



Aristide mural - Léogâne 1991. Here we go again.

Photo by Leah Gordon.

Collapse of Parliament heralds Aristide comeback

The political crisis, simmering for the best part of two years, finally came to the boil in January. Parliamentary elections due in 1997 and 1998 had been cancelled, and the existing Parliament had rejected several attempts by the President to appoint a Prime Minister to replace the last one who resigned as long ago as June 1997.

So, on 11 January, President René Préval in an attempt to break out of the stalemate, declared that, according to a 1995 electoral law, the terms of most remaining members of Parliament and other elected local officials had expired. In a televised address Préval said that in the absence of a functioning Parliament he himself would appoint a PM, and together they would rule by decree, pending fresh elections.

Critics, in both Haiti and the United States, charged that Préval had staged a coup, and was preparing the way for a return to dictatorship. Half of the remaining MPs, nearly all belonging to the majority party, the OPL, refused to recognise that their mandate was over, and, together with a host of tiny centre and right wing parties, appealed to all and sundry to save Haiti's democracy. While the US Republican Party was quick to use this as a stick with which to beat US President Clinton, the UN Security Council and European Union Presidency deemed it sufficient to issue declarations voicing their concern and hoping that elections would be held as soon as possible.

Despite the continuing protests of recalcitrant former MPs, the life of Haiti's 46th Parliament seems over, and the stage is now set for an open contest between, on one side, former President Aristide's new party, Fanmi Lavalas, and on the other, the OPL and most of the

other parties. These parties, dismissively known in Haiti as 'particules', lack any real measure of popular support. Many of them are led by opportunist politicians who supported the 1991 coup and, as such, are almost totally discredited. It is anticipated that they will come together in an electoral coalition, together with the OPL, in an attempt to defeat Aristide's party.

Since relinquishing the Presidency in February 1996, Aristide has sought to distance himself from his erstwhile allies, the OPL, who have controlled the Government since the last general elections in 1995. This Government's failure to arrest the declining standard of living of most Haitians despite the provision of millions of dollars in international aid, has made it deeply unpopular. Aristide has aligned himself with critics of the Government's commitment to a structural adjustment programme involving the elimination of import tariffs, the privatisation of state-owned enterprises, and a reduction in the number of public sector employees. For Aristide, these neo-liberal economic reforms, demanded by international financial institutions, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in return for soft-loans, will only benefit foreign investors and the country's tiny economic elite.

Although many Haitians seem deeply disillusioned by politicians of all stripes, Aristide's discourse is the only one with any resonance for the poor majority. When (or should that be if) free elections are held, Aristide's party will most likely triumph, albeit on the basis of a low turnout. Such a victory would bring Aristide one step nearer re-election as President at the end of the year 2000.

