

Haiti: René Preval's Impossible Task

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Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Global Research, March 02, 2006

2 March 2006

On February 7, 2006 (and with due homage to the great Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano) the people of Haiti were not to be denied. Few people anywhere have endured more oppression and human misery or for a longer period of time (with all too few periods of relief). In spite of an election process orchestrated, controlled and shamelessly rigged by an interim puppet government (the IGH) and an oppressive occupying force (UN Blue Helmets supposedly there to maintain order and protect them), they overcame overwhelming obstacles and elected Rene Preval for the second time as their President (his first time in office was from 1996-2000). It's no secret that the real power calling the shots in Haiti is not in Port-au-Prince. It's in Washington making policy, giving orders and letting its approved proxies do its bidding, which has been bloody and brutal since US Marines in the dead of night kidnapped and deposed democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide at gunpoint in February, 2004.

In a normal country with a tradition of stability and democracy (or any one for that matter) the election of the peoples' choice would be a cause for celebration. Indeed for the first time in the past 2 years the Haitian people are celebrating and hope finally for an end to the nightmare they've been through. But nothing is ever simple in Haiti, a country that for over 500 years has had very few periods of stability free from the oppressive heel of a foreign occupier or repressive dictatorship. They never had a real democracy until the election of Jean-Bertand Aristide in 1991. Two US led, directed or authorized coups later (both against President Aristide), they have one again at least in the office of president. But do they really have good reason to rejoice?

Before continuing I must point out that until February 7 Jean-Bertand Aristide was still Haiti's democratically elected President. It's a valid argument to say he's entitled to remain so for the remainder of the time he lost, but he graciously never requested it and now calls Rene Preval "my President." The benighted Haitian people loved Aristide, called him their President and want and expect him to return. They now have every reason to feel the oddest combination of joy and fear as they await future events to unfold without knowing what will happen.

From behind the scenes, the Washington Chimeres, led by the Haiti Democracy Project (HDP), that is umbilically linked to the US State Department, and its former member and now acting US ambassador Timothy Carney are already sharpening their long knives and beginning their demonization and destabilization campaign to undermine the Preval administration even before it begins. They hope to render it stillborn or at least so falsely tarnished and weakened by a torrent of propaganda it will be unable to function effectively. And if doesn't, they'll blame it on him.

HDP works in conjunction with the so-called Democratic Convergence (DC) of about 200

Haitian political organizations. The DC, in turn, works cooperatively with The Group of 184 Civil Society Organizations (including Haiti's business elites) headed by Haiti's leading industrialist and sweatshop owner, Andy Apaid. These organizations are funded by the notorious US National Endowment of Democracy (NED), the International Republican Institute (IRI – an arm of NED) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID). These federally funded US organizations function to serve US interests in other countries. They're an arm of US foreign policy in those states not firmly established as reliable "clients" or "at risk" of ending that status. It's their job to support US-friendly regimes and try to undermine those that are not – like Lavalas, Aristide and Preval in Haiti.

It's a wonder Preval got to run at all or was even allowed to, as in the last 2 years the UN Blue Helmets (MINUSTAH) and brutal Haitian National Police (PNH) conducted a systematic reign of terror against the Lavalas party and everyone associated with it. They either murdered, imprisoned or forced into exile or hiding its members, effectively destroying it. There were some who believed that since Rene Preval escaped this fate, it meant he'd been co-opted and convinced to desert his former party and allies and join with those in the interim ruling junta. That suspicion (unproven, of course, and hopefully untrue) only grew as the most beloved and popular man still in Haiti, Father Gerard Jean-Juste, was falsely imprisoned without charge to prevent his inclusion in the election as the candidate the people most wanted. Father "Gerry", as he's affectionately known, did not run and while incarcerated was diagnosed with serious but still treatable leukemia, finally released after a long campaign on his behalf, and is now receiving medical care in Florida.

THE DISINFORMATION BEGINS WITH THE USUAL COMPLICITY OF THE CORPORATE MEDIA

We're only in the early stages of the US controlled anti-Preval campaign, but it's easy to know where it's going. It's already getting loud and vicious and is being echoed throughout the complicit corporate media. President Aristide endured a torrent of hate and vitriol during both his 2 terms as President because he dared to deviate from the US script that demanded his full obedience to its dictates. Aristide had more noble ideas. He was determined as best he could to help the 80% or more desperately poor and disadvantaged Haitians try to improve their lives. Because of this he was labeled the "fiery slum priest", a demonic and despotic one and much more. None of it was true, and despite all the US imposed obstacles and hostility he faced, Aristide sought to serve the interests of his people rather than those of his dominant northern neighbor. He did a splendid job of it with limited resources, which I documented in an earlier article.

