



*Under the eye of a UN soldier ballot boxes are brought in to be counted.*

*Photo by Leah Gordon.*

# One step forward, two steps back

**H**aiti's parliamentary and local elections on June 25 resulted in a commanding victory for the Lavalas platform (PPL) supported by President Aristide. Lavalas candidates were outright winners of 5 out of 18 seats in the Senate, and 16 out of 83 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. As for the remainder where there was no clear majority, Lavalas is well-placed to win most of the second round contests. Sixty two out of the 82 mayorships for which results have been announced were won by the PPL.

Largely free of the anticipated political violence, the elections were however marred by organisational chaos which disrupted voting and the count. Problems, ranging from polling stations opening late and, in some cases, not at all, to cases of ballot burning and ballot stuffing, were reported at more than 2,000 of the 10,000 polling stations.

Most international observers agree that the irregularities did not reflect orchestrated fraud nor did they benefit any political party in particular. Even so the losing parties have rejected the results and threatened to boycott postponed and run-off elections scheduled for August.

Problems arising from the actual mechanics of the voting process can probably be resolved, and there is little doubt that the result was a true reflection of the political choice of those who did vote. A more worrying issue must be the absence of any great public enthusiasm for the elec-

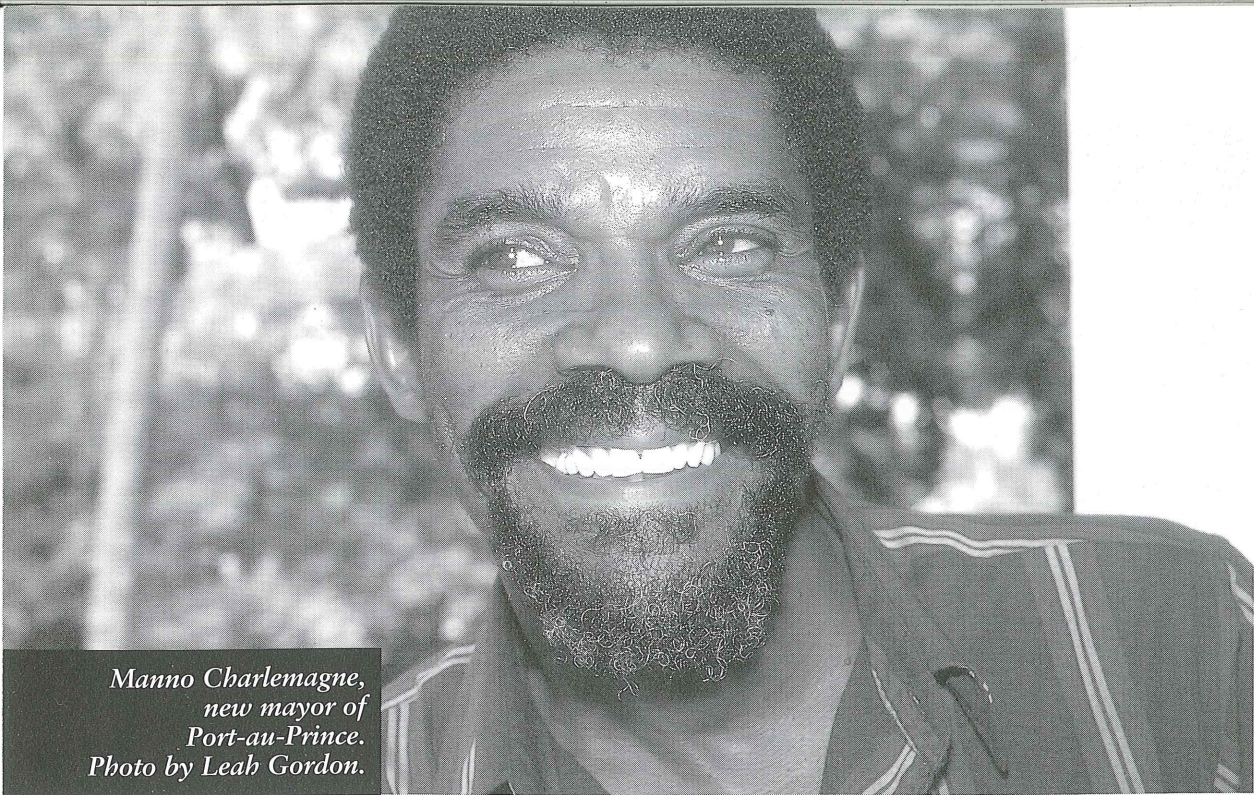
tions, illustrated by a turnout probably somewhat lower than the 50% estimated by Organisation of American States observers.

