Actualidades

From Jean-Bertrand Aristide to Gerard Latortue: The Unending Crisis of Democratization in Haiti

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In june 2003, I wrote that if the three-year old political crisis between the government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the organized political opposition forced Aristide to leave office before the end of his term in February 2006, only a foreign military intervention could prevent the country from descending into a full-fledged civil war. At the time, I thought, such an intervention could be led either by the United States or a joint force from the United States and the Dominican Republic. The intervening forces could then install a provisional government headed by leaders of the opposition or others allied with it. The primary task of that provisional government would be to restore order and security in the country and organize new elections. Before elections could be held, I maintained, the new government would have to crack down on Aristide's supporters and his Lavalas Family party (FL—*Fanmi Lavalas* in Creole) to lessen the latter's chances of winning again as it did in 2000 (Dupuy 2003:8). Except for some of the actors involved, subsequent events confirmed my general prognosis.

On February 29, 2004, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide fled Haiti for the Central African Republic (CAR) aboard an aircraft charted by the United States and escorted by U.S. military personnel and his own personal security provided by a San Francisco-based firm.[1] He left the CAR for Jamaica on March 15, and remained there until the end of May when he flew to South Africa for an indefinite exile (A.P. 2004). As happened when he was overthrown by the Haitian military in September 1991,

Journal of Latin American Anthropology, Vol. 10, No.1, pp. 186–205. ISSN 1085-7025, online ISSN 1548-7180. © 2005 by the American Anthropological Association. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permissions to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, www.ucpress.edu/journals/rights.htm.

seven months into his first term, Aristide's departure last month cut short his second five-year mandate by two years. Aristide was coerced into leaving Haiti after an armed insurgency erupted in the port city of Gonaïves in early February 2004. The rebellion was first led by a gang of *chimères*—the so-called Artibonite Resistance Front (FRA—*Front de Résistance de l'Artibonite*), formerly known as the Cannibal Army led by Butteur Metayer—that was once allied with Aristide but turned against him. Soon after, former members of the defunct Haitian army and its affiliated paramilitary death squad known as the Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti (FRAPH—*Front pour l'Avancement et le Progrès d'Haiti*), and former rural police chiefs notorious for human rights violations, joined and took over the insurgency. As the rebel forces gained control over large portions of the country and advanced toward the capital city of Port-au-Prince, they threatened to storm the city to remove or even kill Aristide.[2] It was then that James Foley, the U.S. Ambassador to Haiti, made it clear to Aristide that the United States would not protect him and that he was on his own. The U.S. State Department also prevented the San Francisco-based firm under contract to provide private security for Aristide from sending additional personnel as Aristide had requested.[3] Aristide then realized that he faced the choice of staying and being killed or leaving the country. He made his final decision in the early hours of February 29, after Ambassador Foley had met with Yvon Neptune, Aristide's Prime Minister, the day before.

Immediately after Aristide's departure, the United Nations authorized the deployment of a Multinational Interim Force (MIF) comprised of troops from the United States, France, Canada, and Chile. In June 2004, the MIF was replaced by the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) led by Brazil with troop contributions from a number of other Latin American countries (Dodds 2004; Davies 2004; Caroit 2004; Wiener 2004; Williams 2004).

With Aristide gone, a U.S.-approved "Council of the Wise" chose Gérard Latortue, a retired UN technocrat and business consultant, to serve as Interim Prime Minister (IPM) of an interim government, and Boniface Alexandre, a Supreme Court Justice, as Interim President (IP). IP Alexandre is mostly a figurehead, and real authority rests with IPM Latorture, who, on March 17, formed a cabinet government of 13 ministers and 5 secretaries of state. The interim government had an 8-month mandate to organize new elections and transfer power to a democratically-elected government. But immediately after his installation, IPM Latortue signaled his intention to remain in power for a longer period. The government recently announced new elections for October and November of 2005 (Semple 2004; Wilentz 2004).