Seeing through the smokescreen

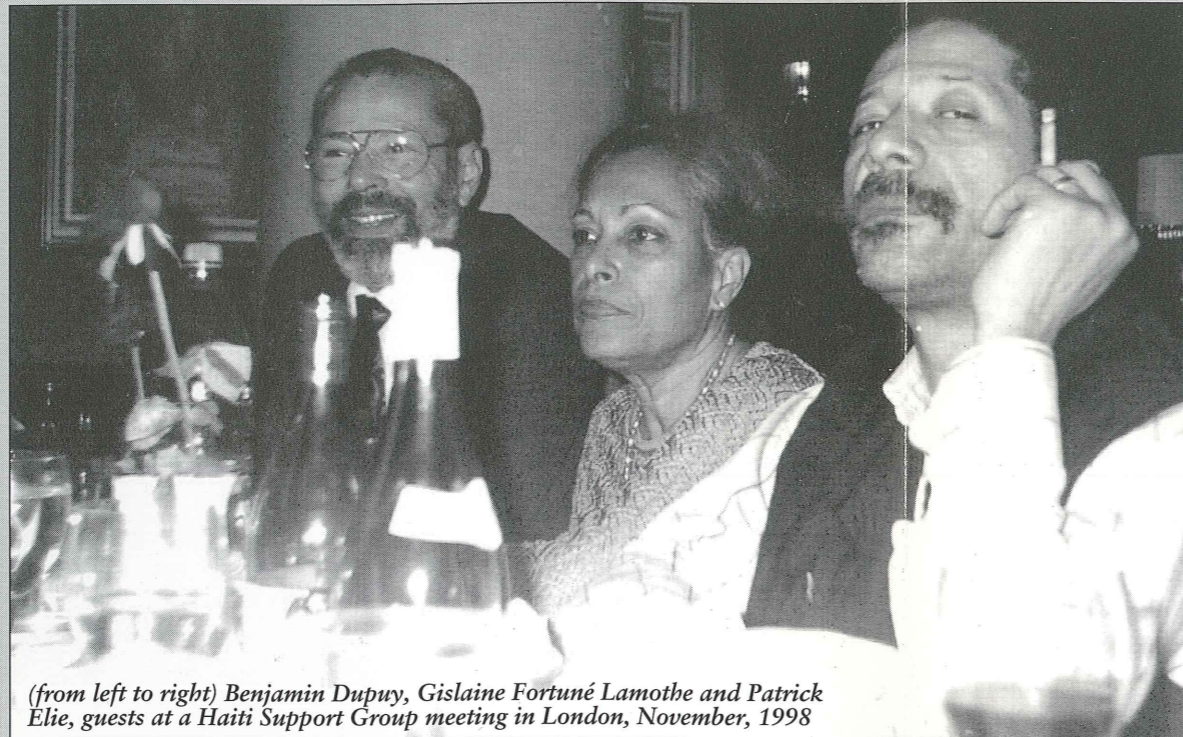
In November, Benjamin Dupuy, leader of the National Popular Assembly, visited the UK as the guest of the Haiti Support Group. Dupuy is the co-founder of the weekly newspaper, *Haiti Progrès*, and from 1991 to 1993 served as President Aristide's Ambassador-at-large. In the extracts that follow, taken from interviews with national radio and print media during his visit, Dupuy speaks about the current situation in Haiti, and relations with the neighbouring island of Cuba.

On recent history:

"When Father Aristide became President of Haiti it was the first time that the great majority of the people had participated in the political process. Their involvement meant, for them, a form of participatory democracy, not the formal democracy where only the elite would be allowed to shape the nation's political future. That's one of the reasons that President Aristide was overthrown. It was precisely because for once the future of Haiti was going to be dealt with at the grassroots level, and this didn't please this traditional elite, nor the US which has had a very great influence shaping the political life not only of Haiti but also the Caribbean and Latin America."

On the current governmental crisis:

"Looking at the situation from the perspective of Western parliamentary democracy and the 1987 Constitution, there is no government. But there are ministers dealing with current affairs. In reality, Haiti has traditionally been a presidential system and effectively Préval is fulfilling the functions of President and Prime Minister. The publicity about this issue [of no proper government] is a pretext for the donors not to come up with the



(from left to right) Benjamin Dupuy, Gislaine Fortuné Lamothe and Patrick Elie, guests at a Haiti Support Group meeting in London, November, 1998

aid packages they promised when the re-establishment of democracy was completed.

The real reason for this apparent crisis is the split in the Lavalas leadership under pressure from the US. This was originally Aristide's party, and in 1995 it won a relative majority in Parliament. Soon after, it defected and was willing to implement a neo-liberal policy dictated by the IMF.

After the betrayal of the party leadership, Aristide formed his own party, the Lavalas Family. This new party doesn't have any representatives in the executive or the present Parliament. The governing party is concerned it may lose any future election. It is therefore demanding a new Provisional Electoral Council be chosen from among supporters of the ruling elite....As any future election is likely to be won by Aristide's supporters, the gov-

ernment is trying to get hold of the administrative apparatus that would supervise such elections. They want to adopt the model of the Mexican PRI, thus becoming the permanent party of government."

On the continued presence of US and UN forces:

"At the end of November, the UN Security Council will renew for the sixth consecutive time, the mandate of the UN mission...The first phase of the UN intervention in Haiti was spearheaded by 20,000 US troops. Presently the occupation forces have been reduced to 300 civilian police, supposedly to train the new Haitian police force. But, in reality, the recruitment of the 7,000 members of this police force has been done by a sub-division of the US FBI. Meanwhile the US has signed a bilateral agreement with the Préval government to station in Haiti 500 US Special Forces, supposedly to carry out humanitarian works. This deal has not been approved by Parliament. This illustrates that the "international community", when it's convenient, isn't so concerned about legality."

