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*Elections in Haiti:  
Papering Over an Illegal Situation  
by the Haiti Action Committee*

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*"There is a growing consensus that there can be no free and fair elections in Haiti under the violent conditions that exist today. Nevertheless, the interim government is determined to hold elections in November of this year, despite rampant violence and the continuing imprisonment of Lavalas party leaders. Under these circumstances, it is hard to believe that the Haitian people would ever accept the results of the elections." – Congresswoman Maxine Waters (D–CA), August 23, 2005*

We are inclined to believe that elections are a key step in creating democracy. Yet the United States government has used rigged elections as an instrument to maintain control and domination for many years. In their 1984 book, *Demonstration Elections: U.S.–Staged Elections in the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, and El Salvador*, Edward S. Herman and Frank Brodhead explain the manipulative use of such elections to:

- "oppose and defeat popular movements"
- "ratify ongoing U.S. intervention strategies" and
- "reassure the U.S. home population" that the latest Washington–backed foreign war is justified.

The authors could have written this very book about the upcoming elections in Haiti this fall.

### **Recent elections in Haiti**

In 1990, Haitian voters elected Jean–Bertrand Aristide as president with a 2/3 majority, in the first free election with universal suffrage in Haiti's history. Aristide, a populist priest and outspoken advocate for the poorest of the poor, demanded a "place at the table" for all Haitians. He was promptly overthrown by a military coup in September 1991 (then restored to power by a U.S. led international force in 1994).

The movement led by President Aristide, called Lavalas, won elections for president in 1995, and then in 2000, under the banner of the Fanmi Lavalas Party, when Aristide was elected overwhelmingly for the second

time in the first democratic successions in Haiti's history. Despite his enormous popularity with the majority of Haiti's people, the United States government and the Haitian elite did everything possible after the election to discredit Aristide and Lavalas, including economic sabotage, aid embargo, funding the tiny opposition which had little popular support, and *fighting to prevent the holding of any future elections*, because it was clear that Lavalas would win.

### **The overthrow of constitutional democracy**

Finally a U.S.–supported paramilitary force of former army officers and death squad members occupied northern Haiti in early 2004, and the U.S. military kidnapped President Aristide and forced him into exile on February 29. The U.S., French, and Canadian governments installed an occupation government, led by Gérard Latortue, and the U.N. Security Council authorized a "peacekeeping" force, which entered Haiti in June, 2004.

In spite of a mandate to protect the people of Haiti, U.N. forces have allied themselves with the Haitian elites to destroy the Lavalas movement. They have been complicit in murderous attacks by Haitian police and paramilitaries on leaders of Lavalas and on the poor neighborhoods that support Lavalas. More than 1000 Lavalas activists and leaders have been imprisoned without charges. Thousands have been killed, and many thousands more live in hiding, unable to be with, or work to support, their families.

### **"Demonstration" elections**

In this context the United Nations now calls for "demonstration" elections to show the world that all is well in Haiti, while at the same time stacking the deck against Lavalas. In the last general election there were more than 11,000 registration centers, but in an August 2 report, the London–based Catholic Institute for International Relations wrote that this number "...has been slashed to less than 500 for the 2005 elections. This raises concerns about the ability of those living in rural areas to participate, as they have to walk much further or pay to reach the registration centers by bus. The location of the registration centers also appears to favor the wealthier urban voter and potential government supporter."

Reports out of Port–au–Prince vary as to the number of voters registered from a high of 2.5 million to a low figure of 870,000 out of a potential 4.5 million eligible voters. Abner Francois, director of the National Organization for the Defense of Youth (ORNADEJ), told Haitian media on August 23, that those living in traditionally pro–Lavalas districts such as Solino, Bel–Air, Delmas 2, Sans–Fil, and Cité Soleil, are finding it impossible to register due to the absence of voter registration offices. Yet there are three centers in the upper class suburb of Petionville.

The Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti notes, "Many of those who have registered stated that they did so because registration is required for the national identity card and that they have no intention to vote." Procuring identity papers in Haiti normally requires a fee; as there are no such fees associated with registering to vote, there is an obvious financial incentive to do so for the desperately poor majority of Haitians.

### **Legitimizing Illegality**

Why are the U.S., Canada, France, and the U.N. so determined to hold elections now, in this current state of chaos and repression, when they fought so hard to prevent elections while Aristide was president?

The goal of these elections is not to elect a representative government chosen by the people of Haiti, but rather to legitimize the ongoing process to eliminate Lavalas as a national movement and to demonstrate popular support for the candidate hand picked by the United States government. When Lavalas refuses to participate, the pro–election forces can cast them as the bad guys who are trying to prevent "free elections."

## The Black Commentator – Elections in Haiti: Papering Over an Illegal Situation

Unfortunately the corporate media offers no context for those unfamiliar with Haiti's electoral history to understand otherwise. Instead, the media gives voice to the paramilitary invective against the poor, calling them "bandits" and "rats." It refuses to acknowledge that the majority of Haitians demand the return of President Aristide, because he built schools, parks, and health clinics, and fully recognized Creole and voodoo, the language and religion of the poor – reforms that, until the coup, enabled them truly to participate in building Haitian democracy.

In El Salvador and Vietnam the opposition parties "were completely excluded from the ballot by law and/or the very real threats of murder." The same process is occurring in Haiti today, as USAID plots to eliminate Lavalas from the body politic, and the murderous police force hacks Lavalas supporters to death with machetes. While in Haiti, Aristide "could do no right," as his besieged presidency struggled to support the interests of the poor majority. Now the illegal coup government receives total international support, as it imprisons and slaughters pro–democracy activists, *who have twice elected the man they want to be president in truly free elections*. Any free society would consider elections a sham in which members of the most popular party cannot campaign because of threats of imprisonment or death, and such is the state of "demonstration" elections in Haiti today.

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