

Photo identification cards for voters – a form of election engineering?

Photo by Leah Gordon

Chronicle of an election postponed

Elections for every single elected office in Haiti, save the Presidency and a third of the Senate, have been due since the end of 1998. Members of Parliament had blocked new elections by vetoing the President's nominees for a Prime Minister, and without a PM there could be no electoral council to arrange the elections. In early 1999, President Préval broke the stalemate by terminating a Parliament whose mandate had expired, and appointing a Prime Minister by decree.

Negotiations between Préval, his new PM, and some of the political parties, resulted in agree-

ment on a new cabinet of ministers, and the formation of an electoral council (CEP). Elections were set for November 1999, but, as early as August, logistical problems ruled this date out.

In October 1999, a new date was set for March 19th 2000. Then, only 10 days before voting was due to take place, the CEP pushed the date back to April 9th. President Préval, who is responsible for authorising the election timetable, heard of the new date on his car radio! He reacted by announcing that no date could be announced until the CEP had provided him with a comprehensive appraisal of the state of prepara-

tions for the elections. Finally, in mid-April, it appeared that the President and the CEP had agreed on the possibility of credible elections on May 21st.

As for who is to blame for this descent into farce, the rag-bag of self-styled 'opposition' political parties are united in pointing the finger at Préval, who is, they say, merely a puppet of the former President Aristide. Their 'theory' - one parroted ceaselessly by editorials and reports in the U.S. press - is that Aristide wants the elections delayed until the end of the year when he will stand as candidate in

the Presidential election. Simultaneous elections would, according to this the latest Haiti cliché, allow the candidates of Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas party 'to ride into office on Aristide's coat-tails'.

An alternative, and altogether more convincing explanation, is that, having had its fingers burnt by free elections in 1990 when Aristide's victory upset their plans, the United States is not about to allow it to happen again. In other words, obsessed with stopping the return to power of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the U.S. has engaged its many tentacles to influence, interfere with, and manipulate the electoral process in what amounts to a shameless and extensive bout of election engineering.

One of the first attempts to mould the political landscape was the International Republican Institute's 1997-98 effort to induce the whole panorama of anti-Aristide leaders, factions and particles to conclude a 26-party coalition. The coalition, that put old-style Duvalierists in bed with ambitious social democrats, quickly fell apart, and the hostile response of

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Chronicle of an election postponed

► popular organisations forced the IRI to leave the country.

A reliable coalition

A more subtle and successful initiative, which produced a coalition to take on Aristide was conducted by the New York-based International Peace Academy (IPA). In 1998, the IPA - a conflict prevention institution linked to the United Nations - hosted a series of meetings bringing together most of the leading figures from what passes as Haiti's political class. Representatives of Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas, and of grassroots peasant organisations were notable by their absence.

The fruits of the IPA dialogues were revealed early in 1999 when a new political coalition announced itself. The Espace de Concertation, a rag-bag of political retreats and opportunists, soon emerged as Washington's favourite, replacing the OPL party which had failed to use its majority in Parliament to good effect, and in any case, remained rather too independently-minded to be regarded as a reliable partner.

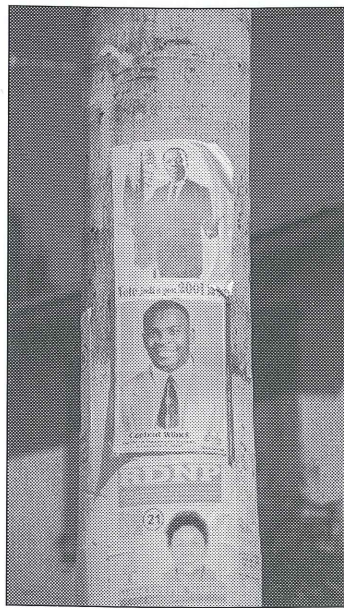
In March 1999, in a move that hardly equated with his apparently pro-Aristide tendencies, Préval had his officials negotiate a deal that resulted in cabinet posts for Espace members, and, more importantly, allocated three of the nine positions on the CEP to Espace nominees.

