

*Rocks of crack cocaine on sale in Cité Soleil.*

*Photo by Fuminori Sato*

## Crack appears in new police force

**C**hristmas came early last year for people of the sleepy hamlet of Flamand, located on a remote stretch of Haiti's southern coast. They'd probably heard about snow from relatives of those emigré Haitians who endure the winter climes of New York and Montreal. For a few days in early November, they got to find out about another kind of 'snow' popular with North Americans when a boat from Colombia ran aground on a nearby shore.

The locals chased away the crew and discovered a haul of cocaine estimated to weigh in the region of two tons. The canny peasants realised they'd hit it rich. One told a reporter, "People here are so poor...cocaine has become as much a dream as winning the lottery." But they weren't the only ones hoping to enjoy the massive windfall represented by this shipment of white powder. In the words of an international narcotics adviser working in Haiti, "There was a lot of cocaine, and everyone went crazy."

As news of the ship-wreck filtered out, in the days and nights that followed, the usually peaceful area echoed to sound of four-wheel drives and gun shots. The drug-traffickers and police arrived in force to try and recover the booty. A local couple were found murdered within days, and then a truck full of cocaine was stopped at a routine police road-block in the nearby town of Aquin. In the ensuing shoot-out, one trafficker was shot dead, and another wounded.

From then on things started to get really fishy. The wounded man

was revealed to be the driver for the recently resigned Minister of Haitians Living Abroad. Then, after the 150 kilos found in the truck were deposited at the closest police headquarters, in the city of Miragoane, 10 kilos went missing, and seven police officers were themselves arrested. This came as no surprise to the local MP in Aquin who told the press that the local police were involved in the trafficking, and had even lent a police car to a drug courier. The plot thickened when the Miragoane justice of the peace, and two other members of the local judiciary, were arrested and charged in connection with the theft.

Only 150 of the original estimated shipment of 1,814 kilos were accounted for. So what happened to the rest of it? Maybe the Flamand peasants, following the advice of a local priest, had spirited it away and found buyers. But in some parts of Haiti a kilo of cocaine now sells for as little as 17 US dollars, and the big bucks are, of course, to be made by selling the drug in North America. No doubt the majority of the haul will have been transported to northern Haiti and smuggled into the States aboard Haitian boats. Which leaves the question of just who is running the drugs transshipment operation in Haiti? The following week, at least two more police officers, this time in an unnamed northern city, were reported to have been charged with possession of a further 84 kilos.

*Sources: Haitian Press Agency and Reuters*

# The tool

by Leah Gordon

## A Short History of the Cocaine Trade in Colombia

In Colombia cocaine trafficking is a bloody and ruthless business, but exceptionally profitable. It is controlled by cartels, the robber-baron capitalists, of which the most renowned are the Cali and Medellín. The origins of the cartels can be traced back to small-time smuggling operations for marijuana and emeralds in the 1970s. Many areas in Colombia were suitable for the cultivation of high grade marijuana but in the late seventies the US put pressure on the Colombian government to eliminate the crop. Using 10,000 troops and extreme brutality towards the peasants, they succeeded in wiping out the cannabis merely to replace it with unemployment, poverty and a far more lethal cash crop - cocaine. By the early eighties, coca production had started in earnest, concentrated in the Amazon region of San Jose del Guaviare.

The origins of the fierce brutality inherent in this trade lie in Colombia's turbulent history. In the late forties and fifties there existed a violent rivalry between the Liberal and Conservative parties, known as La Violencia. Over 250,000 people died during this decade which ended with the formation of an alliance called the National Front. The agreement guaranteed that no other political force other than the Liberals or Conservatives would have any access to power. When the



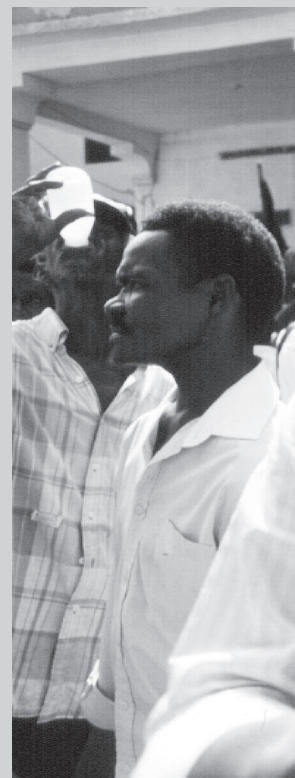
Peasant picking coca leaves in Bolivia (Julio Etchart)

drug cartels emerged in the early 1980s they swiftly applied the twin lessons of La Violencia, group allegiance and feral violence. These brutal traits combined with strong business acumen were soon to propel the cream of the cartels to the summit of the international drug business, finally controlling an estimated 70-80% of the world's trade. The cartels recognised that there was more profit in the processing and distribution of the cocaine, to both the US and Europe, than in merely growing the coca crop. Before long Colombia became the marketing centre for its Andean neighbours and fellow coca cultivators, Bolivia and Peru.