In the capital, Port-au-Prince, few had a good word to say for an election that sometimes felt like it was being held for the benefit of a foreign audience.

One explanation for the evident lack of interest may have been the incredibly low-key electoral campaign. With none of the parties offering up anything much more than the vaguest 'feel-good' slogans, and posters featuring their candidates' photos, this was 'democracy' of the most superficial kind. In Cite Soleil one person told the IPS journalist, "We do not know the candidates, they have never even put in an appearance here in our district during the campaign. We do not have any candidates but we will vote for whomever President Aristide asks us to."

Brian Atwood, head of the US Agency for International Development, called the elections "a very significant breakthrough for democracy", but he was clearly not referring to a participatory democracy of the type that was developing in Haiti in the late 1980s. The demobilisation of a formerly politically active population, and the increasingly pivotal role played by a President ever more distant and removed from the roots from which he sprung, are backward steps for Haitian democracy.





Manno Charlemagne,  
new mayor of  
Port-au-Prince.  
Photo by Leah Gordon.

The position of Mayor of Port-au-Prince is regarded as the second most important post after that of president. It is, considering the lack of resources at hand, also a daunting task to make any positive changes to the sprawling, dirty, urban domain under your authority. One of the key contests in the recent elections was that between incumbent mayor, Evans Paul, and Manno Charlemagne, a radical singer/songwriter recently returned from exile.

In the 1990 elections Evans Paul, previously Aristide's campaign manager, was swept into office with 80% of the vote. He is highly respected amongst the international community and has for some time enjoyed the support of US diplomats. Therefore many people were surprised and a lot of feathers were ruffled when in the June election Manno gathered 45% of the vote, leaving Evans lagging behind with just 18%. "I feel that the votes for me will be protest votes against Evans Paul, because the people do not trust him anymore. They do not know where his money is coming from", said Manno.

Evans Paul, 39, was a popular playwright and radio broadcaster in the mid-eighties. He gained notoriety for his satirical and humorous broadcasts under the name of Comrade Pen or K Plim, as he is known on the streets. After the fall of Baby Doc he set up KID, an organisation which launched a national campaign in civic awareness. He suffered a series of arrests and beatings by the military for his beliefs.

In 1990 KID formed an alliance with other small centre/left parties to create the FNCD. Their aim was to oppose Marc Bazin, the US and World Bank's favourite contestant, in the 1990 elections. Their original Presidential candidate, Victor Benoit, had a very slim chance of winning,

and FNCD asked Aristide to replace Benoit just before registration of candidates closed. Aristide won with 67% of the vote but tension between Aristide and the FNCD quickly developed. The FNCD did not feel justly rewarded when most of the cabinet seats were awarded to non-party figures.

In 1991, after the coup, Evans narrowly escaped with his life but continued to live in hiding in Port-au-Prince. Soon differences between Evans Paul and Aristide began to manifest themselves. In the UK in 1993 Evans criticised Aristide for depending too heavily on a small group of advisers, for not doing more to encourage the development of a strong party, and for not working with the FNCD in the parliament. More recently many in the grassroots movement became wary of Evans because of the large amounts of money, several million dollars, which his foundation received for civic education on democracy from USAID. There were suspicions that by accepting these grants Evans had been co-opted by the United States. It certainly did not go unnoticed that Aristide failed to endorse Evans in the election and unofficially backed Manno.