Controversy still surrounds the departure of former President Aristide and the constitutionality of the interim Alexandre-Latortue government. The United States denies the charge made by the exiled president that he was kidnapped and

forced to leave Haiti by a U.S.-backed coup d'état. The United States maintains that Aristide agreed to leave voluntarily, and made public the letter of resignation he signed. At the same time the United States and France blocked an investigation by the United Nations into the circumstances of Aristide's departure requested by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Venezuela, and 53 African Union countries (Kramer 2004:6). CARICOM remains the only block of member countries of the Organization of American States (OAS) that has so far refused to recognize the interim Alexandre-Latortue government on grounds of its unconstitutionality and its human rights record since taking office. CARICOM also succeeded in getting the OAS General Assembly to approve Resolution 2058 in June 2004 that expressed concern over the "abrupt departure of the democratically elected President of Haiti," the "subsequent questions surrounding his resignation," and the request by CARICOM for "the Permanent Council to undertake a collective assessment of the situation in Haiti" (Organization of American States, June 2004 and November 2004). As Kirstin Kramer noted, however, while the Resolution 2058 was the "first clear sign of concern from a major international organization that the democratically-elected president was overthrown in Haiti with the possible complicity of the United States," it remains to be seen whether the OAS has the political will to carry out the requested inquiry (Kramer 2004).

Whether or not Aristide's allegations that he was kidnapped are true, it is clear that the United States and France allowed the opposition coalition they supported—known as the Democratic Platform that comprised two broad coalition groups: the Democratic Convergence (CD—*Convergence Démocratique*) and the Group of 184 (G184—*Groupe des 184*)—to spurn a plan proposed by leaders of the CARICOM in late January 2004 that might have resolved the crisis peacefully. The OAS also issued a similar plan in February. The CARICOM plan, initially supported by the United States, France, and Canada, called for allowing Aristide to complete his term as President, creating a broad-based cabinet with a new, neutral, and independent prime minister, disarming the armed gangs who supported President Aristide as well as the rebel forces, reforming the national police and placing it under the control of the prime minister, allowing the opposition to protest freely, and establishing conditions for new parliamentary elections. Aristide accepted the plan, but the Democratic Platform rejected it and insisted that Aristide had to resign before it would participate in a new government. Instead of pressuring the opposition to accept the plan, the three major powers sided with the opposition, betrayed the CARICOM, and refused to authorize the deployment of a peacekeeping force to stop the armed insurgency until a political settlement had been reached (Helps 2004; Organization of American States, February 2004; *BBC News* 2004; *Reuters,* February 2004). It became clear at that point that Aristide would be forced to resign.

At first the United States, France, and Canada maintained they were not seeking to force Aristide out and would not tolerate an armed overthrow of a democratically elected president. But as the negotiations stalled, the violence escalated, and the rebels gained more territory and advanced toward Port-au-Prince, French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin blamed Aristide for the crisis and called on him to resign. Soon after, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell also criticized Aristide for having governed undemocratically and blamed him for the crisis, and Canada did the same. Refusing to authorize a peacekeeping force to enter Haiti to stop the rebels and protect Aristide, therefore, was a logical conclusion to a decision taken earlier by the three governments to remove him from power (John 2004; Hudson 2004; Gedda 2004; Ljunggren 2004; Craig 2004; Davies 2004).

Though it came to power undemocratically, the new government formed by IPM Latortue has the full backing of the United States, France, Canada, and the international financial institutions that had denied support (political and economic) to the democratically elected Aristide government. The foreign aid donors have pledged some $1.3 billion dollars to the Latortue government, but these funds will be delivered slowly, if at all, depending on whether the climate of insecurity can be reversed (*The Economist* 2004). Nonetheless, this show of support makes it clear one again that for these governments and international organizations the issue has never been whether a government is democratically elected, but whether that government is willing to conform to their interests, especially those of the United States as the dominant power among them. Despite its claim of being a "government of national unity," I will argue below that the main task at hand is to rid the country of the remnants of Aristide's supporters and to weaken as much as possible his Lavalas Family party. Once, and if, this is accomplished, then new elections could be held and make it possible for a party (or a coalition of parties) that represents the interests of the Haitian elites and is acceptable to Washington to win them.

Most appointed members of the interim government have been depicted as "technocrats" who were not active in the coalition that opposed Aristide or other political parties. But several interim ministers, including those for Foreign Affairs, Justice, Social Affairs, Commerce and Tourism, and the Secretary of State for Education and Culture, are ideologically close to the Democratic Platform. The Interior and National Defense Minister is a retired General who had called on Aristide to resign and wants to reconstitute the repressive and corrupt Armed Forces of Haiti (FADH—*Forces Armées d'Haiti*) that Aristide disbanded in 1995. Not surprisingly, no members of former President Aristide's FL were included in the new government, but that was not enough to satisfy some leaders of the opposition who complained of having been excluded also, thereby depriving them of their rightful share of the spoils of power for their role in ousting Aristide. The recent cabinet reshuffling changes none of that but instead reinforces the pro-business class

character of the government (Semple 2004; *Agence France Presse* 2004; Christie and Villelabeitia 2004; Dodds 2004; *Associated Press* 2004; Wilentz 2005).