But that policy by any nation in the Global South is always unacceptable to the US, the giant transnational corporations whose interests it serves, and in Haiti, its elite junior business partners. Their plan is to return this nation of 8.5 million people, the poorest in the Americas, to its pre-Aristide status of virtual serfdom and a de facto US colony permanently. And so far they've done it by turning the country into a killing field. But now with a new president who once before worked for the people, ordinary Haitians hope their nightmare will end, order will be restored along with their Lavalas instituted social gains that were ended after the 2004 coup, and they can get on with their lives.

The US iron grip over the country's politics will do everything possible to prevent that normalcy from ever returning to Haiti. And the US corporate media is playing its business as usual part to help guarantee it won't. It's unleashed a storm of anti-Preval propaganda, disinformation and demonization in the aftermath of the February 7 election. It began by playing the old game of "blame the victim." Although the US and its obedient proxies

shamelessly controlled and rigged the election and still failed to have it come out their way, they're blaming Preval for the flawed process and electoral fraud. Neither he, any Lavalas remnants or ordinary poor Haitians had anything to do with burning ballots, hiding them, destroying tally sheets or stuffing ballot boxes with blank ballots. Nor did they decide to reduce the number of polling stations from 12,000 in 2000 to about 800 or less this year. And the ones they eliminated were where the majority of poor Haitians lived in rural areas as well as urban Lavalas/Aristide/Preval strongholds like Cite Soleil where they had NONE AT ALL.

SOME CHOICE EXAMPLES OF HOW THE CORPORATE MEDIA REPORTS THE NEWS

The inglorious New York Times always is the lead "attack dog" and echo chamber for US policy, and they began the assault by accusing Preval of causing "the devastating hostilities between the rich and the poor" and that he had to repair it. The NYT went on challenge Preval reporting that "he....faces questions about the legitimacy of the back-room deal brokered by foreign diplomats that ended the possibility of a runoff and made him the victor....." The Times failed to report that Aristide was reelected President in 2000 with 92% of the vote, and Rene Preval was elected President in 1996 with 88% of the vote - both elections judged free and fair. If anything close to a fair election had been held in February, Preval again would have easily won by an overwhelming landslide. Of course, the US knew that and had to assure it didn't happen.

The far right, one-sided, corporate America uber alles, often hate-spewing editorial page of the Wall Street Journal added their own special flavor of vitriol to the mix when they wrote about "armed gangs" and that "The pro-Aristide gangs began ginning up violence when it became apparent that Mr. Preval might not be installed without a run-off election." It hardly mattered to their editorial writer (the news sections of the paper are far more balanced and often credible) that their statement was false and reckless, and they knew it. They had to know as there wasn't a shred of evidence of any violence by Haiti's poor even by the 5,000 who went to the Montana hotel, swam in its pool, behaved peacefully and then left after making their point. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was a guest at the hotel, saw what happened and said not one item was broken or stolen - pretty remarkable for a crowd of that size that had every reason to be very angry.

The Los Angeles Times was about as brazen quoting Lionel Delatour, a board member of the US connected Haiti Democracy Project and the notorious Group of 184 complicit in the 2004 coup, threatening Preval with his comment that "If he does try to bring Aristide back, Preval will NOT FINISH his presidency." The LA Times never reported that Haitian law guarantees the right of all its citizens to travel or live abroad and freely return to the country. It also failed to report that international law and major human rights instruments including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Hague Convention and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights all affirm the right of return.

More anti-Preval abuse was piled on by the Miami Herald that quoted Jacques Bernard, illegally appointed Executive Director (Haitian law recognizes no such position) of the Provisional Electoral Council or CEP by US appointed puppet interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, saying "the president elect and others manipulated ballot counting changes." The story never explained that the CEP was in charge of vote counting and while it was ongoing Preval was in Marmalade at his mountain home and had nothing to do with it or with the

“tensions” that caused the Haitian people to take to the streets (peacefully) and demand their votes be counted by the CEP and not be thrown out at the CEP Tabulation Center in Port-au-Prince or put in the nearest dump site.

Even some in the so-called progressive media have lost their moorings and have now become as corrupted as the corporate media on some crucial issues. Witness the venerable Nation Magazine, the oldest continuously published magazine in the country which first came out in 1865, the year the Civil War ended. They were wrong and failed their readers when they supported the Afghan war after 9/11, and several of their regulars supported the Iraq war at least up to the time it began. They also ran a repugnant racist full page ad in their January 9/16, 2006 issue entitled “Arabian Fables” which outrageously implied Palestinians are prone to violence and deception, and there can be no peaceful, diplomatic resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In response to volumes of justifiable complaints, The Nation replied with an unacceptable weak-kneed op-ed piece claiming political advertising was protected by the First Amendment. Sound familiar? The recent demonizing “cartoons” in European newspapers portraying a blasphemous image of the Prophet Mohammed claimed the same right. Don’t hatemongers always do that?

