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Haitian Election Sends World a Message
by John Maxwell

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If you really want to know what's wrong with Haiti consider this: Last Thursday night, when it was clear that Rene Preval was getting something over 60% of the votes in the UN organized Haitian election, one of his opponents, the man coming second with about 12% of the votes was a former stand-in president, Leslie Manigat.

Manigat, recognizing reality, said that the trend suggested that Preval had swept the board and that there might be no need for a runoff.

The candidate running third, a millionaire sweatshop owner named Charles Henri Baker, had a different opinion. Mr. Baker, with about 6% of the vote, one-tenth of Preval's and half as many as Manigat's, was promising to launch an election petition, charging fraud, hoping to overturn the results.

I cannot imagine anything which more clearly illustrates the mind-set of Haiti's so-called ruling class, the Elite, whose rapacious greed, racist intransigence and bone-headed stupidity have provided the main roadblock in Haiti's 200-year-long struggle to establish a free and civilized society.

I don't think it is possible for anyone, anywhere else in the world, to believe that Mr. Baker's initiative makes any sense whatever. I don't believe that even in the US Embassy in Port au Prince or in the State Department itself that there is anyone who could believe that there is any way, short of assassination, to deny the people of Haiti their basic human rights after this week's demonstration of resolution and will.

For the last ten years, Charles Henri Baker and an assortment of freebooters like himself, notably fellow sweatshop owners Reginald Boulos and Andy Apaid, have been able to convince the United States that

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“populists” like Preval and Jean Bertrand Aristide do not represent the Haitian people. The Elite's stiff-necked refusal to cooperate, negotiate or participate in the democratic process recruited support from the most backward and primitive forces in US politics and effectively brought the operations of Haitian government to a standstill.

“Enhancing democracy”

They also managed to recruit the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, whose Jamaican heritage should have informed him that he and the rest of the world, were being samfied (conned) by the Haitian elite and their co-conspirators against democracy – the International Republican Institute, the National Endowment for Democracy and the Haiti Democracy Project, among others. Under the guise of "enhancing democracy" these apparatchiks sabotaged the hopes of the Haitian people for a new birth of freedom after generations of savage dictatorship initiated by the American invasion of 1915.

The American 1915 intervention was explicitly and essentially racist and was perhaps best exemplified by the notorious remark of the American Secretary of State at the time, William Jennings Bryan. Upon discovering the ethnic character of Haiti he was appalled: "Imagine!" he expostulated, "Niggers speaking French!" encapsulating for a century white American incomprehension of the humanity of people who don't look like them.

This incomprehension extended to the first black American secretary of State, Colin Powell, and even more strongly to his successor, another "brilliant African-American," Dr. Condoleezza Rice.

Powell bought the Elite nonsense so thoroughly that he was able to say, with a perfectly straight face, that President Aristide's "...failure to adhere to democratic principles has contributed to the deep polarization and violent unrest that we are witnessing in Haiti today... His own actions have called into question his fitness to continue to govern Haiti. We urge him to examine his position carefully, to accept responsibility, and to act in the best interests of the people of Haiti." And he suggested that President Aristide was corrupt and that the US with its high tech and pervasive reach, would very soon charge Aristide with high crimes and misdemeanors.

That was two years ago.

According to the North American pundits, the best interests of Haiti meant selling off the few national productive assets and accepting the wise guidance of people like Apaid, Boulos and Baker, all of them suspect as collaborators with the dictatorships under which they had amassed immeasurable wealth and power. Aristide was also supposed to accept the dictates of the International Financial institutions (IFIs), the World bank, the IMF et al, to mortgage his poverty-stricken country to foreign usurers to build super-highways and other hard infrastructure when what Haiti wanted was the development of its people first so they could handle the work of re-inventing and rebuilding their country.

One of the Poorest countries in the World

It wasn't that the US the World Bank and the IFIs didn't know what was needed.

“Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and one of the poorest countries in the developing world. Its per capita income – \$ 250 – is considerably less than one-tenth the Latin American average. About 80 percent of the rural Haitian population live in poverty. Moreover, far from improving, the poverty situation in Haiti has been deteriorating over the past decade, concomitant with a rate of decline in per capita GNP of 5.2 percent a year over the 1985–95 period.

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“The staggering level of poverty in Haiti is associated with a profile of social indicators that is also shocking. Life expectancy is only 57 years compared to the Latin American average of 69. Less than half of the population is literate. Only about one child in five of secondary-school age actually attends secondary school. Health conditions are similarly poor; vaccination coverage for children, for example, is only about 25 percent. Only about one-fourth of the population has access to safe water. In short, the overwhelming majority of the Haitian population are living in deplorable conditions of extreme poverty.” – The World Bank: *Challenges of Poverty Reduction*.

And they all pledged to support Haiti get her back on her feet. But the Elite, citing Aristide's supposedly divisive populism and dictatorial tendencies, convinced anyone who could help to put their investments somewhere else. The Elite despised “the ghetto priest” – as poor and black as his parishioners. Aristide nevertheless went ahead. Haiti wanted doctors; with the help of the Cubans he established a medical school for the children of the poor. Haiti wanted teachers; Aristide built more schools in his short time than had been built in Haiti in 200 years. Yet, to the foreign NGOs busy building “civil society” the man was a menace. They could not and would not work with him. They “knew” that in a fair fight they would not defeat him, so they refused to contest elections, because they would be stolen.

This time round the ground was better-prepared. Dozens of convicted rapists, torturers and murderers were let loose when the Marines took over. The Marines drove out the students and took the medical school for their barracks; their accomplices in “civil society” burned the new Museum of Haitian Folkloric history. They shut down the children's television station. It was clearly subversive of good government and capitalism.