A controlled machine

Next, the United States took a tight grip on the election machinery through its proxy, the International Federation for Election Systems (IFES). Funded to the tune of \$8 million, IFES was given the task of assisting the CEP, and one of its first moves was to insist on a revamp of Haiti's electoral process, including the issue of photo identification cards to all potential voters. The cards were to be produced by a Canadian company with a grant from the U.S. of \$3.5 million.

On the left, concerns were voiced that the need for photo I.D. cards would be used to deter the poor majority from voting. These fears were later borne out when insufficient numbers of registration offices were set up in densely populated urban areas. Equally worrying were the accusations that registration office staff, appointed by the CEP, were in some cases working to further the interests of the Espace.

Contrary to widespread predic-



tions of a low level of election participation, the numbers registering or attempting to register to vote were extremely high, and this fact goes some way towards explaining the election date delays. Whether the Haitian people intend to use their cards to cast their votes, or just believe that possession of the card will be beneficial in some other ways, remains to be seen. However, with some reports suggesting that as many as 90% of

the four million strong potential electorate have registered to vote, the final result of the elections is clearly harder to predict (and harder to manipulate). Hence, the significance of the latest revelation of a possible election engineering tool.

Loyal election observers

Investigative journalist, Jean Dominique, (since assassinated, see centre pages) recently revealed that the Haitian National Council for Election Observation (CNO) had concluded an accord with the CEP that allowed election observers assigned by the leaders of the CNO "to observe the process and to take decisions" at all levels of the electoral process. The CNO, another product of the IPA meetings, is run by Leopold Berlangier, whose research institute received more than \$500,000 of U.S. funding in the late 1980s, and who helped the U.S.-favoured candidate, Marc Bazin, form a coalition to contest the 1990 elections. Today, Berlangier is head of the US-funded, conservative radio station, Radio Vision 2000.

Will these interventions guarantee the 'right' result? Watch this space.

Quick guide to the political parties

Espace de Concertation (EC)

Centre-right coalition composed of long-time U.S. favourite, Evans Paul's KID party; the Panpra party, part of the illegal coup regime government headed by Marc Bazin; and the social democratic, Konakom party, which supported the U.S. State Department's 1994 attempt to solve the coup crisis without the participation of the deposed President. Making up the numbers are two tiny groups, one lead by Claude Roumain, also a minister under the coup-time PM, Bazin.

Organisation du Peuple en Lutte (OPL)

Formerly supporters of Aristide's Lavalas movement, the OPL now characterises the former President as a corrupt populist, with dictatorial tendencies. It is essentially a social democratic party, proposing an alliance between the popular movement, the middle class, and progressive business interests.

Fanmi Lavalas (FL)

Formed by Aristide in 1996 after his split with the OPL. Proposes a collaboration between the public and private sector to reduce poverty, create jobs and do away with social inequalities.

Other than the general vision outlined by Aristide (see *Eyes of the Heart* - back page), is short on the specifics of its programme.

Mouvement Chretien pour une Nouvelle Haiti (MOCHRENA)

A new right wing Protestant group lead by Pastor Luc Mésadiou who claims he has been sent by God to save Haiti. Vigorously anti-Aristide.



Michelle Montas (left) with the body of her husband, Jean Dominique, at his funeral service. 15,000 people gathered at the national football stadium to pay their respects
Photo by Daniel Morel

Leading journalist assassinated

by the Information Service of the Centre for Research and Documentation (SICRAD)

Monday, 3rd April - the country is recovering from shock following the assassination of the celebrated journalist, Jean Dominique. The 69-year old Dominique was shot down in a hail of bullets on the forecourt of his radio station, Haiti Inter, on the Delmas road, between the capital and Petionville. The Radio Haiti Inter security guard, Jean-Claude Vilsaint, was also killed during the attack.

Jean Dominique would, as usual, have presented his morning programme, "Inter-actualité", and had arrived at the studios around 6.15am. He had just parked his car when someone opened fire, seriously wounding him. Quickly transported to hospital by another journalist from the station, Dominique however died from his wounds at around 7.30 am.

A visibly moved President

Préval, and his wife, Gerda, as well as other high officials, went to the hospital to present their condolences to the family and friends. Former President Aristide and leaders of his party were also there. Meanwhile, the police collected evidence from the scene of the crime in order to begin an investigation.

