Before the September 1991 coup d'état, 1,500 sacks of charcoal per month were shipped from Jérémie on the western tip of Haiti's southern peninsula. Now, over two years later, that figure has risen to over 4,500. This simple statistic points to the despair of rural populations who are increasingly driven to cut their trees to earn money. The heavy rains of May carried unprecedented amounts of topsoil into the sea. Inette Durandis, member of the National Association of Haitian Agriculturalists, was even more pointed. Studies conducted by her organisation show how over half a million peasants have mortgaged their crops and, worse, their land, in order to capitalize their needs. She anticipates the continuation of the political impasse and, as a direct consequence, the expropriation of peasant land by unscrupulous speculators and money-lenders.

I was in Haiti for a couple of weeks waiting for Aristide's return in fulfilment of the Governor's Island Accord. I met political leaders, army and police chiefs, the leadership of the ghastly 'attachés', and representatives of the business class as well as people living in the slum districts of Port-au-Prince. None of them could give me a convincing answer to the question I put repeatedly: 'How will Haiti get out of the mess it's in?' The one group that's taking advantage of the vacuum which currently exists is known as FRAPH (Force Revolutionnaire pour l'Avancement du Pays d'Haiti). It wants President Aristide, Army Chief Cédras, and UN Envoy Caputo to resign. The FRAPH leadership (linked closely to the 'attachés', the police-backed thugs who roam the streets with guns imposing terror on city neighbourhoods) wants to play a key role in a new approach to the solving of Haiti's seemingly intractable political problem. Its spokesman is smooth-talking Emmanuel Constant, son of an Army General and nephew of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Gonaïves (two grounds for treating him with extreme caution!).

But, on examination, it's a jumped-up bunch of opportunists, tied old men, and nobodies. To hope for enlightenment from this source is like waiting for cockerels to lay eggs.

So the political efforts run into the sand. Port-au-Prince and the Haitian economy grinds to a halt. But the increase in Jérémie's charcoal trade and the mortgaging of peasant land should inject a new note of urgency into the search for a solution. A whole people, their economy and their environment, are on the verge of total collapse. A WAY OUT HAS TO BE FOUND.
The truth, the whole truth and nothing but...

The trouble is Clinton has a particularly big credibility problem on Haiti. One of his first acts as President was to renew the Executive Order excluding Haitian boat people in direct contradiction to his campaign promises. But perhaps the most incredible feature of the last month's revelations was the admission that the Haitian national intelligence agency, SIN, set up by the CIA in 1986, has become a major drugs smuggling vehicle.

The same CIA that is at the forefront of the drugs fight was funding a 'liaison' organisation whose anti-narcotics smuggling intelligence allowed it to eliminate rivals to become the biggest drugs smuggling operation in Central America. Gamekeeper becoming poacher with a vengeance, it seems.

It's not the first time the CIA has been involved in drug running. Indeed, I seem to recall that someone called Ollie North ran cocaine in to secure US airforce bases to fund his arms-for-hostages, 'off-the-books' alternative foreign policy.

There's more to come on this. The political embarrassment of the failures of US policy in Haiti has set the North American press digging deeper than ever before. In mid-November the CIA-SIN link made the front page of The New York Times, which now has three top journalists working on the story.

Time magazine also excelled itself with a three-page article entitled 'Friends Like These'. The weekly drew attention to a series of names which will ring bells amongst those who reported the CIA's covert actions in Central America in the 1980s - veterans of previous US capers in the region, as Time put it.

I suspect that the drug smuggling some of us drew attention to as long as two years ago - now worth up to US$500 million a year in Haiti according to some intelligence chiefs - will eventually emerge as the key plank in the CIA's strategy to help Cédras, François and co. stay in power. These profits have been crucial to both their ambition and motivation to survive sanctions.

