



15 October 1994: Haitians celebrate the homecoming of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide

Photo by Leah Gordon

Aristide Returns — Mission Accomplished?

Three years ago, who would have betted on President Aristide returning to Haiti? Let alone with the support of the United States which for decades has helped to keep Duvalierism alive and kicking. But credit for the return of Aristide must be given to all those—Haitians and their friends all over the world—who kept struggling against all odds for the return of democracy. By taking to leaky rafts in their thousands, Haitians—backed by solidarity groups, the Congressional Black Caucus and even Hollywood stars, like Jonathan Demme—forced President Clinton's hand.

In one sense, the return of 'Titid'—as his supporters affectionately call him—is a historic event. No other democratically elected President who was overthrown has returned to office. If history always repeated itself, Aristide would have stayed in exile. But Haiti is no Grenada or Panama. This is not the overthrow of a legitimate government but its restoration.

In another sense, Aristide has less room now for economic and social manoeuvres than he had before the coup. Haiti needs the \$770 million pledged in foreign aid, but not

by Christian Wisskirchen

at the expense of becoming a worse sweat shop than before. Already Aristide had to reverse his own choice for Prime Minister from Claudette Werleigh, who has obvious sympathies for the poor, in favour of Smarck Michel, who is closer to the business elite.

But in five centuries of dictatorship Haitians have learnt to organise in different ways than other societies. It is the local grassroots organisations that matter, and not so much centralised institutions that run the state in Western-style democracies.

To be sure, the US and the UN will try to impose a representative "controlled" democracy, but Haitians will fight for their own, participatory model. This will probably be a long, protracted fight—as we see in other Latin American countries—but at least now a real start can be made. The UN more or less abandoned Haiti after the 1990 elections, leaving the Duvalierist structure untouched. Not that they are likely to try very hard to remove it, but the international presence until 1996 will give democracy ac-

tivists in Haiti the chance to organise properly and, hopefully, uproot that structure for good.

The first step is to outlaw and dismantle the paramilitaries. These thugs must not be allowed to convert into a political party. Yes to reconciliation, but criminals must be brought to justice. No to vengeance, but independent judges don't grow on trees! Sadly, while Haitians grapple with this problem, the US and the paramilitaries still play musical chairs.

Groups like ours can make a difference. We must keep the spotlight on Haiti:

- UNCOVER attempts to undermine the democratic process
- CALL FOR programmes to support returning refugees
- DEMAND that aid reaches small local NGO's and not the pockets of the elite
- HELP ESTABLISH links between grassroots organisations and supporting bodies in our country and highlight many other issues.

The return of formal democracy to Haiti is a great success but—as the report by Charles Arthur on the following pages shows—the real work has only just begun.

Working on the ground

Charles Arthur and Leah Gordon of the HSG arrived in Haiti just before President Aristide returned. They spoke to many Haitians, especially from the grassroots movements, to find out how they see the new situation and to explore how the HSG may help Haiti in the future. This is an exclusive report from CHARLES ARTHUR in Haiti

Six weeks since the arrival of the US military, and for most Haitians it is time to draw breath and adjust to the new situation. So far the presence of US troops, the lifting of UN sanctions, and the return of President Aristide have had a positive effect on people's everyday lives. But, as one Haitian newspaper put it, "the party is over, the work begins."

In many ways the country is unrecognisable compared with how it was this time last year. Now the streets of Port-au-Prince are bustling with people and

"For the first time in three years we can actually sleep at night without fear of being beaten or shot."

of the criminals in the countryside has not begun." He said, "many people do not feel any change." He called for the removal of the Haitian military and the disarmament of FRAPH members, *attachés* and section chiefs. In the small community of Lospalis, ten miles from Hinche, villagers confirmed that the six local *attachés* still function openly.

US forces talk up the success of the weapons confiscation and buy-back programme.

In reality — and this is admitted even by UN military officials — the problem is far from over. Many Haitian soldiers who deserted took their arms with them, while the *attachés* are now the ones in marronage, or hiding. Even those *attachés* apprehended by the people and handed over to the US troops were mostly set free a few days later. There is concern that the violence against grassroots organisations and Aristide supporters may resume.

In Hinche, the main town in the isolated rural department of the Central Plateau, the small US mil-

itary contingent admitted that the *attachés*, who fled before it arrived, were returning from hiding in outlying areas. In the city of Les Cayes *attachés* are reported to have relocated to surrounding villages from where they return each evening to continue harassing pro-Aristide activists.