All morning, crowds of people massed in front of the Radio Haiti Inter studios - a place considered as a sword-bearer of the democratic struggle in Haiti. Among the democratic and popular sectors there was consternation.

The station, founded in the 1930s, (first leased by Jean Dominique in 1968) played a vital role in the struggle against the Duvalier dictatorship of 1957-86, and

had been closed down by the regime in 1980. Most of the journalists, including the director, Jean Dominique, were arrested and forced into exile. Back on air following the fall of Duvalier, Radio Haiti had to cease broadcasting again following the military coup against former President Aristide in 1991. Radio Haiti, like other stations, was attacked by the military, and the bullet holes are still visible on the outside walls.

Jean Dominique was known for taking a firm position against Macoutism, and clearly defined himself as a militant journalist for democracy. His editorials were widely followed. Recently, he had done his outmost to warn against rigged elections. His last editorial broadcast on 27 March raised questions

"The rich and powerful, and their associates, experts in crime, merchants of death, snatched Jean Dominique with the intention of killing the hope born on 7th February 1986."

about the accord between the National Election Observation Council (CNO) and the Provisional Electoral Council, and in particular about the considerable powers allocated to the CNO. (see Chronology of an election postponed)

For certain colleagues, the assassination of Jean Dominique is not unconnected to an electoral contest that is marked by increasing conflicts of interest.
(translated from French by Charles Arthur)

Reactions

Choiseul Henriquez, spokesperson for the President's press office, was convinced that Dominique was killed as a result of his political convictions. The crime was, he said, a serious assault on the freedom of the press. "It is paradoxical that it is not the power in place now that attacks the press. The executioners of journalists are in the opposite camp." He recalled that Radio Haiti Inter had recently been under pressure when certain sectors had withdrawn their advertising in reaction to the positions taken by the station director.

The united platform of popular organisations in the Grande Anse department (PINGA) claimed the assassination was directly linked to Dominique's position on the electoral process. "These assassins could not forgive him for the fact that he had denounced an electoral coup d'état in the making", said one of the PINGA leaders.

The left-centre Open the Gate Party (PLB) saluted Jean Dominique's work in the field of radio communications in Haiti. "Other voices will come to take his place in order to denounce the injustice and the inequality at the heart of Haitian society," said a spokesperson.

A coalition of Haitian women's organisations (Fanm Peyi d'Ayiti) invited all democratic and popular sectors to join a peaceful demonstration in memory of Jean Dominique. The coalition asked the government to explain to the country why it cannot arrest the coup makers, Macoutes and thieves, and put an end to impunity and injustice. It remarked that Jean Dominique had recently spoken out against the distributors of contaminated medicines, the controlled elections, the manufacture and sale of toxic alcohol, and against drug dealers.

Stephen Phelps of the Jean Marie Vincent Foundation said, "The rich and powerful, and their associates, experts in crime, merchants of death, snatched Jean Dominique with the intention of killing the hope born on 7th February 1986 (the date Jean-Claude Duvalier left Haiti)."

The former Environment Minister, Yves André

Wainwright, carried a banner on the 7th April demonstration asking the question "Where is the State?". According to Wainwright, the double murder of 3rd April bore many similarities to the assassination of Father Jean Marie Vincent in 1994. He remarked that the murder of the priest had satisfied certain large national business interests at the same time as it prepared the ground for the U.S. intervention.

Camille Chalmers of the Haitian Platform to Advocate an Alternative Development called the assassination a terrible blow for the democratic movement. He said it was "time for us to prove that we can gather together the democratic forces to defend the country." He spoke of the need for a real judicial reform, and the construction of a system that is truly at the service of human rights.

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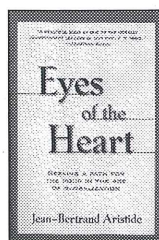
Recently published

Eyes of the Heart: seeking a path for the poor in the age of globalization

by **Jean-Bertrand Aristide (Common Courage Press)**

The leader of the once vibrant Lavalas movement, who was elected President in 1990 and overthrown by a military coup after only eight months, will almost certainly be elected head of state again at the end of this year. His new book is therefore of particular interest for the light it sheds on his current thinking and strategy.

