

# Democracy's Death

Haitian dissidents find themselves the targets of massive repression.

BY BEN TERRALL

**I**N SYNC WITH ITS GRANDIOSE CLAIMS about building democracy in the Middle East, the Bush administration is promoting new elections in Haiti in October and November as the great hope for the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. Yet, while Washington provides diplomatic, political and military support for the Haitian government of Interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, hooded police and death squads are systematically repressing political supporters of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Aristide's Lavalas Party is still the Haitian political organization with the most popular support by a large margin. Months after the February 29, 2004, coup that drove Aristide from office, Conrad Tribble of the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince conceded, "If there were an election held today, Lavalas would win." But today, Lavalas partisans can barely go outdoors safely, while the right-wing paramilitary leader Guy Philippe, who was trained by U.S. Special Forces in Ecuador in the '90s, has launched his own political party, the Front for National Reconstruction.

In the beginning of February 2004, Philippe led U.S.-trained paramilitaries across the border from the Dominican Republic in attacks on Haiti's second largest city, Cap-Haitien. Also directing the paramilitary attacks was Louis-Jodel Chamblain, former second-in-command of the Revolutionary Front for Haitian Advancement and Progress, an anti-Lavalas death squad that the CIA helped create in 1993. In the following two weeks, these forces emptied Haiti's prisons; among those set free were anti-Aristide death squad veterans from the 1991-1994 coup period. The new regime has now filled the jails with government officials, teachers and Lavalas supporters.

Thomas Griffin, a Philadelphia immigration lawyer, interviewed both poor slum dwellers and rich elites in Haiti for a report recently published by the University of Miami's Center for the Study of Human Rights. The report noted, "Haiti's security and justice institutions fuel the cycle of violence. Sum-

mary executions are a police tactic. ... Haiti's brutal and disbanded army has returned to join the fray. Suspected dissidents fill the prisons, their constitutional rights ignored. As voices for nonviolent change are silenced by arrest, assassination or fear, violent defense becomes a credible option."

Much of the repression has occurred under the watch of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), established by the U.N. Security Council on June 1, 2004. A March 2005 report by the Harvard Law Student Advocates for Human Rights and the Global Justice Center notes that the mission was endowed "with a strong mandate in three principal areas: providing a secure and stable environment, particularly through disarmament; supporting the political process and good governance in preparation for upcoming elections; and monitoring and reporting on human rights," but it has "made little, if any, progress on any of these three fronts."

The Harvard report concludes: "MINUSTAH has provided cover for abuses commit-

ted by the HNP [Haitian National Police] during operations in poor, historically tense Port-au-Prince neighborhoods. Rather than advising and instructing the police in best practices, and monitoring their missteps, MINUSTAH has been the midwife of their abuses." The report also attacked the United Nations' unwillingness to protect civilians from political violence, saying, "the failure to do so when civilians beg for U.N. assistance is simply incomprehensible."

## Violent imprisonment

Father Gerard Jean-Juste, famous in both Haiti and the diaspora for decades of service to the poor, is still working on the ground in Port-au-Prince. On October 13, 2004, masked Haitian police arrested Jean-Juste as he was feeding hundreds of hungry children at his parish.

Latortue claimed there was a warrant for Jean-Juste's arrest, but no one ever produced the document or any evidence linking the priest to a crime. This means the arrest was in violation of Haiti's con-



**Supporters hug paramilitary leader Louis-Jodel Chamblain, who was released by the Latortue regime after an overnight trial that Amnesty International deemed "an insult to justice."**

stitution, but the U.S. State Department explained this away, saying, "Haitian legal experts have told us that under Haitian law, the government can hold Father Jean-Juste for up to three months in his current status while finalizing the case against him." A State Department spokesperson also assured reporters that Jean-Juste was being "lawfully held."

But as one of Jean-Juste's lawyers, Loyola University New Orleans professor William Quigley, put it: "The situation here is very bad—there is no real law except the law of the powerful."

On November 29, Jean-Juste was released for lack of evidence. He told *In These Times*, "A guy like me is lucky." While imprisoned, his wrists were cuffed so tightly that circulation hadn't completely returned in one hand, but "they didn't beat me." Twelve of his fellow cellmates had been beaten so badly "their heads were broken."

In contrast to Jean-Juste, Ted Nazaire's case received no international attention. Nazaire was arrested after fighting with his brother. Because a judge happened to be passing by when the fight occurred, a warrant actually was filled out for his ar-

rest, unlike most of his fellow inmates. A tall, muscular man of 26, Nazaire spent four months in prison until his mother resorted to bribing a judge to gain his release.

While in prison, Nazaire witnessed the bloody December 1 massacre of prisoners by guards at the National Penitentiary—the same day that Colin Powell was engaged in a high-profile meeting with Latortue. Nazaire estimates that police systematically killed at least 60 prisoners. Other eyewitnesses, including Radio Megastar journalist Saby Kettny, who saw police firing machine guns from a catwalk at prisoners, confirm that mass executions took place. According to the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, on December 1, only 22 of the 1,041 prisoners in the National Penitentiary had been convicted of a crime.

The swollen eye, knot on his head, and bruised arms and legs testified to the severe beating Nazaire received from guards who threatened to kill him if he talked about the massacre. Nazaire and his family have since gone into hiding for their safety.

### A complicit media

Jean-Juste says that on most Haitian radio stations "everything bad happening this week

will be blamed on Lavalas." The stations, primarily owned by elites who opposed Aristide's efforts to increase the minimum wage and advance other progressive initiatives, have demonized Lavalas for years.

The press owner's association, the National Association of Haitian Media, is a member of the Group of 184, an anti-Lavalas outfit masquerading as a civil society umbrella group that spearheaded the coup with funding from the U.S.-based International Republican Institute (itself an arm of the National Endowment for Democracy). Between 2001 and 2003 the European Commission contributed approximately \$890,000 to organizations affiliated with the Group of 184, and the U.S. Agency for International Development allocated more than \$3 million. This funding occurred during the U.S. aid embargo that financially paralyzed the Aristide government.

Andre Apaid Jr., the Group of 184's leader, is a factory owner who founded Haiti's main TV station, Tele-Haiti, and led the 2003 campaign opposing Aristide's decision to double the minimum wage. For the University of Miami report, Griffin talked to numerous sources who described Apaid's support for the Port-au-Prince gang leader Labanyé, who had terrorized the city's residents before his

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