Manno Charlemagne, 47, stood as an independent candidate using a red guitar logo, but there seemed to be an unspoken link between himself and Lavalas. "I can be the Lavalas mayor after being elected, but before that I'm an independent structure, everyone knows me like that. I wrote the Lavalas anthem 'Aibobo Pep La'. But I am the reason that Lavalas have not fielded any other candidate. I have helped them before, if they need some help I will give it to them."

Emmanuel Joseph 'Manno' Charlemagne was born in Carrefour, a slum

# Battle for City Hall

by Leah Gordon

area on the south road leading out of Port-au-Prince. As a teenager he became involved in "political and cultural" activities in his area. By the mid-seventies, Manno had become a popular street singer, one of the few who publicly dared to criticise the Baby Doc's regime. In 1980 he was expelled by the Duvalier government and lived in exile in Canada, France and the United States. He returned to Haiti in 1986 a month after Baby Doc left the country. He remained in Haiti sometimes in hiding, sometimes in the open, campaigning for Father Aristide. A couple of days after the coup he was arrested but managed to escape to the Argentine embassy, and thus began another three years in exile.

Manno's campaign relied heavily on posters carrying his photo and his guitar emblem. But the campaign failed to communicate to the people any cohesive policies for the future of Port-au-Prince. In an interview with the Haiti Support Group in June he said that he hoped to commer-

cialise Haiti's carnival in order to produce more revenue for Port-au-Prince.

"Everything is emergency in Port-au-Prince," he said, "we have a lot of work to do, to build schools, canteens and health centres." Manno plans to ask the trained technical personnel of Haiti to give their labour for nothing to help get the city back on its feet. "They must remember that they went to school on the shoulder of the poor of Haiti, so now they must give their support. Good people must give their time for no money on some Saturdays or some Sundays."

Manno hopes to get support from progressive NGO's in Europe to avoid dependence on USAID. "I'm going to travel in northern Europe to ask progressive people and groups 'how can they help me to fight the struggle against poverty in Port-au-Prince?'" Though Manno opposed the American intervention, he says that he will adhere to the president's new programme of economic liberalisation. "I don't agree with this new deal but we will have to participate with the new system. I am a pragmatist. They are here now and I will deal with them."



President Aristide casts his vote.

Photo by Leah Gordon.

# Peasants organise to build their own solutions

Since the Haitian revolution two hundred years ago Haitian peasants have been more or less left to fend for themselves. Governments taxed peasant farmers but gave almost nothing in return. New roads and bridges built during the first US occupation only facilitated the expropriation of peasants' land by foreign businesses and larger landowners.

In the early 1970s peasants in the Central Plateau began organising and working together, and the Peasant Movement of Papaye (MPP) was born. Forced to maintain a low profile for years, the MPP expanded rapidly after Duvalier's fall in 1986. Links with other peasant organisations were made and in March 1991 the National Peasant Movement of the Papay Congress (MPNKP) brought together representatives of over 100,000 organised peasants.

In March this year a Special Congress of the MPNKP brought together 424 peasant delegates. The following extracts are from *The Peasant*, the magazine of the MPP Education and Development Fund:

JUSTICE was one of the hottest issues discussed during the Congress, with delegates voicing their frustration over the slow pace of government initiatives in this area.

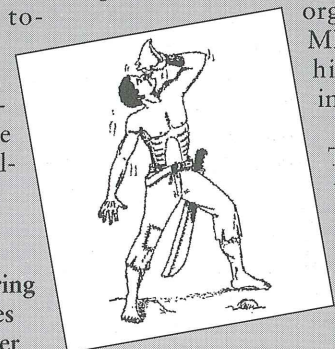
In looking at issues surrounding food production, the peasants' analysis of the root causes of hunger led them to condemn 'food aid' and to call instead for a concerted government policy aimed at producing national production by initiating agrarian reform, constructing irrigation and storage facilities, providing credit and supporting efforts to reintroduce the hardy Creole pig stock destroyed in the 1980s by USAID programmes.

The peasants demanded the right to participate in the political, social and economic affairs of their country. They denounced the planned structural adjustment programme and its privatization of state run industries. One peasant mused, "Once they sell off everything that is supposed to belong to us, will they begin to sell us too, like they used to sell us to the Dominican government?"