Now The Nation is at it again, this time on the Haiti election and its aftermath. In their March 13 issue in an article entitled The Fight for Haiti, author Kathie Klarreich writes about an “enigmatic” nation. “Guns had gone underground, kidnappings had stopped and Port-au-Prince streets that had resembled target practice became accessible.....” I know much about Haitian history up to the present and find nothing about it “enigmatic”, and her implication from the above quote is that the Haitian people had the guns and used them for target practice – a classic example of blame the victim journalism when the Haitian people themselves were the frequent targets and still are. The writing that follows is full of disgraceful innuendo, omissions of truth or outright lies – so many space won’t allow to list them all. But I’ll settle for the writer’s failure to acknowledge the coup ousting Aristide in 2004, ignoring the flagrant CEP electoral rigging and vote counting fraud and then stating Preval was declared the winner by a “technical decision”.....reigniting the celebratory pumping and gyrating.” Is she implying the people are animals and acted as such? She also outrageously claimed Aristide although “wildly popular” is also “feared and despised.” By whom outside the Haitian elite? Is the writer unaware he was reelected in 2000 with 92% of the vote in a fair election? She then claims it’s up to Rene Preval to heal the breach he never opened and “negotiate a detente with an actively hostile opposition, a wary international community and armed supporters.....and demonstrate that he is no longer Aristide’s twin” (read: abandon the people who elected him and surrender to the demands of the Haitian elite, the international lending agencies and their dominant neighbor from el norte).

Readers should take note of Ms. Klarreich’s interesting credentials. She’s written for the New York Times, Christian Science Monitor and continues writing about Haiti for the Miami Herald, Time Magazine and the CSM. She’s also reported for NBC, CNN, ABC, CBC, PBS and NPR. Any of those names sound familiar? Is it clear what their agenda is? I’ll get to NPR below (PBS is no different, but I didn’t discuss their reporting).

There were many other delicious corporate media gems by other publications including those saying Preval’s victory is compromised by his connection to the people of Haiti, Lavalas, Aristide, and that he champions the poor. Imagine the “audacity” of an elected president caring about the most desperate and disadvantaged people in his country. And it takes a leap of chutzpah for an AP reporter to write that “Opponents of Haiti’s president-

elect could use the country's disputed election result to try and weaken his government if he doesn't perform" (read once again: serve the interests of corporate America and Haiti and, of course, the dictates of the IMF and World Bank and not the people who elected him).

None of these accounts even hinted there'd been a 2004 coup, 7,000 democratically elected and appointed officials were forcibly removed from office, 10,000 Haitians were murdered by the combined forces of all US proxies (including UN Blue Helmets), 1,000 were imprisoned and are still in jail as political prisoners for the crime of freedom-fighting, 100,000 became internal refugees and 20,000 more went into exile while countless others tried to flee by sea but drowned in the attempt, Cite Soleil and Bel Air were turned into West Bank or Gaza type open air prisons, other prisons with walls and bars were established to house Haiti's poor, and the brutal and hated Haitian military was partly and unofficially reconstituted and given 10 years back pay while their victims suffer, starve and are denied any justice. They also never reported that after the 2004 coup the US puppet government looted the Presidential Palace, burned museums, shut down radio and TV stations and terrorized the whole country. I guess they thought all of the above was of no consequence.

Even at this early stage, there's almost no limit to the volume of anti-Preval rhetoric from the dominant and hostile US corporate media. But I've saved the best (in my judgment) for last. It's the case of Amelia Shaw, the Voice of America (VOA) propagandist now on the payroll and posing or assigned new duties as a "reporter" for National Public Radio (NPR). She also does double duty for the "venerable" BBC. Anyone with some knowledge of what's really happening in Haiti will have a hard time keeping down their breakfast listening to her reports. They ooze with a stream of deliberate and malicious lies and deceit from so-called "public" radio. NPR is nothing of the sort, of course, as they long ago abandoned us, the public, to become just another voice as a member in good standing in the corporate media. And they've got the big bucks corporate funding to prove it. Their current president and CEO Kevin Klose, in fact, is the former director of all the major worldwide US government broadcast media including VOA, Radio Liberty, Radio Free Europe and the anti-Castro Radio Marti. In other words, he was the head of all US worldwide propaganda making him an ideal choice for a comparable job at NPR, the "peoples' radio" that never met a US instigated war it didn't love.