Aristide clearly rejects the neo-liberal economic approach foisted on Haiti and other developing na-



a global economic system, in which we know we cannot survive, or we refuse, and face death by slow starvation." For Aristide, Haiti's only hope in this context is a "third way" that will utilise the poor majority's "wealth of experience, knowledge, skill, energy and power to mobilise".

In this short book, Aristide outlines his basic concept of "democratising democracy" by referring to the work of the non-governmental organisations with which

Aristide's "third way" will utilise the poor majority's "wealth of experience, knowledge, skill, energy and power to mobilise"

tions by international institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. Global capitalism is, he writes, "a machine devouring our planet." In his view, free trade and privatisation are damaging rather than helping Haitian economic development. Yet, such is the current dominance of the neo-liberal agenda, he argues that Haiti has found itself presented with a Hobson's choice: "either we enter

he has been involved. The Lafanmi Selavi orphanage for street children, and the Aristide Foundation for Democracy are the models of popular participation and collective mobilisation that Aristide believes can be extended across Haitian society as a whole.

The Lafanmi Selavi orphanage, founded in 1987, and its radio station, Radyo Timoun, started in 1996, are for Aristide examples of

how the energy and creativity of Haiti's young people can work for the progress of all. The Foundation for Democracy, also launched in 1996, provides more concrete examples of Aristide's vision of how to support the economic activities of the poor majority. It has a co-operative with 13,000 members who can obtain credit at low interest rates, purchase basic necessities at two-thirds of the market price, use public transport at reduced rates, and secure investment in co-operative agricultural projects.

Eyes of the Heart is short on detail, but does provide some idea of what a second Aristide administration would attempt. National economic production will be based on agriculture, and be driven by co-operatives in the countryside and in the urban informal sector. The people's potential will be realised by the provision of education - free education for every child, and literacy in Kreyol for every adult.

Yet, apart from the usual appeal to the Haitian diaspora, there is no suggestion of how this programme will be funded. Nor is there any indication of how to deal with the vested interests that must be taken on if such a transformation is to occur. After all, agrarian reform, an independent judiciary, progressive taxation, and import tariffs would all seem to be necessary parts of the Aristide plan.

Will this path lead the Haitian people out of misery and poverty? Aristide admits he cannot be sure, but stresses that Haiti has no alternative but to try.

Haiti, a priority for the Jubilee 2000 movement

Haiti's debt to international financial institutions and foreign governments has grown from US\$ 302 million in 1980 to US\$1.134 billion today. About 40% of this debt stems from loans to the brutal Duvalier dictators who invested precious little of it in the country. This is known as 'odious debt' because it was used to oppress the people, and, according to international law, this debt need not be repaid. The other part of the debt has been run up in recent years as Haiti has been lent money to carry out structural adjustment policies that rather than helping economic development are in fact damaging it.

Despite the fact that the debt

has provided next to no benefit to the majority of Haitian people, they are now suffering from the obligation the current government has to repay it. The servicing of this debt is estimated at more than US\$ 4 million a month - much more than the Haitian government can spend on public services such as health care.

The World Bank and the IMF have not included Haiti in the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) for debt relief to the countries who suffer most under the burden of debt.

For these reasons, people in Haiti have joined the international Jubilee 2000 Coalition. Nine thousand Haitians have already

Eighty-five per cent of Haiti's debt is owed to the World Bank and the IMF. The remainder is owed mainly to Italy (US\$ 58 million) and France (US\$ 47 million)

signed an international petition to demand the cancellation of 'Third World' debt. Earlier this year, the Jubilee 2000 Coalition took the decision to concentrate on Haiti, and to campaign for the complete cancellation of Haiti's debt this year.

ACTION:

Eighty-five per cent of Haiti's debt is owed to the World Bank and the IMF. The remainder is owed mainly to Italy (US\$ 58 million) and France (US\$ 47 million).

Support the Jubilee 2000 Campaign and the people of Haiti by writing letters to the World Bank and the IMF, and to the Presidents of France and Italy, asking for Haiti's debt to be cancelled. These letters should be sent in advance of the G8 summit in Japan starting on 23rd June. Model letters can be requested from the Haiti Support Group <haitisupport@gn.apc.org>