On relations with Cuba:

"For the inauguration of Aristide in 1991, a large delegation from Cuba came - in fact, in *Haiti Progrès* we ran a campaign for an invitation to be made to Fidel Castro. Anyway, for the seven months of Aristide before the coup, it was clear that Haiti was going to re-establish diplomatic ties with Cuba (broken since 1962). Then the 1991 coup, but when Aristide returned under the auspices of the UN, as a smoke-screen for US intervention, Aristide, far from complying with the dictates of the US State Department managed to dissolve the old Army, created and trained by the US Marines, and before leaving office made the historic move of officially re-establishing diplomatic relations with Cuba.

Today, President Préval, while he is not implementing the programme of the Lavalas movement but following the dictates of the US and Bretton Woods institutions, has just recently visited Cuba in the context of the links that are now being established through CARICOM. Préval spent a week in Cuba [and concluded ten bilateral accords including agreement that Cuba would send 200 doctors to help bolster the rudimentary Haitian health system]. We contemplate that before the year 2000, that will most probably see the re-election of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, he will pay a visit to Cuba."

Sources: BBC Radio Five Live, Cuba Si and Labour Left Briefing.

What is the National Popular Assembly (APN)?

In the words of a spokesman, the Asanble Popilè Nasyonal (APN) is "one of Haiti's oldest, largest and most influential popular organisations, with branches nationwide throughout the countryside and cities." It was formed in March 1987 at a mass conference held at St. Jean Bosco church, with

welcoming remarks by then Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

The APN works to organise and raise consciousness among the Haitian people for the need for fundamental economic and political change. Some of the defining features of the APN's political stance

(which correspond largely to those proposed by the Lavalas coalition of December 16, 1990) are national sovereignty and self-determination, participatory democracy, land to those who work it, and justice for the crimes of the Duvalier and coup years.

Accordingly, the APN is

a fierce opponent of the on-going US/UN military occupation of Haiti, as well as the neo-liberal structural adjustment programme of privatisation, lowered tariff walls, and budget austerity championed by President René Préval and the Organisation of People in Struggle (OPL) under

pressure from the IMF, World Bank, and Washington.

The APN also opposes the manoeuvres of the OPL to scuttle the April 6, 1997 elections, which, despite low voter turn-out, were carried by the anti-neo-liberal party, Fanmi Lavalas, of Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Haiti's own 'Pinochet'

The impact of the Pinochet case continues to reverberate. In November, a group of Haitian exiles living in France formed a committee to push for the arrest and trial of the former Haitian dictator, Jean-Claude Duvalier. Gérard Bloncourt, a Haitian writer and poet who founded the Paris-based Committee to Bring Duvalier to Judgement, said, "It is our duty to make sure Jean-Claude Duvalier is tried on behalf of the memory of the 60,000 victims of his regime and that of his father François."

Duvalier fled Haiti in 1986, and settled in France, although the French authorities never formally granted him political asylum. He was allowed to enter the country on an eight-day visitors' visa, but the authorities turned a blind eye when his documents expired. He had allegedly

brought with him a fortune of tens of millions of dollars, and lived in luxury on the Côte d'Azur until 1994. Recent news stories report that Duvalier is now broke and staying with friends.

Last December, the French Justice Minister declared it was possible that a case against Duvalier could be tried, but that the Ministry of the Interior had "lost track" of him. A few weeks later, from "somewhere in France" Duvalier appeared on a French TV interview claiming, "I do not believe there was a lot of violence during my time (in Haiti)."

After hearing the interview, a Haitian exile in France wrote that she "was reminded of the terror that I and my friends' families suffered at the hands of this father and son dictatorship. I have members of my family that were tortured and killed, and I know that I am not alone."

The Committee to Bring Duvalier to Judgement is preparing legal suits to present to the French courts. At a demonstration organised by the Latin American Coordination Against Impunity at Place Bastille, Paris, on 22 January, Gérard Bloncourt told the crowd, "Today, it seems to us important to clarify that not only Jean-Claude Duvalier but the whole of Duvalierism must be indicted. All of those who soaked their hands with the blood of the Haitian people must equally, clearly, be prosecuted. His direct entourage, his ex-wife Michèle Bennett, his father-in-law Ernest Bennett, those who supported him and succeeded him: Raoul Cédras, Michel François, etc...must also personally answer to their crimes against humanity..."

