Jockeying for position
On 12 January 2015, the mandates of a second third of the Haitian Senate and of the whole of the lower house expired, leaving Haiti without a legislature. This was due to the failure of President Michel Martelly to hold any legislative or local elections since he took power in March 2011. Since then, Martelly has been governing by decree.

In the face of increasing unrest on the streets, and the barely disguised exasperation of his backers in Washington, Martelly resigned himself to the necessity of holding elections in 2015.

According to the Haitian Constitution, the body that organises and oversees all elections is the Conseil Electoral Provisoire (Provisional Electoral Council). The Constitution, in fact, provides for a Permanent Electoral Council but the formal conditions for its creation have not once been met in the 28 years since the constitution was promulgated. A new CEP was duly constituted on 21 January 2015.

Who controls the CEP controls the election process, and so eyebrows were raised when Pierre-Louis Opont, a prominent local businessman, was named president of the CEP. Opont had been director-general of the CEP that had fraudulently engineered the ‘election’ of Michel Martelly back in 2011 (see HB78). He had even openly admitted his involvement in that electoral coup d’état.

The first task of the new CEP was to deal with the scandal surrounding other electoral bodies: if the CEP has overall control of the electoral process, at the level of the geographical Departments and the Communes, the process is organised and monitored by ten BEDs (Departmental Electoral Offices) and 140 BECs (Communal Electoral Offices) respectively.

Competitive examinations are held for the positions of president, vice-president, and secretary of those bodies. Those examinations had been marred by accusations of fraud and blatant cheating. After investigation, the CEP decided to rerun the examinations in some Departments, but simply plaster over the cracks in others. In any case, the process was not transparent.

On 2 March, the electoral timetable was published: on 9 August, the first round of elections for the 20 Senate seats, and elections for all 118 seats of the Chamber of Deputies; on 25 October, the second round of Senate elections and the first round of presidential elections; finally, on 27 December the second round of the presidential elections.

And they’re off!
The campaign was declared open by the CEP exactly one month before the 9 August ballot. Campaigning was ‘lively’: nine armed confrontations, five killings, five attempted killings, nine people wounded by firearms, ten people wounded by knives and machetes, seventeen hit by stones, and ten severe beatings. Little wonder, then, that polling day on 9 August turned into an ‘electoral fiasco’, in the words of one monitoring organisation.

The most comprehensive report on this ‘fiasco’ was compiled by a group of Haitian CSOs, namely RNDDH (National Network for the Defence of Human Rights), CNO (National Council for Election Observation) and CONHANE (Haitian Council of Non-State Actors). They were able to deploy some 1500 observers to just under 50% of the 1508 polling stations established across the country.

To describe the 9 August poll as ‘flawed’ would be a gross under...
The people have spoken – the bastards!

In this mid-December 1990 at the École Ar- gentine in Port-au-Prince and the votes are being counted by candlelight. About nine out of ten of the giant ballot papers unfolded and held up for scrutiny express a preference for Aristide and the FNCD (Natio- nal Front for Change and Democracy) ticket for president. By polling stations. One man, wearing a badge identifying him as one of President George Bush Sr’s personal observers, has seen enough: turning from the counting table and pushing through the crowd, he shouts, to no one in particular, ‘The people have spoken – the bastards!’

In Haiti’s first free and meaningful elec- tions, the people had embraced democracy with enthusiasm: more than 80% had turned out – defying the intimidation and violence metered out by the army and the PNH (Haitian National Police). Tens of thousands more were tortured, raped, or ‘disappeared’ by specially trained death-squads. The aim was to eliminate – by targeted assassinations – the leaders or would-be leaders of the popular movement and thus cure the people of their new-found thirst for democracy.

In 1993, Bill Clinton succeeded Bush Sr as US president but it was only when the body-count of drowned Haitians washing up on Miami beaches started to impact on his approval ratings, that Clinton decided to call time on the carnage in Haiti. The laughably ‘popularly-elected’ government by democratic process had returned to Haiti in October 1994, accompanied by 20,000 US Marines and about the same number of UN forces – the so-called Plan Monhez (American Plan).

By the due-date of the next elections (2000), the Clinton era had passed and a democratic slap in the face for para- political democracy. As it goes, 2004 was a nodal point in the political spectrum. Haiti’s ‘red’ and ‘green’ movement was dead. Haiti’s ‘green’ movement was dead. There is a slight swing towards the left – but it is still a long way off. President Aristide had exercised his popular sovereignty through the ballot box, and twice they learned that ‘democracy’ is a precious tool wielded by the local bourgeoisie and their foreign backers.