The question now is how the CIA been as amateur in uncovering their tracks in Haiti as they were in Central America? How strong are the political connections to US Senators like Bob Dole and Jesse Helms - the chiefs of staff of the 'Discredit Aristide' army on Capitol Hill? Watch this space. Meanwhile get a grip, Clinton. Do they ran you or you run them?
UN beats a Haiti retreat

by Leah Gordon

On Saturday October 16th the UN hurriedly evacuated its 270 observers from the Civil Mission in Haiti. These were the foot soldiers in a complex political process with the supposed aim of restoring democracy to Haiti and Aristide to his rightful place as President.

To this day the Mission, culled from human rights organisations all over the world, languished in expensive hotels in the Dominican Republic awaiting their unlikely return to Haiti. As the repression rises in Haiti they still enjoy their salary of $6,000 a month plus a daily subsistence rate of $87.

Since the UN Mission's beginning, in early 1993, many onlookers have expressed their dissatisfaction with its operation. To the Haitians the Mission represented a life-saver, in reality it was a group of people preparing reports.

An observer said of his work, 'I just sit in the office and people come in and tell me the worst horror stories. They need material help, a safe house, money to leave town, due to harassment from the army.'

When they realise that all I'm going to do is write a report they are incredulous and they feel deeply let down.

Scandals have rocked the Mission. A female co-ordinator from St Lucia, working in the Northern Department, was revealed to be having an affair with the local military commander. This was not the only incident where the Mission got too close to the ruling powers. In Gonaives another co-ordinator was perceived to have struck up a rather cosy relationship with the 'chef de section'. During his daily visits he would spend most of the time sharing jokes and gossip. This caused a rift in the office. The UN had to act quickly moving half the employees to other bases and replacing the co-ordinator.

By September many papers had begun to report the lavish lifestyles of the observers. Newsweek ran a story entitled 'Great work if you can get it.' Most of the observers lived above Port-au-Prince in Petionville, home to the Haitian elite. They could be found most nights in the opulent French restaurants light years away from the poverty of downtown Port-au-Prince.

Then on September 16th there came the tragedy of Antoine Izemery's assassination at a memorial service held at the Sacré Coeur. The Malval government had requested extra security but the UN had only one car in the area which did nothing to deter the killers.

Out of extreme embarrassment, a week later at Izemery's funeral, they deployed all five of their vehicles at the prerequisite safe distance. This did not prevent the attachés from surrounding the church after the service whilst Pere Adrien and Pere Masco, two pro-Aristide liberation priests, were still inside. They were finally led to safety by Deputy UN Chief of Mission Colin Grandison about two hours later.

Colin Grandison is concern for the safety of the Mission employees sometimes appeared to neutralise the real effect of the Mission itself. One observer said 'Some days I felt that I would have to find out what was happening from a journalist as they were the only people who could get close enough to events to witness them.'

Finally the confidentiality of the reports that were being filed has to be questioned. These reports represented a fascinating dossier of Lavalas members and supporters.

On the Canadian UN police arrived they demanded full access to the files, even though they were mandated to work with the Haitian police. There were rumours in the Port-au-Prince office that at least two of the observers were working directly with the US Embassy. People started to be very wary about their files. The day after a report was filed civil mission observers were expected to verify the given address by a personal visit in a UN marked vehicle. Many soon refused because of the danger this could place their informants in. This led, it is rumoured, to the falsification of addresses on the reports. Increasingly, the verification of reports seemed to come before the safety of Haitian people.

Dante Caputo - going, going, gone

In simple fear, has deserted. His trousers are smeared from top to bottom.

At the manse, Father Jean Yves asks us to wait and then to accompany the padres. We agree, but then the most senior police officer on the scene demands that we leave the street. I reply that as the observers, we have the right to continue our monitoring. His reactions make it clear that it is only the power of weapons that counts in this country.

It is a rerun of what happened a week ago, when they forced a UN car to leave and a few minutes later dragged Antoine Izemery from the church and shot him. I call over the radio that the director of the UN-mission arrives at the main portal of the church and we drive into the yard of the manse. For once we have achieved something in a critical situation.