Most of Colombian society has been affected by the cocaine traffic. The early eighties was a boom time for the Colombian peasant. Cultivation of narcotics brought them far more cash and a better developed infrastructure than the state had ever offered. The cartels understood that the profits would be greater if the peasants and small farmers grew the crop whilst they cornered the distribution. But after a while the small farmers became processors and merchants in competition with the traffickers. This was aided by the re-emergence of the Communist guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The guerrillas were the only organised power capable of imposing order and protecting lives. The leaders clearly understood that a peasant base with illicitly gained wealth would be an unconditional ally and a generous economic benefactor. They mandated that the farmers grow food as well as coca which protected the farmers and maintained public order. The US vilified the FARC calling them 'narcoguerrillas' implying that there was little difference between the FARC and the drug cartels. But the peasants were clear - the insurgents were their defenders. This precipitated the 'dirty war' which lasted between 1986 and 1989. The cartels aligned with members of the traditional élite, landowners and members of the armed forces to wrestle back control of the area. The war cost the lives of thousands of peasants, workers and left-wing activists. The guerrillas withdrew from the area and the cultivators returned to their status as simple low-paid producers. It seems clear from this history that similar allegiances could and would be made in any other country whose internal affairs stood in the way of the distribution of drugs.

## The Trade Routes of Cocaine in the Caribbean

The distribution of the cocaine is having a dreadfully disruptive effect on the Caribbean region. The Colombians, having recognised that the largest proportion of the profits lie in the distribution of cocaine, are ruthless in protecting established routes and very persuasive in opening new ones. The traditional passage into the US used to be via Mexico but by the mid-eighties this was



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illed by cocaine in 1993 (Leah Gordon)

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rate in the world. Ninety per cent of all crimes in Puerto Rico are drugs-related, and Antigua has become the newest offshore banking centre for laundering the drugs cash. In Trinidad, witnesses testifying against a cartel boss, accused of murder, had their food poisoned, their jaws shot off and their families executed.

Whilst it is mostly those in power on the Caribbean islands who stand to gain from the traffic, those at the bottom suffer the fallout. The Colombian cartels compensate local traffickers with cocaine rather than cash, usually awarding them with 40% of the shipment. It is, of course, in the interests of the local dealers to create a desperate and addicted local market. This tends to be in the slum areas where life is bleak, and the need for escapism is a priority. As the number of small local dealers increases, competition gets stiff, and the result is bloodshed of poor against poor, dog eat dog. This divides communities rendering them incapable of organising themselves to demand improvements in their conditions.

## The Haitian Drugs Experience

Since the mid-eighties, a steady stream of evidence has emerged which links Haitian military leaders to the drug trade. Patrick Elie, Aristide's co-ordinator for Haiti's anti-drug programme said at a press briefing that "...drugs has become the engine that drove the military and overwhelmed the island's commerce."

Drugs mainly from the Cali cartel, would come into Haiti, sometimes exiting through the Dominican Republic, ending up in Puerto Rico. Two witnesses have testified at US Senate hearings to Haiti's involvement in the drug business. A former Medellín cartel operative swore that he met both the police chief Michel François and General Prosper Avril at the office and ranch of Pablo Escobar, the chief of the Medellín cartel in the mid-eighties. Drugs money was fuelling the increasingly lavish lifestyles of the high-ranking military officers, and buying loyalty from the lower ranks. The transshipment of drugs through Haiti was soon acknowledged to be a major perk of the job. Lt. Colonel Michel François consolidated his role in the business immediately after the coup by taking control of the capital's Port Authority. This placed him in a perfect position to shift large quantities of cocaine through Haiti. There are also claims that he had an airstrip built on his ranch to facilitate drops.

After Baby Doc Duvalier fled Haiti in 1986, the CIA created an intelligence network in Haiti supposedly to gather information about drug running. In the National Intelligence Service, with the propitious acronym of SIN, an unbridled beast was born. Instead of stemming the flow of drugs through Haiti, most of the staff of SIN actively took part in the drug running. Each year the CIA spent between \$500,000 and \$1 million on equipment and training for SIN that evolved into a military organisation which simply distributed drugs extremely efficiently. The only intelligence that was gathered by SIN was usually about, and used against, their political enemies, those who supported change in Haiti. Members of SIN were involved in machinations against Aristide and his supporters, and three of SIN's chiefs were named by the US Treasury Department as 'people who seized power illegally and contributed to the violence' during the 1991 coup.