But the reprise is, as they say, history. As all but the most mousy could have predicted, the departure of Aristide was swiftly followed by invasion and occupation. This ‘democratic intervention’ of 2004–2006 – of the same slash-and-burn dwellers as under the junta of 1991–1994, perpetrated another round of Haiti’s endless cycle of ‘elections’ – under military occupation, in the context of a long-running campaign of a lethal cholera epidemic – one each tightening by the world economy’s thirst for ‘free trade’ masquerading as ‘freedom fighters’.

In this they were aided and abetted by far-right-wing elements of Bush Jr’s foreign policy establishment who succeeded in imposing an ‘international community’ of the world’s big governments (a UN ‘army’) to fund and train a well-armed insurgent force masquerading as ‘freedom fighters’.

The implications of the maths have been striking. One might have thought that after three years of his five-year term, in February 2004, time was long overdue for the re-election of imported ‘elections’ as under the junta of 1991–1994, perpetrated another round of Haiti’s endless cycle of ‘elections’ – under military occupation, in the context of a long-running campaign of a lethal cholera epidemic – one each tightening by the world economy’s thirst for ‘free trade’ masquerading as ‘freedom fighters’.

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These figures may go some way to explaining how Marins’s sitting successor for the presidency – Jovenel Moïse – emerged officially unscathed from the election, with a majority of 50% + 1% over 810,000 votes. There was no challenge to Moïse’s victory, and the accumulating evidence of massive fraud included in the

Vast Operation of Organized Elec- tion Fraud

The basic mechanism of the fix consisted in making sure that ‘real’ voters were stopped from voting by huge numbers of bogus electors. Whether the fraud was ‘made in Haiti’ or imported, as has so often been the case, the CEP itself was at the centre of operations. Who would have thought it? Not even the self-confessed election fraudster – who is, after all, the President of Aristide’s political party – President Pierre Louis Opont – a self-confessed election fraudster – would have guessed such a thing.

The CEP had, by one estimate, up to 900,000 accreditation papers fraudulently certified by election officials. Every single one of these was lobbied for and applauded not only, as one might have thought, by the foreign occupiers, teetering precariously on the brink of a possible withdrawal, but by the candidates themselves. This ‘democratic intervention’ was a fraud as under the junta of 1991–1994, perpetrated another round of Haiti’s endless cycle of ‘elections’ – under military occupation, in the context of a long-running campaign of a lethal cholera epidemic – one each tightening by the world economy’s thirst for ‘free trade’ masquerading as ‘freedom fighters’.

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Narcodemocrats

Amidst all the noise surrounding the August and October elections, did anyone even notice the names of the successful candidates for the Senate? One was Youyi Lartortue. Known as the ‘Godfather of the Abonite’, Lartortue is a former death-squad member (1991-1994), coupster (2004) and, allegedly, one of the biggest drugs barons in Haiti. Another was Guy Philippe. Having somehow evaded arrest by the DEA (multiple warrants have been issued against him), Lartortue’s fellow ‘freedom fighter’ of 2004 was placed first in the Senate race in his fiefdom of Grand’Anse.

Lartortue and Philippe are well-connected in Washington. But, when crack cocaine causes such misery on the streets of American cities, why would elements in the US foreign policy establishment be in bed with such notorious narcotics? Part of the answer to that question is provided by events in 2008. That was the year that the Mexican drugs cartels came to the rescue of the global capitalist system: HSBC, along with its partners in laundering liquidity by laundering, through its Mexican subsidiary, some $8 billion of drugs revenues. It was subsequently fined $1.9 billion for this ‘mistake’.

If the cost of running for office is so steep, what of the potential prizes? These began with the ‘campaign funds’ to which accredited parties are entitled. If you are lucky enough to actually get elected, then the rewards are commensurate to the office you hold. At the mayoral level, there are the usual profits that accrue from patronage and clientelism. If you are fortunate enough to have a secret airfield in your commune (there are hundreds of these dotted all over the country), you can also take a cut of the merchandise in-bound from Colombia. You may even use your official armoured SUV to transport it. To this can be added the large degree of de facto legal immunity enjoyed by holders of elected office.

The value of the kick-backs and the assorted prebends increases the farther up the food-chain you are. To the biggest fish, the biggest prize.

Legal Bandits

Since his ‘election’ in 2011, Martelly has increased the budget of the National Palace from an annual $2 million to $7 million, whilst his personal spending allowance has quadrupled to $20,000 per day! But this is small beer. Martelly has proved himself the equal of the Duvaliers when it comes to plundering the state coffers. His great innovation was the creation of a series of ‘funds’ that are anything but ‘public’.

In the case of Jovenel Moïse, it helped to be backed by a president willing to spend $3.5 million of taxpayers’ money on the services of one of the shadiest political fixers in Latin America. One service allegedly provided by Antonio Solá was the concoction of bogus opinion polls wildly exaggerating Moïse’s popularity.

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