Amelia's work is little more than a series of diatribes against President Aristide, Lavalas and past and now President-elect Rene Preval. In recent reports she falsely claimed Aristide as President ordered hired assassins to murder Preval's sister (the attempt failed). And in another report she made the most breathtaking comment that the people of Haiti yearned for the days of Duvalier rule. The Duvaliers ("Papa Doc" and "Baby Doc") ruled the country as a reviled and hated brutal dictatorship. The people of Haiti rejoiced when their reign of terror finally ended. It's hard to believe even NPR would allow such "rot" on their airwaves when under Duvalier rule over 30 bloodstained years as many as 60,000 Haitians were murdered by the state. No one knows for sure the exact number, except maybe those still around associated with the killers. "Papa Doc" was once a practicing physician, but apparently he never learned or took seriously the implied message from the sacred Hippocratic Oath to do no harm.

RENE PREVAL'S IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

Governing Haiti under the best of conditions would be a task to challenge the patience of Job, require the wisdom of Solomon and have the luck of a "riverboat gambler" on his best day. But the way things are now as Rene Preval prepares to do it, he may be lucky just to

stay alive and keep his sanity and blood pressure under control. On day one in office he'll be virtually alone trying to govern a country still run by criminals under the aegis and with full support of the US. The Haitian peoples' leaders and advocates are in exile, prison or are dead, the country is in desperate need of development, and at least 80% of the people are in an even more desperate state but hoping Rene will be their savior. Those people need everything including food for their next meal.

The knowledgeable, thoughtful and keen observer of events in Haiti for many years, John Maxwell, wrote just before the 2004 coup how abused this small country (3 times the size of Los Angeles) and its people have been for so many years. Referring only to the 20th century (he might have included 4 others) he wrote: "The.....story of Haiti is one of economic and social strip-mining, of rapacious exploitation on a scale that is almost incomprehensible (the crime of genocide in slow motion).....Haiti is an international crime scene.....For decades Haitians have been driven abroad for some sort of dignity, livelihood and an end to suffering. The brightest, including journalists, have been murdered or are in voluntary or involuntary exile.....Haiti is a war zone, where the rich (from the US and Haiti mainly) have scorched the earth so thoroughly....." Powerful words, all true and all ignored by the corporate media.

The world community of nations has stood by and watched it all, unmoved, uncaring and eager when possible to join in the plundering. The renown doctor and humanitarian Paul Farmer, Haiti's Albert Schweitzer, has also watched and tried to help through his non-profit Partners in Health. His philosophy is that "the only real nation is humanity", and he observed that "The international community has acted recklessly in Haiti for years without any accountability."

Maxwell, Farmer and others like dedicated lawyer Marguerite Laurent, Esq. (founder and chair of the Haitian Lawyers Leadership Network - HLLN, dedicated to promoting Haitian civil, human and cultural rights) have now observed that today little has changed since the above comments were written. Maxwell equates Preval's task to be like trying to carry water in a basket. So well said. I titled this article Preval's impossible mission. The US and Haitian power elite are still there and in control and have no intention of ending their rapacious policies and trying to help the Haitian people as Aristide and Preval both did during their previous tenures. Also, Prime Minister Yvon Neptune is still in jail where at times during his incarceration he's been close to death from a hunger strike. This writer has no information on his current condition or any possible change in his status. Rene Preval's first order of business - on his first day in office - should be to free him and all the other political prisoners.

COPING WITH THE IMF AND WORLD BANK

The IMF and World Bank are always at the head of the queue in demanding developing states adhere to their neoliberal structural adjustment policies of privatizations, debt servicing and cuts in vital and desperately needed social services. Rene Preval knows the message but is no doubt hearing it again even more forcefully as he prepares to assume office. It remains to be seen how he'll respond, but it's easy to know what will happen if he doesn't. Haiti is in critical need of funding for programs to help its 80% or more desperately poor, but it won't get it from either of these international lending agencies or all the others the US controls. What he'll do and how he'll cope will likely decide his fate. The US and IMF and World Bank they control don't take "no" for an answer. But what's the worse choice - going along with them and allowing the extreme suffering and deprivation of Haiti's poor to

get even worse or rejecting them and facing the likelihood of another coup which is certainly already planned if Preval won't play ball.

Under these conditions, who would trade places with this man who now has the most challenging and unenviable job I know – to govern his people as President surrounded by the most powerful and hostile forces out to do him in unless he surrenders to their will. I doubt very many are that courageous if they intended to serve their people and defy the dictates of a ruthless “Godfather” that never tolerates disobedience. The long knives are razor sharpened, poised and at the ready in Washington and Haiti and Rene have few if any allies to turn to. But about 7 million desperately poor Haitians are armed with hope and faith in this man to deliver them out of the maws and bowels of hell just like the Book of Exodus tells us Moses tried to lead the Jews to the promised land. Moses never made it there. Will Rene Preval have better luck? We should all hope he will.

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