



Photo by Leah Gordon.

Sowing the seeds for a grassroots revival

These are dark days in Haiti. The promise of economic renewal funded by international development aid has come to nothing. Impunity for human rights violators has given birth to a pervasive sense of insecurity. Common crime is on the increase, and the new police force at times seems almost out of control. The worst of a number of recent incidents occurred at the end of May in Port-au-Prince when a group of senior police officers, three of them former soldiers, handcuffed and then shot dead 11 people.

Perhaps most worrying of all is that a once vibrant political scene – in which grassroots organisations played an active role – is now moribund, reduced to a struggle for power between politicians almost totally disconnected from the population. In this context, general elections scheduled for later this year elicit almost universal disdain.

For an analysis of the state of the popular, grassroots sector at this time, *Haiti Briefing* talked to Rose Anne Auguste, a militant activist and organiser throughout the years since the fall of the Duvaliers. Rose Anne grew up in the southern city of Jérémie, and moved to Port-au-Prince in the mid-1980s to study at the Nurses' School. There she was instrumental in the founding of a students' associa-

tion which joined the new National Federation of Haitian Students (FENEH) – at that time one of the most dynamic forces for social change. Her organising activities got her expelled from the school, but she later completed her nursing studies while continuing to campaign with the Union of Nursing Personnel. In 1992 she founded the Carrefour Feuilles Women's Health Clinic to provide health care and counselling in one of Port-au-Prince's largest slum areas. The clinic was originally set up to serve people who had suffered torture or were in hiding because of their political activities.

Rose Anne makes no bones about the crisis affecting the once influential popular, grassroots movement. "There has been a serious deterioration of the popular movement, and this has given our enemies in the imperialist camp quite an opening to place their pawns more strategically."

Charismatic leaders and demobilisation

While recognising that the extreme repression inflicted on the popular organisations during the 1991-94 coup years accounts for

Continued on page 2

Sowing the seeds for a grassroots revival

Rose Anne Auguste interview . Continued from page 1

much of the demobilisation within the movement, she also attributes many of the problems to the weakness of the Lavalas current, and to the orientation of the Lavalas government since the end of the coup regime in 1994. "People believed in certain charismatic leaders who said that they wanted change, but then people saw that they didn't do any better than the Duvaliers - they were reproducing the same system."

She added, "Of course the imperialists have been manipulating things behind the scenes, but we have to be clear that there has been a lack of will, and an incorrect attitude on the part of many former leftists in the country. All these things taken together have led the population to lose confidence in the struggle."

Echoing the now oft-repeated charge that the recent demonstrations in the capital city have involved people in the pay of political forces, Rose Anne bemoans the current political climate: "What we can see today is that this population, that was once willing to participate in policies for the construction of the country, now has to be manipulated. Five or six years ago, the people would demonstrate on the streets, but now they have to be paid to go out."

A government of lackeys

Rose Anne is clear that the Haitian government controlled by the Lavalas OPL party since 1995 bears much of the responsibility for the current state of affairs: "We have had a government that has not had any real room for manoeuvre. They are lackeys of the bilateral (funding) organisations, and they don't take into account the economic situation of the population. The government is there because there has to be some form of government - no more than that. The population that faces this government is demobilised, watching what is happening, and sometimes would like to rise up, but is reflecting on the trauma of the coup years."