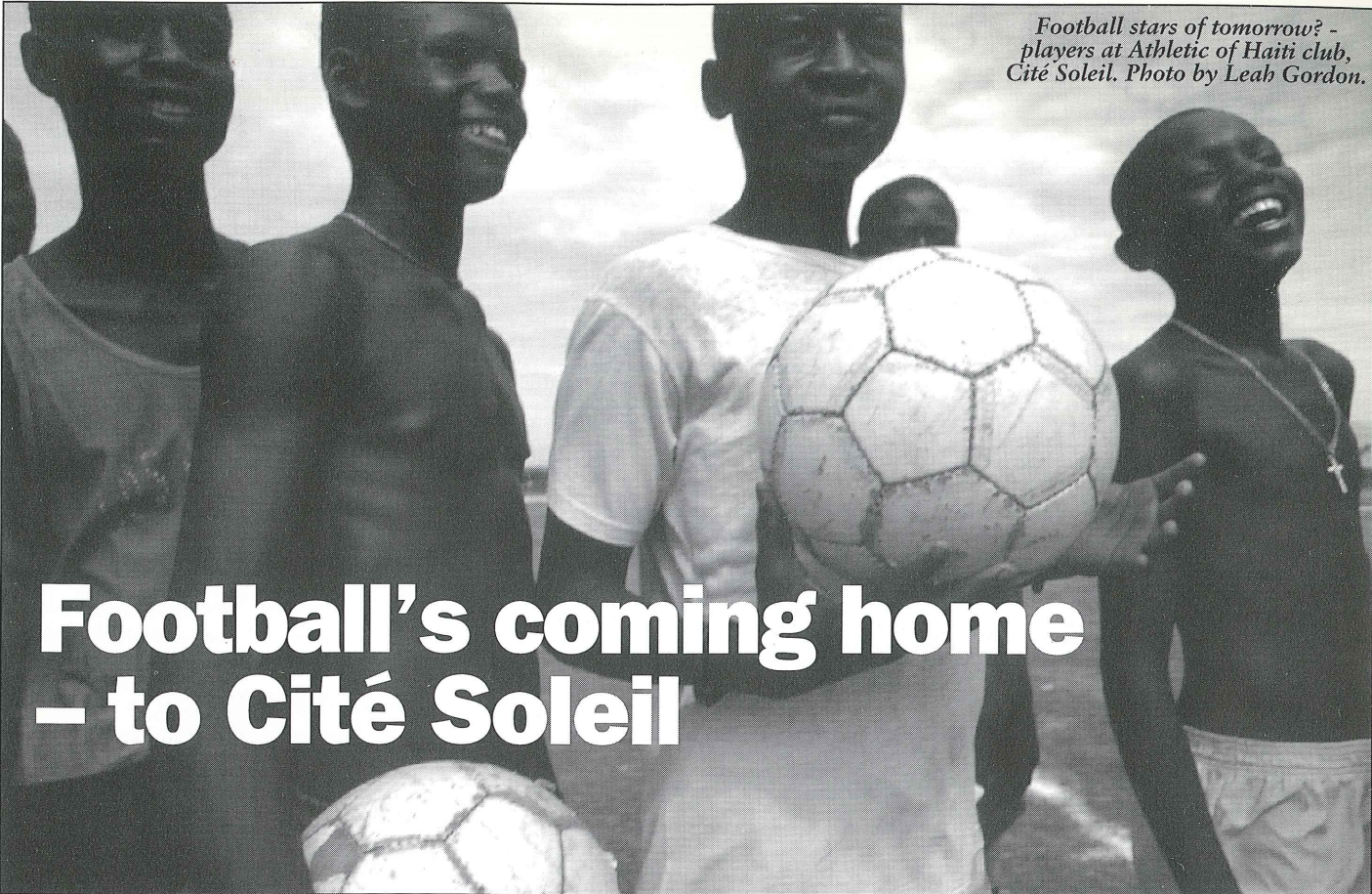
PAPA DOC BABY DOC

HAITI AND THE DUVALIERS



JAMES FERGUSON

The seminal text on the history of the Duvalier dictatorships, Papa Doc, Baby Doc, by James Ferguson, is currently out of print, but copies can be obtained from The Haiti Support Group, priced £11 including post and packing. (order from the HSG - address on back page)



Football stars of tomorrow? -
players at Athletic of Haiti club,
Cité Soleil. Photo by Leah Gordon.

