



Immigration and
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration
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HTI 102951.FE

Haiti: The Struggling People's Organization (Organisation du peuple en lutte, OPL) political party, its founding members, and its past and current leaders; whether Evans Paul, current leader of the Nation. Change and Democracy (Front national pour le changement et la démocratie, FNCD), was one of the founding members of the OPL; whether the OPL issues membership cards; if so, the procedures for obtaining a card and whether members must have one.

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

OPL: from the Lavalas Political Organization (Organisation politique Lavalas) to the Struggling People's Organization (Organisation du peuple en lutte)

The Lavalas Political Organization (OPL) was founded in 1991 (*PHW 2008* 2008, 546; OPL Jan. 2000; Référéncé n.d.), during the 1991-1994 military regime (AlterPresse 4 Mar. 2004) and President Aristide (IRSP 11 Sept. 2008). The OPL officially became a political party in 1995 (Political Scientist 11 Sept. 2005) and brought together five movements (*Le Monde diplomatique* Oct. 1997; *Volcans* Jan.-Feb. 1997) [translation] "the Little Church (petite Église); an organized peasant movement; a more radical movement of the years 1975-1980; a movement of socialists, communists and nationalists; and a movement composed of people who were never organized but who supported change, were patriots and supported President Aristide" also *Le Monde diplomatique* Oct. 1997).

Although initially the OPL was affiliated with the pro-Aristide Lavalas movement (*Volcans* Jan.-Feb. 1997; Haïti-Référence n.d.; OPL n.d.; see also AlterPresse 4 Mar. 2004), it completely dissociated itself from the Lavalas movement when it became the Struggling People's Organization (OPL Jan. 2000; Haiti Democracy Project 2004). During its first convention in January 1997, the organization decided to change its name (OPL Jan. 2000). According to several sources consulted by the Research Directorate, this split resulted primarily from a split within the Lavalas Political Organization, which gave rise to the Lavalas Family (Fanmi Lavalas) party and the Struggling People's Organization (*PHW 2008* 2008, 546; *The Independent* 23 Oct. 2004; FOCAL June 2004). The split was confirmed in the legislative elections in April 1997, when each party ran its own candidates (IRSP Crisis Group 18 Nov. 2004, 6).

Founding members and leaders of the OPL

In 16 September 2008 correspondence, a political scientist originally from Haiti who is currently a member of the International Center for Information and Documentation on Haiti, the Caribbean and the Afro-Caribbean Community (Centre international de documentation et d'information haïtienne, caribéenne et afro-caribéenne, CIDIHCA), a cultural institution located in Montréal, sent to the Research Directorate the following list of founding members of the Lavalas Political Organization, which was obtained from an OPL staff member:

1. Gérald Pierre[-]Charles
2. Irvelt Chéry
3. Sauveur Pierre Etienne
4. Jean Louvier Elie
5. Héra[r]d Pauyo

6. Patrick Norzéus
7. Rosny Smarth
8. Marc Romulus
9. Ernst Mathurin
10. Evans Lescouflair
11. Ed[ga]rd Leblanc
12. Adeline Chancy
13. Suzy Castor
14. Paul Déjean
15. Paul Denis
16. Gabriel Bien Aimé
17. Chavannes Jean Baptiste
18. Max Chancy
19. William Kénel-Pierre
20. Charles Manus

(16 Sept. 2008c)

However, two sources consulted by the Research Directorate provide only the name of Gérard Pi as founder of the OPL (IRSP 11 Sept. 2008; *Le Monde* 14 Oct. 2004).

In a 1995 article in the magazine *Volcans*, Suzy Castor, one of the OPL's founding members, is q stating that the OPL originally wanted to distinguish itself from other political parties by moving away f organization built up around a [translation] "'leader'" to instead being a [translation] "collectively man. organization comprising national coordinating body and a seven-member executive" (*Volcans* Jan.-Feb

The following information comes from the OPL's website and concerns the organizational structur in 2000:

[translation]

The Struggling People's Organization (OPL) is led by:

A nine-member executive committee. The general coordinator is Professor Gérard PIERRE-CHARI and the primary members are

Senator Irvelt CHERY, International Relations

Paul DENIS, former senator and senatorial candidate

Sauveur Pierre ETIENNE, Secretary of the executive committee

Rosny SMARTH, former prime minister.

A political committee comprising a varying number of members includes the nine-member execu committee, as well as the following:

The elected OPL senators

The speakers of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, if they are elected OPL members

Representatives of the OPL's parliamentary group in the Chamber, managers and experienced le

The most well-known of these figures are

Edgard LEBLANC Fils, current Speaker of the Senate

Suzy CASTOR, Senate candidate for Ouest department

Vasco THERNELAN, former president of the Chamber of Deputies and candidate for a seat in the Chamber. (OPL n.d.)

In its January-February 2005 newsletter *Potekole*, the National Democratic Institute for International Democracy and Self-Governance reported that, during its second convention held from 17 to 19 December 2004, the OPL voted to reorganize its leadership team as follows:

[translation]

Edgar Leblanc Fils, General Coordinator
 Ernst Mathurin, Vice-Coordinator
 Rosny Smarth, Vice-Coordinator, Training
 Paul Denis, Vice-Coordinator, Information
 Sauveur Pierre Etienne, Vice-Coordinator, International Relations
 Suzy Castor, Executive Secretary
 Claude Jean François, Vice-Secretary
 William Kenel Pierre, Treasurer
 Milton Chery, Vice-Treasurer

Five of the nine executive committee members elected during the second OPL convention are also listed in a 20 December 2004 *AlterPresse* article. The same source also reports that Edgar Leblanc replaced the late professor Gérard Pierre-Charles (*AlterPresse* 20 Dec. 2004).

In a 7 July 2008 article, the Haitian daily *Le Nouvelliste* published a list of 13 members of the OPL executive committee following elections held during the third national OPL convention of 4 to 6 July 2008:

[translation]

Edgard Leblanc Fils, General Coordinator; Andris Riché, Assistant General Coordinator; Anick Josué, Training Coordinator; Ernst Mathurin, Organizational Coordinator; Pierre-Paul Harry Marsan, Communications Coordinator; Suzy Castor, International Relations Coordinator; Roland Étienne, Finance and Budget Coordinator; Eloune Doréus, Executive Secretary; Anthony Jean-Louis, Assistant Executive Secretary; Paul Denis, Vasco Thér[n]elan, Arthur Papillon and Rosny Smarth, Advisers

In an 11 September 2008 telephone interview, the Political Scientist and CIDIHCA President provided the names of most of the members of the OPL's leadership as they appeared in *Le Nouvelliste*. He also sent correspondence to the Research Directorate that provided the following information: During the third OPL convention, the executive committee was expanded from 9 members to 14, and Evans Paul has never been a member of the OPL (Political Scientist 6 Sept. 2008b). This information could not be corroborated among sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

OPL membership cards

In additional correspondence, the same Political Scientist stated that since 1995, the OPL has issued a large number of membership cards, but only through the OPL headquarters (*ibid.* 16 Sept. 2008a). Further corroborating information on the existence of OPL membership cards could not be found among any of the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive on the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in preparing this Information Request.

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Oral source: Attempts to contact the OPL were unsuccessful.

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