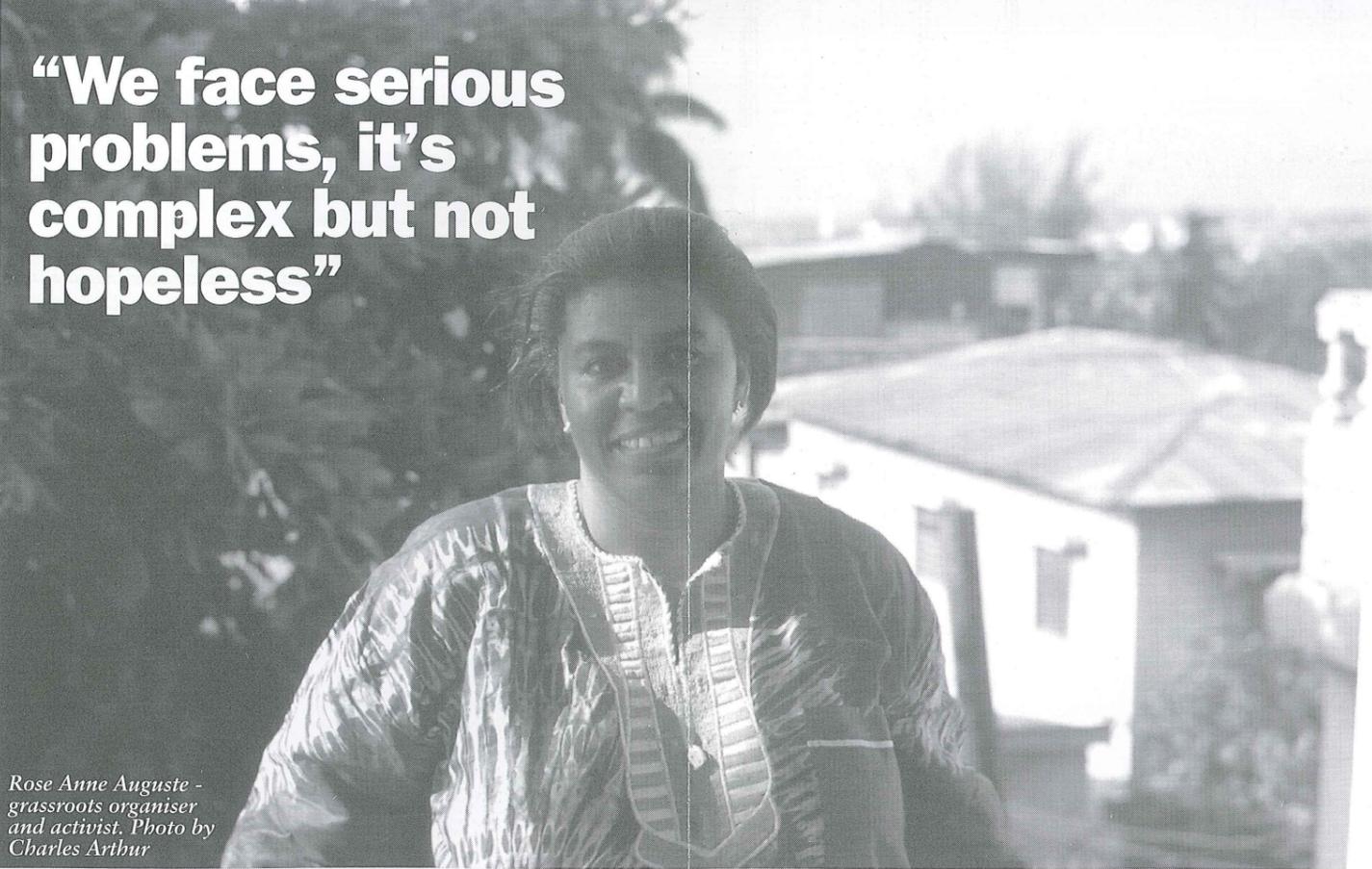
For Rose Anne, the fact that the international aid money has not brought about any noticeable improvements for the poor majority is not surprising. "If there were people with political will (in the government) even with a small amount of money they could effectively accompany the people. But what is in fact happening is that there is complicity. Money comes from the North and goes back to the North. There is no real development - because the way that the international community organises it, there can never really be self-development for the countries of the South."

Accomplices

She blames the OPL government and the current government selected by President Préval for participating in a failed development strategy. "The international community, together with the kind of government we have here, are accomplices. When you look at the reality of this country - the environmental degradation, the socio-economic crisis, the lack of education - what is really happening with the aid money? Well, we are not on the same wavelength at all. For example, at a time when the mountains do not have a single tree, they are cleaning the irrigation canals! Their interventions do not correspond to our reality. I don't think they are stupid, they are experts. It's just that they have their own agenda."

The absence of any alternative strategy to the neo-liberal agenda is, according to the Rose Anne, one of the worst failings of the Lavalas government. "There are alternative ideas for fund-raising so we do not have to fall into the trap of structural adjustment, and build roads all over the place when there isn't even any basic social infrastructure for the population. But people are not thinking about the interests of the country. For them it is globalisation or nothing. The modernisation they talk of is simply the modern form of poverty. That is not to say we can work without any international aid. We do need the solidarity of other governments and other peoples, but what is needed is vision in order to negotiate well, and that is what is lacking here."

She insists that alternatives to neo-liberal structural adjustment programme do exist: "Half the money we borrow from the International Monetary Fund, we could borrow from Haitians living abroad. Instead of giving tiny plots of land to individuals, large plots could be allocated to collectives so that they could really increase



"We face serious problems, it's complex but not hopeless"

Rose Anne Auguste - grassroots organiser and activist. Photo by Charles Arthur

Members of the Haiti Support Group joined thousands of demonstrators in a 'Carnival against Capitalism' in London's financial and business centre on Friday, 18th June. The carnival was part of a world-wide protest against the miseries inflicted by the capitalist system, and was designed to coincide with the opening of the G8 summit meeting in Cologne, Germany.

