

# Table of Contents

U.N.-Liberating Haiti . . . . . 1



# U.N.-Liberating Haiti

By Kevin Pina

Since the deposition of Haiti's elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February 2004 the global media, 'civil society' and murderous UN 'peacekeepers' have been working hard to ignore popular demands for his reinstatement, reports Kevin Pina

For most, Haiti's second name is 'the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere', a well-worn rhetorical device that brings us no closer to understanding the socio-political landscape than reminding ourselves that the United States is the wealthiest and most powerful nation on earth. Yet there they are, the two extremes of wealth and poverty in the western hemisphere inexorably caught in a deadly dance. On one side there is Washington's policy of protecting Haitian elites through a myriad of NGOs hell bent on 'enhancing democracy', and, on the other, close to a million economically dispossessed people able to paralyse the capital at the drop of a hat. It is this dynamic that continues to define the political landscape and the ongoing battle between US foreign policy objectives and the majority of the Haitian people.

That was exactly the dynamic in play when hundreds of thousands of supporters of ousted president Jean-Bertrand Aristide took to the streets to beat back the attempt by the UN/US-backed Provisional Election Council to steal recent presidential elections from René Préval through fraud. Their protests also combined with the results of the elections to expose the big lie that was used as the pretext and justification for Aristide's removal from office – a key piece of misinformation that continues to confuse those watching events unfold in Haiti today.

pina images - house 8

Image: Cité Soleil, Anne E. Shroeder, <http://www.language-works.com/>

The overarching thrust of the lie was that Aristide was yet another Haitian dictator in democrat's clothing who had fallen prey to his own thirst for power. His forced departure, and the two years of severe repression that followed, was portrayed as a necessary evil to liberate Haiti from his tyrannical rule. Yet the results of the presidential elections showed that the political parties representing the movement to oust Aristide could not garner a combined tally of more than 30 percent of the vote cast in the elections. Most of these parties polled in single digit numbers exposing what was portrayed as a popular uprising against Aristide for the paper tiger and media creation it actually was. The venerable journalists of the corporate media feed unsuspecting consumers a false image of the strength and numbers of demonstrations against Aristide while virtually ignoring much larger demonstrations like the one on 7 February, 2004. While stories and photos of demonstrations led by sweatshop owner Andre Apaid and his Group 184 chewed up the bandwidth, hundreds of thousands demonstrating for Aristide and his Famni Lavalas political party went largely unreported and were treated with indifference by the press.

This also helps to explain the human rights situation in Haiti following 29 February, 2004. If the premise behind the ousting of Aristide was that he had lost the support of the Haitian people, what did it mean when hundreds of thousands continued to take to the streets in a series of endless marches and protests demanding his return? Why were the Haitian police compelled to brutally suppress the demonstrations by firing on unarmed demonstrators as the UN and the international community stood by ready to pounce at the slightest sign of armed resistance to the killings? The answer to those who followed the situation on the ground was simple. Every large demonstration for Aristide's return ran

contrary to the very justification for his ousting. The US-installed regime of Gerard Latortue, that assumed power with the blessing of the international community following Aristide's deposition, had no choice but to contain this truth through demonising and brutalising the growing protests. While the peoples of the US, Latin America and Europe were led to believe that the real problem in Haiti was dark and nefarious gangs of killers tied to Aristide, hundreds of thousands of Haitians were risking their lives in almost daily protests where Haitian police with high-powered telescopic rifles would pick them off indiscriminately with a single bullet to the head.

It is no secret that the reason behind Préval's victory was that the base of Aristide's Lavalas party voted for him in overwhelming numbers with three objectives in mind. First and foremost was that they wanted to put an end to the previous two years of human rights hell in Haiti. Summary executions, armed raids and arbitrary arrests took a huge toll on people living in the poorest neighbourhoods of the capital as they continued to resist the US-installed government. Battle fatigue was beginning to set in as these neighbourhoods were forced to continue to fight on two fronts. They managed to fight and resist the brutal Haitian police and the subsequent UN efforts to pacify them, but the time had come to adopt a new strategy. Préval's entering the race, after the corrupt Provisional Electoral Council blocked the candidacy of the Lavalas favorite Catholic priest Gerard Jean-Juste, provided another avenue around the US and its now famous chorus a.k.a. the international community. They also calculated that the quickest way to insure Aristide's return and secure the release of Lavalas political prisoners was to elect Préval president. That is why, when the fraud in the elections became apparent, they were willing to give the international community an ultimatum: either let Préval win the first round of balloting as initially projected by the polls or risk the country breaking out into civil war with the Haitian police and the UN battling the majority of the population in the streets.

pina images - p19

Image: Soldiers distributing food in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 2006. UN, <http://www.un.org>

The US and their allies in the Haitian elite and the international community blinked. In an obscure agreement dubbed the 'Belgium option', the international community brokered an arrangement with the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) where thousands of blank ballots were distributed evenly among the candidates giving Préval the votes he needed to rise above the 50 percent threshold to avoid a runoff. The arrangement also helped to mask the failure of the international community to sponsor clean and fair elections in Haiti after investing an estimated 76 million dollars as well as providing a UN army for security and logistical support to the process.

Central to the current struggle between the wealthiest nation on earth and the poorest nation in the western hemisphere is this very question of the return of Aristide. By now it is public knowledge that the US and its closest partners in Haiti, France and Canada, have made it clear that Aristide is not welcome back. The Haitian people thwarted the plans of the CEP to defeat Préval through manipulation and fraud, yet the international community still managed to blame the victim and turn it to their advantage. Then acting US Chargé d'Affaires, Timothy Carney, reminded the new president that a veritable Sword of Damocles hangs over his head. In an Associated Press article written by Stevenson Jacobs on 19 February, 2006 – titled 'American: Haiti Leader Must Perform' – Carney stated, 'If he [Préval] doesn't perform, yes it [the electoral settlement] could weaken him.' Carney then added the caveat, 'If he does perform, nobody will remember it.' Carney had already made it clear that part of the expected performance from Préval included not allowing Aristide to return to Haiti. In a statement the day after the elections Carney said, 'Aristide is on his way to becoming as irrelevant to Haiti as Jean-Claude [Duvalier], and with no future. Aristide is now demonstrated to be a man of the past.' They have also made it clear to Préval that if he even considers allowing Aristide to return he can expect the sharp end of a lance.

In spite of threats by the US and its allies, a demonstration estimated at well over 50,000 took place

this last Saturday [article submitted 17 July, 2006] in Port-au-Prince demanding once again that Aristide be returned to Haiti. One of the main themes of the demonstration was that Préval had been elected for the express purpose of returning Aristide and releasing political prisoners still held in Haitian jails today. Despite protesters forcing their way past armed policemen to march in front of Haiti's National Palace, there was no reported violence and it is expected that this movement will continue to grow in volume and frequency over the next few weeks and months. If the recent past is any indicator, it is only a matter of time before the negative propaganda machine, fed by certain foreign embassies and the local elite, goes into hyper-drive once again to demonise and marginalise the protesters. Then you can expect violence and it will, as always, be blamed on the supporters of Lavalas and Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

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