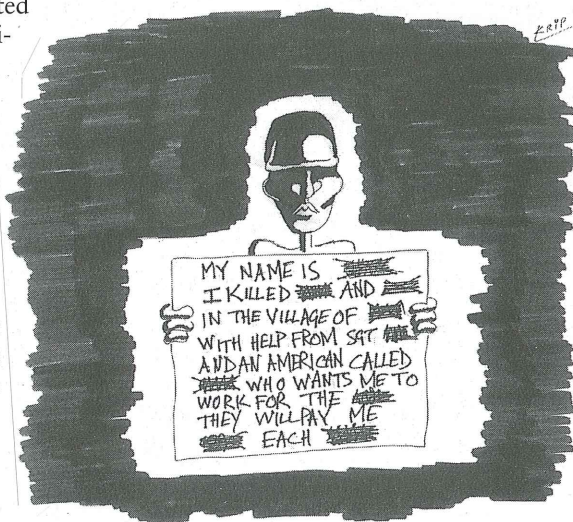
A US official claimed the visit was part of a general policy to maintain "contact with a broad spectrum of Haitian society." A senior Haitian official retorted, "What are we supposed to think when they meet with Avril, maybe warn him, but fail to pass on intelligence that directly influences our safety?"

Autumn was certainly an awkward season for the US Embassy and the CIA as their special relationship with Haiti's right wing elements were constantly scrutinised. In September, US officials were accused of involvement with the unlawful release from prison of Marcel Morissaint, a former US 'intelligence asset' and gunman for ex-Police chief and coup leader, Michel Francois.

Morissaint, in custody on common crime charges, had subsequently also been accused of participating in the 1993 assassination of Justice Minister, Guy Malary. But, just days before he was due to give evidence to the team investigating

by Leah Gordon

the high profile assassinations of the coup period, he was freed. In the October issue of the US magazine, *The Nation*, the then Haitian Justice Minister, Jean-Joseph Exumé accused US agencies of first paying Morissaint's legal fees, and then organising his release. The *Nation's* Allan Nairn stated that much of this story was confirmed by US officials working in Haiti.



The US say they will return the 150,000 pages of documents taken from FRAPH offices and the Army HQ. This is how the Haitian newspaper, Libète, imagines the pages will look. (Cartoon by Mike Naylor with acknowledgements to Libète's J.V. Kcush)

At the beginning of December, Emmanuel 'Toto' Constant appeared live on the CBS programme, 60 Minutes, to reiterate that he was on the CIA payroll at the same time as he was forming FRAPH, the now notorious death squad. "I was meeting with the CIA on a regular basis," he told the programme. "We had an understanding, we had an allegiance." He told of being furnished with sophisticated radio equipment, a code name, and a salary of US\$700 per month.

Constant also stated that the CIA station chief was fully aware of his intentions to carry out a demonstration to block the arrival in Port-au-Prince of the US ship, the Harlan County, in October 1993. Constant had promised not to threaten any US lives but to merely orchestrate a "media frenzy". Yet it was the CIA and then the Pentagon that claimed that US lives would be at risk in

Haiti, prompting the withdrawal of the ship and the collapse of the 1993 UN plan to restore President Aristide.

Constant's TV appearance coincided with the tug-of-war between the Haitian and US governments over the vast trove of documents, photographs and tapes taken from Haitian army buildings and FRAPH offices by US troops in late 1994. In December, the US spokesperson in Haiti said that the documents would be returned to Haiti but only after the names of Haitian-American citizens and US agents had been removed.

The reason for the US's reluctance to release the unabridged documents was clear following another Allan Nairn scoop in the January 8th issue of *The Nation*. The article revealed that "starting in mid-1993 FRAPH was launched on its reign of terror with secret shipments of US arms." The arms shipments, originating in Miami, included revolvers, semi-automatic pistols, machine guns and fragmentation grenades. Nairn's source, a US-trained Haitian army officer, estimated that "five to ten thousand pieces" were sent (despite a US naval blockade) and were distributed to FRAPH members.

More worrying still are the claims made in the same article that the US has continued to work closely with FRAPH. Based on interviews with military and intelligence officials in Haiti and the US, Nairn writes, "Within the first week of the occupation a CIA contingent arrived and, breaking down into two-person teams fanned out across the countryside. The operatives... approached (US) Special Forces field units and asked for their help in identifying Haitians who could be recruited to work secretly for the CIA. Those placed - or continued - on the payroll include FRAPH leaders and attaches, according to US officials closely familiar with the operation."

US forces are preparing to leave Haiti in February but it seems their presence will continue to be felt.

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