Haiti Support Group coordinator, Charles Arthur said, "We are here in response to the request of the Haitian Platform to Advocate for Alternative Development (PAPDA). It asked us to represent the millions of people in Haiti who are suffering from the inappropriate economic policies demanded by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund."

In the context of continuing discussions about debt relief for the poorest countries, the Haiti Support Group joins PAPDA in questioning the wisdom of the massive loans to Haiti still being made by multilateral lenders. By 1990 Haiti's external debt was

some \$800 million - nearly all of it stolen by the Duvaliers. With loans totalling \$143 million made in 1996, and a further \$102 million lent in 1997, the total external debt owed by Haiti has now grown to some \$1.1 billion. However, as the years go by and the aid money continues to flow in, the majority of the Haitian people get poorer and poorer.

On 29th June members of the Haitian Jubilee 2000 Coalition organised a sit-in at the entrance of the Inter-American Development Bank offices in Port-au-Prince. One demonstrator told the Haitian Press Agency, "The Haitian population has not benefited from the money lent, and we will not agree to its repayment while we wallow in misery."

● In the UK, the richest 20% receives 41% of national income. In Haiti, the richest 1% receives 50% of national income.

● In the European Union, 18% of the population live below the 'poverty line'. In Haiti, 75% of the population live in 'extreme poverty'.

Carnival against Capitalism



Haiti Support Group members at the J18 protest in the City of London. Photo by Leah Gordon.

production in the context of environmental protection. There could be health and education programmes at a macro-economic level, not like how the World Bank approaches it, spluttering money around"

Aristide is not the solution

While critical of the OPL branch of the Lavalas movement, Rose Anne is no less damning of the rival Fanmi Lavalas led by former president Aristide: "I'm not one who thinks the country can depend on Aristide. There are different groups that support him who he can't control, and they each have their own agenda. Most of them do not have the country's interests at heart, and only want to take power to make money. Even if Aristide is repeating some nice ideas, he is not part of any organised structure that would guarantee any real change for the population. In any case, we can look at the example of when he returned to power in 1994/5 - it was a catastrophe."

The level of corruption and manipulation across the established political spectrum convinces Rose Anne that genuine militants in favour of social and political change should not be drawn into contests for political office. She believes that, "There is more important work to be done - more structured work at the grassroots level, helping people to understand the issues better."

Starting from scratch

"Demobilisation of the popular movement has taken a chronic form right now, to the point where militants who are aware of this talk about starting from zero. Constant work is needed, and it won't be easy to re-launch a movement of popular organisations quickly."

According to Rose Anne, this work of sowing the seeds for a grassroots revival has begun: "There are reflection and discussion groups that are trying to analyse the situation, and are asking themselves how they can redevelop something. But we can't really speak of a base movement. We are faced with very serious problems, and the demobilisation is very real, but efforts are being made to see how we can try to articulate activities. I am not totally negative. It's complex but not hopeless."

New book: *Libète: A Haiti Anthology*

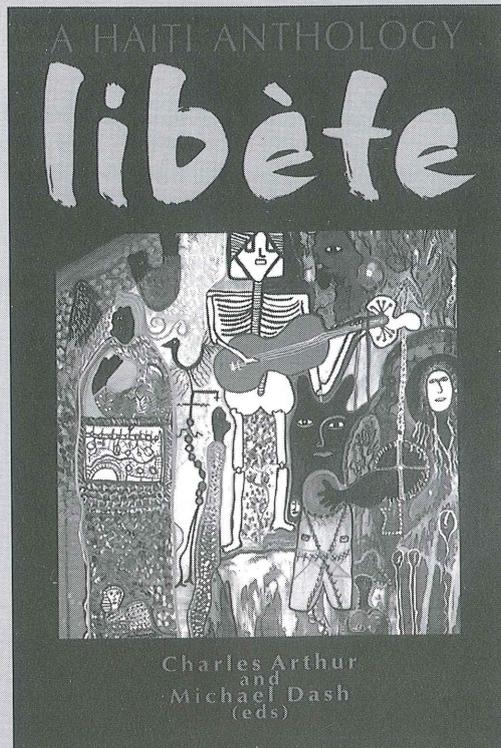
The Latin America Bureau announces the publication of a new book, *Libète: A Haiti Anthology*, edited by Charles Arthur and Michael Dash.