The US have forces based only in Port-au-Prince, Cap-Haitien and 20 other towns. One of the many places with no permanent US presence is Grand Goave,

"I think Aristide will be struggling against it [the IMF plan] but it will be the mobilisation of the people that can change it."

curity. In some areas the Haitian army and police keep a low profile. In others they deserted their posts. Many local military posts and FRAPH offices have been sacked or demolished by the people. For Father Gerard Jean-Juste, a leading member of the Ti Legliz (the liberation theology wing of the Catholic Church) the US intervention means, "we can speak, we can walk, we can assemble. We are on our way to most of the basic human rights."

This is largely true in Port-au-Prince, where most US troops are concentrated, and in Cap-Haitien, where the US have replaced the existing military authorities. However, it is unclear whether the new situation is in any way permanent — out in the smaller towns and the countryside an atmosphere of insecurity persists. According to Chavannes Jean-Baptiste, spokesperson for the national peasant movement, MPNKP, "disarmament

is the emerging pattern is one of the US forces arriving in the main urban centres with a priority to establish their own security in relation to the Haitian military and paramilitary. What happens in other places is regarded pretty much as beyond their remit. With this first phase completed, it now appears that a modus vivendi between the foreign and local military is developing.

In Petit Goave, as in other towns where the US are based, the US Special Forces (the equivalent to the British SAS) share barracks with the FADH (Haitian military). Special Forces Sergeant McCullough revealed the nature of this relationship: "We have a good relationship with the FADH and we're working real good together. When we first arrived here the local people had the wrong idea. They thought we were going to arrest the soldiers, but now they're getting to understand what's what. We had a meeting with all the local officials and representatives of all the political parties, including FRAPH, and they know we're just here to prevent 'Haitian-on-Haitian' violence."

As the Special Forces troops in Hinche had intimated, McCullough also considered FRAPH a *bona fide* political group, perhaps easier to handle than Lavalas groups because of its better organisation and military connections. This is disturbing, particularly in view of the now open secret that the CIA has been grooming FRAPH to become the counterweight to Lavalas, and

of the leading role that USAID intends to play in the forthcoming legislative elections.

While the Haitian public continues to perceive US troops as liberators because of decreasing political violence, perhaps a growing number — aware of the US's past role in blocking progressive change in Haiti — remains sceptical. Father Jean-Yves Urfié, editor of the pro-Lavalas weekly 'Libète' acknowledged that because of the US intervention, "it will be very difficult for the government to do what it wants."

But he went on to say, "The people have recovered their freedom of speech, their freedom of association, and so on. The Haitian type of democracy is grassroots democracy. So if we take the chance that has been given to us by the same nation that made the coup, we can organise ourselves for the future."

Chavannes Jean-Baptiste also stressed the importance of the grassroots organisations regrouping and resuming their role as the driving force for the development of participatory democracy in Haiti. On the IMF/World Bank structural readjustment plan for Haiti, he said, "If the people don't mobilise to struggle against this plan they will be able to put in place every-



US troops and Haitians — a fragile relationship

thing they want. I think Aristide will be struggling against it but it will be the mobilisation of the people that can change it."

Whether Aristide's government will be able to meet the expectations of the people, and whether the US will permit it to try, remains to be seen. But it seems inevitable that a honeymoon period in which many Haitians will enjoy the short-term benefits of the US presence will be followed by a resumption of the struggles for fundamental economic and political change which were interrupted by the 1991 coup d'état.

Photo by Leah Gordon

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After three years of terror the spirit of Lavalas lives on



Working in the UK

Repatriation of Haitian refugees

At the moment we are involved in a joint lobbying effort with the Refugee Council regarding the repatriation of Haitian refugees from the US Naval Base at Guantanamo, Cuba. The US is returning Haitian refugees at a rate of 150-200 a day.

While many of them want to return now, a considerable number of them are concerned about their safety. According to the National Coalition for Haitian Refugees in the US, refugees at

Guantanamo are being told that it is safe for them to return. In fact, huge numbers of armed paramilitaries are still at large (see report by Charles Arthur).

Moreover the US has done nothing about the 1,000 unaccompanied children who have no relatives in Haiti, but often in the US. Those children, as well as the 2,000 other Haitians either too afraid or too ill to return, should be allowed to

apply for asylum in the US.