Press freedom became a memory with journalists tortured and murdered. Leaders of the Lavalas popular movement were sometimes murdered, sometime simply imprisoned without charge. The Prime Minister was jailed, as was the country's leading folklorist, a 69 year old woman named Anne August who was arrested at midnight on Mothers Day 2004 by Marines using stun grenades to shatter her front door. They shot her dog and carried away her young grandchildren in handcuffs. She is still in prison.

Convicted terrorists were freed by a compromised judicial system and one of the most notorious and dangerous even ran for the presidency. The work of years in bringing the torturers and murders to Justice was undone overnight. The US installed “President” acclaimed the murderers as "Freedom Fighters". He was in good company; the Canadian representative of the OAS was on his bandwagon as he hailed the criminal resurgence. And Condoleezza Rice, with more doctorates than common sense, was ecstatic about the prospects of an election. After all, Lavalas had been silenced, the *chimeres* (Lavalas “terrorists”) had been murdered, the people were leaderless. When a leader stepped forward in the person of Father Gerard Jean Juste, a Roman Catholic priest like Aristide, he too was thrown into jail, prevented from becoming a candidate for President and only released two weeks before the election because he had been examined in prison by the internationally known Professor Paul Farmer and found to be suffering from leukemia. Not even the State Department could challenge that diagnosis.

Spreading “democracy”

All was set fair for democracy to sprout. In a country of 8 million people with 4 million voters spread over 28,000 sq. km (about the size of the US state of Maryland and nearly three times the size of Jamaica) there were 800 designated polling stations, about as many as would serve in the city of Kingston, Jamaica. There were three polling stations outside of the main slum cities adjacent to Port au Prince – to serve nearly 300,000 voters. There were none inside.

Condoleezza Rice had a message for the Haitian people. In an interview last September, before the election was postponed three times, her "message for the Haitian people is don't miss this chance to go out and vote

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and to decide your own future. There is nothing more important to a human being than to control his own future and the vote is the way to begin to control your own future."

"Nou lèd, Men Nou La!"

The election was expected to be a shambles in which anything could happen to frustrate the popular will: widespread violence, too few polling stations, too many voters convinced that the rich would get many chances to vote while they waited, shoeless and voteless, in mile-long lines under the hot Haitian sun.

Yet, suspecting the worst, the Haitians were disciplined and resolute. There was one violent incident in the whole country.

People fainted as they waited for hours to vote, were revived, waited again and no doubt fainted again. All were hungry, I am sure. But they were hungrier for their rights than for food. Despite all the odds, they made the election work. Despite the intimidation, the confusion, the bad faith and the UN peacekeeping forces, they made the election work. If ever there were a people deserving autonomy, it is the Haitians. They proved it 200 years ago, when the Enlightenment made a soft landing in Haiti, when in advance of France and the United States and the world, the Haitians abolished slavery and promulgated the inalienable Rights of Man.

They proved it again on Tuesday when they cocked a snook at their "benefactors" "Nou lèd, Men Nou La!" as they say in Haiti – "We may be ugly, but we are here!" or as we say in Jamaica "You a-go tired fi see mi face"!!

Preval won even in upscale Petionville.

And of course, we need to remember that despite this "election", there is no vacancy in the office of President of Haiti. The President of Haiti is alive and well. He has been prevented from discharging his duties by the illegal machinations of the United States, Canada and France, aided and abetted by Kofi Annan. Those characters are simply attempting to legitimize the illegitimate.

The Haitian people know this and have used the election to explain to the world, as best they can under the circumstances, that they want their democracy and their President back. Of course, the American viceroy in Haiti, Timothy Carney, doesn't buy that. Carney said he was not concerned about Préval's former alliance with Aristide and dismissed speculation that Préval would bring Aristide back to Haiti.

"Aristide is as much a man of the past as Jean-Claude 'Baby Doc' Duvalier is," Carney said in an interview. "I believe the electorate has absolutely understood that."

And of course, Mr. Carney, like Dr. Rice and Mr. Bush, know what the Haitians want – much better than the Haitians themselves.

Colin Powell was fond of speaking about what he said were "the Pottery Barn rules":

"You break it; you've bought it."

The United States, Canada and France broke Haiti on behalf of a thoroughly toxic Elite. The French already owed Haiti \$25 billion in blood money extracted by blackmail in the nineteenth century and the Americans, who financed that extortion at usurious rates, owe them even more, having destroyed Haitian governance, killed and exiled their leaders and deprived their landscape as well as their politics.

Will they do the honorable thing and pay for their depredations?

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Stay tuned.

Poetic Justice

They say revenge is a dish that men of taste prefer cold.

In his position as Foreign Minister of Canada Mr. Pierre Pettigrew was one of the leading conspirators and mobilizers against President Aristide and Haitian democracy. So, it is with some satisfaction that I record that Mr. Pettigrew, a rising star in the Liberal party, lost his seat in the Canadian Parliament in the recent elections. Pettigrew was defending a seat which had been safe for the Liberals for nearly 80 years – since 1917. He was defeated handsomely by – WAIT FOR IT... (DRUMROLL and FANFARE!!!)

... A Haitian woman.

I am sure that you, too, will feel that somehow, somewhere, there is, occasionally, some Justice.

John Maxwell of the University of the West Indies (UWI) is the veteran Jamaican journalist who in 1999 single-handedly thwarted the Jamaican government's efforts to build houses at Hope, the nation's oldest and best-known botanical gardens. His campaigning earned him first prize in the 2000 Sandals Resort's annual Environmental Journalism Competition, the region's richest journalism prize. He is also the author of How to Make Our Own News: A Primer for Environmentalists and Journalists (Jamaica, 2000). Mr. Maxwell can be reached at jonmax@mac.com.

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