Football's coming home - to Cité Soleil

A grassroots project in one of the worst slums in the Americas is helping Haiti find the players who hope to emulate the heroes of 1974 and qualify for the World Cup finals. Former political prisoner, Bobby Duval, has created three football pitches on wasteland on the fringes of Cité Soleil, and by providing food, education and training, is grooming local kids to become the stars of tomorrow.

Duval was incarcerated in the notorious Fort Dimanche prison for 18 months for speaking out against the dictatorship of Jean-Claude Duvalier. Now, some two decades later, he is devoting his considerable energies to building his club, Athletic of Haiti, and dreams of getting Haiti to the World Cup for the first time since 1974. He also hopes that the existence of the club will help the disadvantaged kids from the slums of Cité Soleil, where there are no recreational facilities, and drugs and gang violence are growing problems. In addition, the project helps fight malnutrition among slum children by providing the players with a morning meal.

Feeding the spirit

In a recent interview with *The Independent on Sunday*, Duval said, "Food is what glues this idea together. A lot of the kids came here initially just to eat - it was their only chance of a meal that day. Look at them

now. Some of these boys are big...They're playing in second-hand strips, wearing second-hand boots, but they're so happy. They have a great spirit."

Athletic has four teams, made up of players ranging from seven to twenty years of age. A derelict building, destroyed during the protests against the Duvalier dictatorship, has been repaired and serves as a clubhouse. Duval plans to construct a second building for use as a girls changing room.

Hero of the past

The club's main sponsor is the Pingouin (Penguin) ice cream factory which is managed by the nephew of Haiti's best-known footballing son, Joe Gaetjens. In the 1950 World Cup in Brazil, Gaetjens played for the US team, and had the distinction of scoring the winning and only goal in the sensational (and then unprecedented) defeat of the England team in Belo Horizonte. He went on to play in France for Racing Club of Paris, and in 1953, returned to Haiti, and organised a youth soccer league. On 8 July 1963, he was arrested by Papa Doc Duvalier's Tonton Macoutes and never seen again.

Pingouin helps out by providing football kits and soft drinks, but Duval says he needs much more help to keep Athletic going. He hopes that some of the city's relatively wealthy fee-paying schools, which provide no physical education for their pupils, will hire Athletic's facilities, and that the income will allow the penniless local schools to use them for free. In the meantime, Duval says he desperately needs assistance, whether it's money, or football strips and boots of any size. Best of all, he told *Haiti Briefing*, would be if a famous

English footballer came to train his players - can we ask Gazza?

Heroes for the future

Five players from Athletic have recently been selected to join a national football academy that is training players at a complex sited on the Duvalier's former ranch in Croix des Bouquets, outside Port-au-Prince. One of the coaches is the Haitian football legend, Manno Sanon, the player whose goals sent Haiti to the World Cup in 1974 - the first Caribbean team to qualify for the finals. In an interview with *Haiti Briefing* last year, Sanon said, "Most of the time Haiti is the first Caribbean country to do something. After all, we were the first Caribbean country to have a revolution. We are good at starting things, but not so good at keeping them going."

Sanon hopes to buck the trend and repeat the feat of 1974 by taking Haiti to the finals in 2006, although, as he says, "The country is in a state, and the state of soccer here reflects the state of the country." But he remains optimistic, based on the passion for football that exists in Haiti despite the lack of facilities. "There is nowhere to play. When I left the country (in 1974) there were not many cars, but now there are, and they have built everywhere. Yet, we have pure talent in the street. We are like Brazil - you can still go on to the street and pick up good players just like that."

If it gets the support it needs, maybe Duval's project in Cité Soleil will help make Haitians' dream of football glory come true.

Sources: *The Independent on Sunday*, Greg Chamberlain, Leah Gordon and Charles Arthur.