Please, support our efforts by writing to: Ambassador William Crowe, U.S. Embassy, 24 Grosvenor Square, London W1. Express your concerns about the above points. You may add that Haitians should receive at least equal treatment to that of Cuban refugees who are ill, under age or elderly, to whom US Attorney General Janet Reno has recently granted humanitarian parole. For further information get in touch with us.

Visits of Haitian Democracy Activist

Following the intervention in Haiti the HSG and War on Want invited Dr Gerard F Laforest, a leading democracy activist on a speaking tour of the UK. In October he addressed meetings in London and Liverpool as well as a fringe meeting at the Labour Conference in Blackpool. For his visit the HSG co-produced a pamphlet, entitled "Shaking

the Table", including, among other pieces, our analysis of the current situation in Haiti and the (previously unpublished) speech of President Aristide in Liverpool, when he visited the UK in 1992 at the invitation of the HSG. Copies of this pamphlet are still available from our office.

Media work

Most of our time in the last two months has been spent on media work. The office was inundated with interview requests from Channel Four News, BBC World Service Radio and TV, GLR, Radio 5 Live, LBC, BBC Regional Radio, Radio France Int'l, BSkyB News, and many others.

Apart from speaking on radio and TV we have been busy issuing press releases and writing letters to the papers. One long letter regarding the Carter-Cedars agreement was published both in 'The Guardian' and in 'The Independent' on 21 September.

NEWS

Haitian Priest Receives Anti-Slavery Award in London

On 26 October Father Edwin Paraison received the 1994 Anti-Slavery Award, established by Anti-Slavery International in 1990, in recognition of his courageous work with Haitian cane cutters in the Dominican Republic.

Anti-Slavery has for years been the main champion of the cause of these 40,000 people, whose fate deserves much greater attention. The HSG was represented at the award ceremony and also had a private meeting with him. He reminded us that the working conditions on the sugar plantations in the DR are the worst in the whole of the Americas — tantamount to actual slavery. The Haitians are being held in special camps, so-called *bateyes*, where armed

guards prevent any escape.

Father Paraison has done some very effective work in the past, including the repatriation to Haiti of more than 50 children, some as young as nine, who had been forced to work in the plantations against their will.

As a result of his appearance in a TV programme in the DR and his subsequent testimony before a sub-committee of the US-Senate the DR government was forced to outlaw child labour on the sugar plantations. He has also helped Haitian refugees who fled to the DR after the 1991 coup d'état.

One of Father Paraison's most urgent concerns is the strengthening of two small cane workers' unions, something he has

Father Paraison with a Haitian worker on the bateyes

been working on since 1990. These unions have currently about 450 members, 90% of whom are Haitian.

While they are officially recognised, their work is hampered by the DR government, whose attitude towards Haitians is notoriously hostile. It is vital that these unions grow in strength and numbers because they are the only organisations which work exclusively on improving the situation of the Haitian workers. The HSG is looking into ways of helping with this issue.

EVENTS COMING UP

Visit of Bishop Romelus

Bishop Willy Romelus of Jeremie, the only Haitian bishop who openly spoke out against the coup d'état, is visiting the UK and Ireland from 10-17 November at the invitation of CIIR.

There will be a public meeting with him in Liverpool on Sunday 13th, 5-7pm at St. Margaret Mary's, Pilch Lane (contact the Parish House: 051-228 1332 or Mike Naylor: 051-489 8522) and he is

meeting the HSG in London on Wednesday 16th, 7.30 pm, at Trinity Church, Hodford Road. (Please contact the office.)

Public Lecture at Warwick University

The Rev Dr Leslie Griffiths, one of the founders of the HSG and one of the most distinguished experts on Haiti will deliver a lecture on 1 December, 5.30 pm at Warwick University in Coventry,

entitled: "Haiti: What hope? Aristide's first 50 days." Venue: Chaplaincy (on campus), Gibbet Hill Road. Entry free, all welcome.

HSG - 'Strategy Meeting'

In view of the significant changes taking place in Haiti, a "strategy meeting" will be held on 17 December, 2 p.m., to debate the future direction of our work and organisational matters. The venue has not yet been decided.

All members interested in attending please notify the office by 30 November at the latest. This is also the deadline for any written suggestions.

Haiti Support Group — membership form

Yes, I want to become a member of the Haiti Support Group. I enclose payment of £15 (£8 unwaged) for one year's membership. Please debit my VISA/ACCESS/Other

a/c:..... No. Expiry Date

Name

Address

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Signature

*Please note that Credit Card transactions will be handled by the Catholic Institute for International Relations on behalf of the HSG.

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