Mixing contributions from anthropologists, historians, and novelists, *Libète* is arranged thematically, with ten chapters covering a wide range of historical and contemporary issues. Each chapter contains an introductory essay, extracts from differing authors, and full bibliographical information.

Contributions include work translated for the first time from Creole and French, as well as excerpts from such authors as C.L.R. James, Alejo Carpentier, P.J. O'Rourke, and Edwidge Danticat.

"A remarkable collection. The selection is careful, judicious and enlightening; whoever reads this volume will end up with a sound and rich general knowledge of the country and its people."

Sidney Mintz, Professor of Anthropology, John Hopkins University.



"This anthology provides fascinating insights into the terrible fate of one of the richest colonies in the world, and the remarkable human and cultural achievements of its people in the face of unimaginable calamity."

Noam Chomsky

"This is an extraordinary book, and one that fills a great gap in what's available. It's a must for any household with an interest in Haiti."

Bob Corbett, Professor of Philosophy, Webster University.

● Readers of *Haiti Briefing* in the UK can purchase copies of a *Libète: A Haiti Anthology*, at the special price of £14 including post and packing. Make cheques payable to the Haiti Support Group.

■ *Libète: A Haiti Anthology* (ISBN 1-899365-29-X), 352 pages, retail price £14.99.

Protecting war criminals?

At the United Nations Human Rights Commission meeting at Geneva in April, the Haitian government proposed the following addition to the resolution on Haiti:

"Invites those states interested, to make available all the possible information, including the documents related to the Haitian Armed Forces (FADH) and the paramilitary Revolutionary Front for Advancement and

Progress of Haiti (FRAPH), so that the Government of Haiti may carry out the task of contributing to the search for truth and the administration of justice, as the (UN's) Independent Expert requested in his report."

The so-called "Four Friends of Haiti" – Venezuela, France, Canada, and the United States – then discussed the Haitian amendment. While the delegations of the first three countries accepted it, the United States

objected, saying that inclusion would threaten consensus on the resolution as a whole, and the amendment was omitted from the final resolution. The single opposition of the US was enough to deprive the whole UN Human Rights Commission of the opportunity to vote on the issue.

While collecting over one hundred more signatures for the international petition demanding the return of the FRAPH/FADH documents at the City of London Carnival against Capitalism, Haiti Support Group coordinator, Charles Arthur said, "Everybody can see the blatant hypocrisy when right now in the Balkans all the talk is of apprehending and prosecuting war criminals, while the crimes committed in Haiti during the 1991-94 coup regime remain hidden from view. We assume that the US wants to protect the culprits, who include former CIA employees such as the death squad leader, Toto Constant, and perhaps US agents as well."

Meanwhile, the US organisation Human Rights Watch has announced plans for a campaign modelled on efforts to extradite Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet from Britain. It has prepared a list of exiled former leaders who it contends should be tried on charges of murder, torture and other abuses. The list includes Jean-Claude Duvalier, who fled to France, Raoul Cédras, former army chief of Haiti, currently living in Panama, and Emmanuel 'Toto' Constant, former chief of the FRAPH, who lives in New York City.

New UK link with Haiti

David Ward, the British Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, visited Haiti in April, and made the following statement to the Press:

"With the setting up of an embassy in Santo Domingo, and with the improvement in relations between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, it seems opportune to propose to His Excellency, President Préval that the United Kingdom henceforth be represented in Haiti by an Ambassador residing in Santo Domingo, and not in Kingston, Jamaica, as before. This transfer of accreditation explains my presence here today."

"The people of Great Britain and Northern Ireland wish the Haitian people well, especially at this stage in the democratisation process. It is very important that the Provisional Electoral Council is able to accomplish its task of encouraging the participation of all the political parties in elections that are free, honest and credible, and that take place safely before the end of this year. I believe that the Haitian people deserve these elections and are expecting the full

involvement of their political representatives. Great Britain, through its financial contributions to multilateral institutions such as the European Union and the United Nations, is prepared to assist with this objective, and will support the allocation of the development funds that the country needs."

Published by the **Haiti Support Group**, Trinity Church, Hodford Road, London NW11 8NG
● Phone & fax: **0181 201 9878**
● Email: **haitisupport@gn.apc.org**
■ Editor: **Charles Arthur**
■ Designer: **Andy Smith**
■ Printed by **East End Offset Ltd**, London E3