Opposition to the US occupation surfaced with complaints that the US troops have protected the repressive forces, refused to carry out disarmament, pressurised popular organisations and controlled the actions of the Haitian government.

Regarding elections the peasants made a clear distinction between elections, which are generally used by the elites to further their own agenda, and democracy, which is measured by people's participation in the political, economic and social affairs of their country.

*The Peasant* concluded that the Congress provided further evidence that the process of regrouping and reorganising the MPP and the MPNKP is in full swing, and highlighted the following initiatives:



THE MPP headquarters in the village of Papaye, which was ransacked by the Haitian military during the coup, was repaired in time to host the conference. A new

training centre is under construction.

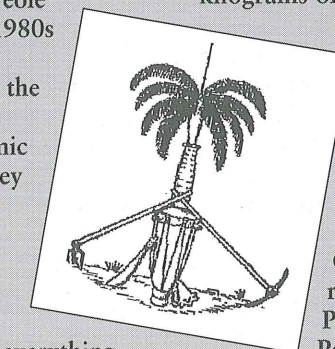
MPP efforts at reforestation have been boosted with the reopening of 10 tree nurseries capable of producing millions of seedlings.

Small livestock cooperatives and credit programmes have been re-launched. A poultry project will allow 10,000 chicks to be sold to peasants at affordable prices. An apiary cooperative will guarantee that over 6,000

kilograms of honey can be collected, stored and sold, and production can be expanded. Expansion of the credit programme will enable more women's groups to start small businesses.

On the last day of the Congress the MPP's new radio station—Radio Vwa Peyizan (Voice of the Peasant)—was inaugurated.

With a staff of five, the station broadcasts five hours a day to 50,000 people with programmes of news, education and music.





# Libète under threat

**T**he only Creole-language newspaper in Haiti may be forced to cease publication. Libète is in the midst of a financial crisis brought about by a 40% increase in the price of newsprint paper, and by the cancellation of a Canadian organisation's grant.

Libète was founded in November 1990 with the aim of giving the majority a chance to read and get informed in Creole, the language spoken by all Haitians. At the time of the 1991 military coup the weekly paper's circulation had risen to 6,000. Publication resumed in mid-1992 and, although vendors were beaten by the military, and death threats forced the paper to close three times, Libète was able to increase its circulation. A special issue on the return of Aristide last October sold 25,000 copies.

According to its director, Father Jean-Yves Urfié, Libète's support for democracy was not the only reason it was persecuted by the Haitian military. "All other papers are in French, which is the language of the very small elite. Creole was hated for a long time and called inferior due to linguistic ignorance. It was also political be-

cause it (the French language) isolated peasants from everything in national life. So when you use Creole, it's already a political thing because you are including the peasants."

Now, as Haitians strive to make some sense of the Aristide government's support for US plans, and of the impending economic changes imposed by the IMF and World Bank, a real battle over information and ideas is under way.

Earlier this year Father Urfié declined a grant from the US Agency for International Development (AID), fearing that the paper's independent line would be fatally compromised. He believes that there may well be some connection between his rejection of the AID money and the cutting of the Canadian grant a short time later.

There are rumours that new AID-funded and right-wing Christian fundamentalist Creole-language newspapers are about to be launched. If true, and if Libète closes, the potential for planned literacy programmes to help progressive political development, particularly in the countryside, will be tragically undermined.

Selling for only one gourde a copy (approximately 5p) so that even the poorest sectors of the population can afford it, Libète's financial position has always been precarious. But, with help from the international community, there was a real prospect that the paper would become economically self-sufficient next year.

In December Libète hoped to have its own printing press up and running, so reducing production costs considerably. There were also plans to extend distribution to the Haitian communities in the US and the Dominican Republic which would open up the possibility of greater advertising revenue.

All this is now jeopardised by the threat of closure, and Father Urfié has appealed for emergency assistance. This appeal in the UK is being coordinated by the Haiti Support Group.

■ **Father Jean-Yves Urfié will visit London at the end of August as a guest of the Haiti Support Group.**



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