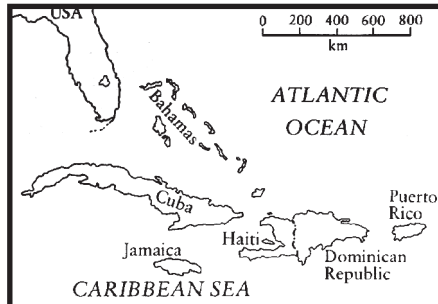
More than a 1,000 Colombian nationals live in Haiti, and, as there is no perceivable economy, there must only be one thing keeping them there. Aristide promulgated a strong anti-drugs rhetoric during his period in office. The cartels were brutal in order to protect their business interests in their own country - it would be interesting to know what level of involvement they had in the Haitian coup. The drugs continue to pour through Haiti, and the number of cocaine users in the slums is increasing dramatically. The once highly politicised community in Cité Soleil is now descending into a fragmented mess, smaller and smaller dealers scrapping over pathetic slices of drug-selling territory. It looks as if democracy and organisation has fallen to the drug barons and their tool of apathy - cocaine. Haiti is still the perfect prey to the drugs trade, pay is low and poverty is rife. Keeping the influence of drugs out of both the policing and governing of the country is going to be almost impossible.

# Cuba - the threat of a good example?

**“W**e know about Cuba. If you live there you can get a good education without having to pay, and they have health centres and hospitals. We would like to have those things in Haiti.” These words were spoken by a member of a peasant organisation in the village of Milot in northern Haiti, in February 1996, a few days after Jean-Bertrand Aristide, in the last act of his presidency, restored diplomatic relations between Haiti and Cuba.

The two Caribbean neighbours' official divorce occurred in the early 1960s when some opponents of the Haitian dictator, Papa Doc Duvalier, based themselves in Castro's Cuba. The exiles' botched attempts to launch invasions from Cuba were easily crushed by Duvalier's forces, but Papa Doc played up the danger for the benefit of the other party in the relationship - the United States. He used the threat of Communism, both that posed by a Cuban invasion, and by dropping unsubtle hints that Haiti might be tempted to follow Castro's lead, to procure millions of dollars of US aid, nearly all of which ended up in his personal bank accounts. The reciprocal nature of this arrangement was highlighted in 1962 when the US wanted the Organisation of American States to condemn Cuba, and, despite its arm-twisting diplomacy, found itself one vote short of the necessary two-thirds majority. In stepped Haiti, changing its position from an abstention to a vote in support of the US line. Needless to say, US aid to Haiti, i.e. to the Duvalierists, increased.

Diplomatic contacts between Haiti and Cuba were ruptured for over three decades, cutting a link established when, between 1913 and 1931, an estimated 450,000 Haitians worked in Cuba as seasonal sugar cane cutters. Although large numbers were repatriated when the



sugar industry declined in the 1930s, thousands remained there. When the Haitian *racines* music group, RAM, toured eastern Cuba in 1996, they encountered many descendants of the original *braceros* still speaking Haitian Creole.

The short distance between the two countries across the Windward Passage permits sporadic maritime traffic, reflected in the prevalence of Cuban cement found on sale in the Artibonite department of central Haiti. The sailors' exchange of ideas and experiences per-

haps also accounts for the nickname of Amio Metayer, a leader of the Popular Democratic Organisation of Raboteau, a seaside slum in the port of Gonaives, who is known as "Cubain."

It is not surprising that some Haitians, who see the pitiful state services in their own country being further eroded by the blind adherence to free market economics, cast envious glances at their Communist neighbour. While all social indices collated by international organisations show that, in terms of health, education, literacy, and working conditions, Cuba is a leader in the developing world, and rivals much of the developed world, sadly Haiti continues to sink nearer the very bottom of the list.

The peasant leader in Milot approved of the move to renew official links, but added that because of it, "the American troops won't be leaving Haiti just yet." He was right - the UN troops may have departed, but 500 US troops are still there.

## updates

■ **Workers producing clothes for Walt Disney** in Haitian sweatshops are continuing to struggle for better pay and conditions. In October and November, over 150 workers, most involved in workplace organising, were sacked by one of the main Disney sub-contractors, but leaflets calling for collective action still circulate in the factories. The workers' organisation, Batay Ouvriye, recently let us know that, as a result of unfavourable publicity in Europe and North America, Disney has made contact with them with a view to discussing their grievances.

■ **The Haiti Support Group conference on tourism in Haiti** took place in London in November. One of the participants, Rénald Clérismé, speaking on behalf of a number of Haitian grassroots organisations, suggested that, at a time when the very fabric of Haitian society is in tatters, investment of effort and money in the development of tourism was inappropriate. Nonetheless, he agreed that tourism will take off in Haiti, and that it was extremely useful to learn of the experiences of neighbours, such as the Dominican Republic and Cuba. A booklet summarising the conference will be published by the

Haiti Support Group shortly.

■ **The Channel Four documentary film, A Pig's Tale**, looking at one of the most controversial episodes in recent Haitian history, was broadcast in October with a viewing figure of 1.2 million. If you missed it, PAL video copies are available at £12 each, including post and packing, from Parisio Productions, 56-58 Clerkenwell Road, London EC1M 5PX. Tel: 0171 250 3630. For NTSC copies, contact Crowing Rooster Arts, 180 West Broadway, Room 302, NYC, NY 10013, USA. Tel: 212 334 6260. Fax: 212 334 6263