

Electoral Sham in Haiti

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Few people anywhere have suffered more for so long, yet endure and keep struggling for change. For brief periods under Jean-Bertrand Aristide, they got it until a US-led February 29, 2004 coup d'état forced him into exile where he remains Haiti's symbolic leader - for his supporters, still head of the Fanmi Lavalas (FL) party he founded in 1996 to reestablish links between local Lavalas branches and its parliamentary representatives.

From then to now, nothing has been the same. UN paramilitaries occupy the country. Washington effectively controls it. President Rene Preval got a choice - go along or pay the price. He submitted knowing what awaits him if he resists. Nonetheless, he's disappointed bitterly.

Haitians suffered dearly as a result, deeply impoverished, at times starving, denied the most basic essentials, plagued by violence, a brutal occupier, police repression, an odious and onerous debt, and exploitive sweatshop conditions for those lucky enough to have a job in a country plagued by unemployment and deprivation.

Elections, however, are regularly scheduled and held, the latest for April 19 - democratic in name only, this time for Haiti's senate. Here's the problem. On February 7, AP headlined: "Aristide Allies, Ex-Rebel Barred from Haiti Vote." It refers to Haiti's Provisional Election Council's (CEP) February 6 disqualification of Fanmi Lavalas candidates on procedural grounds. At stake are 12 open seats in the 30-member body, ones vacant since early last year after 2007 elections were postponed when Preval dissolved the CEP because of infighting. Delays persisted after food riots, a prime ministerial ouster, parliamentary wrangles, and last summer's catastrophic hurricanes from which the country has yet to recover.

Radio Metropole reported that "at least 40 of the 105 (registered) candidates....were rejected" with CEP officials unavailable for comment. Expecting protests, it barricaded its headquarters in anticipation.

On March 9, a Haitian judge ruled the CEP's action invalid at the same time thousands of FL supporters demonstrated in Port-au-Prince during Bill Clinton and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's visit. They demanded reinstatement of FL candidates and reintegration of the party overall, the one Haitians support overwhelmingly and want elected to serve them.

A week earlier, FL sued the CEP for excluding its candidates on grounds that their registration papers lacked Aristide's signature, a first-time ever technicality. Judge Jean-Claude Douyon agreed in stating: "The political rights of the Lavalas have been violated" and ordered their "reintegration," provided "each individually meets legal standards."

They had, and according to one of their lawyers, Camille Leblanc: The CEP “had no justification for its arbitrary decision of exclusion, since the Lavalas political organization had fulfilled all the requirements to participate.” At the time, it was unclear if CEP would yield. Constitutionally, it’s the “final arbiter” on all election matters and in the past ignored court orders.

At the same time, huge crowds massed in front of the National Palace awaiting a Clinton, Ban Ki-moon, Preval press conference. They had signs, banners, and T-shirts displaying Aristide’s image, and from a sound truck asked Clinton to tell Obama that since the “kidnapping of our president....(our) situation has only worsened.” One demonstrator told Haiti Liberte: “We are waiting for the soonest possible return of the president....and if Lavalas is not part of the elections, free and fair (ones) will not take place.” In addition, Preval was denounced as a traitor, and repeated chants were “Down with the MINUSTAH,” the UN paramilitary occupiers.

Clinton and Ban Ki-moon were there for a purpose – to bolster Washington’s control, support the military occupation, encourage local sweatshop industry, boost Rene Preval, keep him weak and subservient, diffuse popular anger, put a friendly face on a repressive MINUSTAH, and convince Haitians that jobs and aid are coming, repeatedly promised in the past, then reneged on so Haitians expect nothing this time. It’s why they support Lavalas, denounce Preval, and demand Aristide’s return.

On April 3, they were reminded again when Preval’s Justice Minister, Jean-Joseph Exume, fired Judge Douyon, accusing him of corruption in an unrelated case in retribution and as an excuse to ignore his decision. However, Douyon responded that Exume threatened him not to hear the case saying that Haitian courts have no authority to overrule the CEP. As a result, Preval’s handpicked Council is “final arbiter,” meaning Lavalas is excluded and Haiti’s democracy is an illusion.

Earlier, the coup-installed Latortue regime tried a similar stunt to prevent Preval’s 2006 election and almost succeeded. Only massive street protests forced it’s hand to let Preval’s victory stand – a very dubious one considering how impotent he’s been ever since, enough to arouse Haitians openly to denounce him with just cause.

Sham elections will be held on April 19, shamefully with Preval’s approval. Once again, Haitians will lose out. Their long overdue rights will be denied, the result of Obama continuing the same hard line policies as George Bush.

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