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’etat.

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.

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 Clinton administration illustrated its commitment to this “democracy” by decreeing that Aristide be allowed to run for a third term. Under the President only until the end of 1995 (which is less than 15 years (1991 and 2004) the Haitian president but it was only when the body-count of drowned Haitians washed up on Miami beaches started to impact on his approval ratings, that Clinton decided to call time on the carnage in Haiti. The laughably baptised “Operation Re- 
Stability” away into action with Aristide 
returned to Haiti in October 1994, accompanied by 20,000 US Marines and about the same number of French troops and Aristide and the FNCD (Na-

tional Front for Change and Democracy) ticket 

The basic mechanism of the fix consisted in making sure that “real” voters had been allowed to cast their votes by huge numbers of bogus electors. Whether the fraud was ‘made in Haiti’ or had been allowed, or had allegedly, been designed in Washington, matters little, what is beyond doubt is that the CEP itself was at the centre of operations. Who would have thought that the CEP was such an assistant to the presidency of Louis Pierre Opont – a 

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tech assistance of MINUSTAH; three more ‘elections’ — under military occupation, in the sense of UN Peacekeeping and the setting up of a lethal cholera epidemic — one each tightening the noose on the people who were under the impression that they 

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Voting booths (isolos) that 
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node the notion of the neoliberal agenda — the Plan Meriken (American Plan). 

Indeed, when Aristide was returned to office, 

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partout’) and they had seen no evidence of fraud. We do not know just how many observers the international community deployed, but it is unlikely that they matched the 2,400 fielded by just two Haitian CSOs (RNDDH and POGHDH). It is unlikely, also, that they saw the same things. POGHDH reported that its own observers were kept out of some polling stations while EU and other foreign observers were ushered in – presumably to be treated to the carefully stage-managed spectacle of a well-run ballot.

Mulrane used his interview to cast aspersions on the motives of all those who had cried foul, whilst leaving Martelly’s PHTK party whiter than white (or rather pinker than pink). And despite the fact that PHTK and Boulcier (another pro-Martelly party) had been, by all accounts, the most egregious offenders in both August and October.

Here is another paradox: never have there been so many candidates and political parties and so few voters willing to turn out to elect them. Why would elections be viewed as so vital by the former and so irrelevant by the latter? There were 232 candidates chasing one of the 20 Senate seats up for grabs, and no fewer than 1,621 candidates seeking one of the 118 seats in the lower house. The odds of success were even longer for the presidential candidates with 54 candidates seeking the ‘padded armchair’. Those candidates represented 128 different political parties. The inevitable result: a zillionaires’ prize for the lowest bidder. The rewards of political 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 a prebend. 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.

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 Youi Latortue. Known as the ‘Godfather of the Aristonion’, Latortue is a former death-squad member (1991-1994), coup leader (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), Latortue’s fellow ‘freedom fighter’ of 2004 was placed first in the Senate race in his fiefdom of Grand’Anse.

Latortue 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 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, America’s largest bank, was found to be laundering liquidity through its Mexican subsidiary, some $8 billion of drugs revenues. It was subsequently fined $1.9 billion for this ‘mistake’.

The cost of running for office is so steep, what of the potential prizes? These begin 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 a prebend. 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.

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Legal Bandits

Since his ‘selection’ 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 not open to public scrutiny and which are administered by him, his family and his cronies.

To date, there are nine of these: Industrial Development Fund; Public Investment Fund; Economic and Social Assistance Fund; Fund for the Management of the Collectivities; Road Maintenance Fund; Social Welfare and the Office for the Metamorphosis of Aid and Development Programs; the National Fund for Education; the Tourism Development Fund, and – perhaps the most cynical of all – the Inter-Haitian Solidarity Fund. And let us not forget his levy on money transfers and phone calls from the diaspora and the misappropriation of Petrocaribe funds. No wonder that he and his cronies are referred to as ‘legal bandits’ (after the title of one of Sweet Micky’s albums).

The art of the simulacrum

The elections of 2015 resembled nothing more than a second-rate play performed by ham-actors, and played out before an empty theatre: political ‘parties’ that are nothing more than an acronym atop a piece of grubby paper; ‘candidates’ turning up to vote armed with assault rifles (when you are already in bed with crime lords); polling stations where ‘equipment’ was less convincing than a low-budget stage-set; political tours disguised as election officials… As Haitian economist Gary Olius put it, months before the curtain went up on this farce: “In Haiti, we connive in pulling the wool over each other’s eyes in everything that concerns politics, democracy and the fate of the people… The art of the simulacrum… is embedded in our culture.”

And what of the stage manager? The international community requires that elections in Haiti be ‘credible’, that is that they bear just enough resemblance to the ‘real thing’ for them not to be laughed off the stage by a hooting crowd pelting them with rotten fruit. Here at the Haiti Support Group we thought that the bar of ‘credibility’ had been driven as low as it could go in 2011. We were wrong.

The most nauseating aspect of this thoroughly depressing spectacle has been the open contempt of the international community for the Haitian people: “we wouldn’t stand for it over here, but it’s good enough for them!”

Washington has finally arrived at its goal: the corruption of virtually the whole of the Haitian political class and the discrediting of the democratic process to such a point that the electorate would rather stay at home than legitimise it with their presence at the polling stations. In this tacky, deserted theatre it matters not one jot to Washington which party is handed power: there is only one role left to play – to remain that of a “driving-belt” for neoliberalism.