From the standpoint of the United States, it made sense to endorse the Alexandre-Latortue interim government rather than a government drawn from the anti-Aristide coalition. The United States backed the Democratic Convergence when it was united in its opposition to Aristide, whom the United States, especially the right-wing Republicans in Congress and the Bush administration, also disliked. But neither the DC nor the Group of 184—which was not a coalition of political parties but a "civil society" group led by some prominent members of the Haitian business class—represented a viable alternative to Aristide, and they lacked broad popular support. Formed in the wake of the contested parliamentary elections of May 2000, the DC was a coalition of many parties and groups of diverse and incompatible ideologies, ranging from neo-Duvalierist, centrist, religious, and social democratic, to former members of the Lavalas movement and close allies of Aristide.[4]

United only in its opposition to Aristide, the DC did not have or present an alternative program of government that could have attracted popular support. While the DC as a whole was backed by the Haitian elite, the Bush administration, the Republicans in Congress, and especially the International Republican Institute, others within the coalition received support from European and Latin American social democratic parties. The International Republican Institute did all it could to urge the DC to build a national electoral constituency that could rival Aristide's FL party at the polls, but it never rose to the challenge (*BBC Monitoring Service* 2002). Despite deteriorating social, economic, and political conditions during Aristide's second term, he and his party still retained the support of a majority of the population. For example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) commissioned CID/Gallup to conduct two public opinion polls between March 1st and March 8th, 2002. The results of the polls were never made public, but they confirmed the following. Despite waning support for Fanmi Lavalas due to widespread discontent with the government and the state of the economy, one-third of the adult population—especially outside of Port-au-Prince, among women, and the less educated, that is, the poor—identified itself with the FL, in contrast to only 8 percent—concentrated among young and well educated respondents, that is, the middle class and elites of Haiti—who supported the DC. And despite his poor job rating, 50 percent of the population still favored Aristide over any other public figure from the traditional political class and the DC (CID-Gallup n.d.).

The unpublished polls confirmed that the strategy employed by the DC and its domestic elite and foreign backers to squeeze Aristide politically and economically, combined with the repression, corruption, and poor governance of the government, was having the effect of eroding support for Aristide. But they also showed that

he and his FL party would still likely win an electoral contest against the DC. That is why for the DC, negotiating any resolution to the crisis that kept Aristide in power and that called for new elections in which his party would participate was unacceptable. Instead, the only negotiations its leaders were willing to entertain were, in the words of Evans Paul, a DC spokesman, "through which door [President Aristide] leaves the palace, through the front door or the back door" (Evans, cited in Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2004). Thus, the only alternative was for the DC, with U.S. backing, to stick to its "Option Zero" strategy and force Aristide out of power. By the same token, the polls also made it clear to the United States that there was neither a political party nor a leader within the DC whom the United States could support who had sufficient legitimacy and would be acceptable to the small but powerful Haitian business class or the traditional political class, much less the majority of Haitians. Any attempt to appoint leaders from the DC to succeed Aristide would have immediately rekindled the divisions within the coalition suspended temporarily in their opposition to Aristide. The DC, in fact, has now dissolved since Aristide's departure and, as was to be expected, old rivalries among its constituent elements are now resurfacing.[5]

In Latortue's cabinet of "technocrats," on the other hand, the United States had individuals who, like Latortue himself, either lived most of their adult lives outside of Haiti, or were not directly involved in the opposition to Aristide, have no expressed political aspirations beyond their service in the interim government, and are compliant and fully behind the objectives of the United States and its French and Canadian allies in Haiti. These are, in brief, to pacify Haiti and see to it that the next government will, unlike Aristide's, play by the rules, accept without equivocation the economic policies of the "Washington Consensus," and not advocate "class warfare" by purporting to champion the cause of the poor and downtrodden and attacking the elite and the unequal distribution of wealth and resources.[6]

But if the DC has now outlived its usefulness to the United States, that was not the case in the 2000–2004 period. Though it was clear to the United States that the DC could never win an electoral contest against Aristide or his FL party, it nonetheless served the United States' objective of undermining Aristide's second term in office. Without denying that Aristide had been legitimately re-elected president in November 2000, the United States nonetheless portrayed the DC as a legitimate opposition to Aristide. The United States insisted that it would not accept any resolution to the political crisis generated in the aftermath of the May 2000 parliamentary elections without the participation of the DC.[7]

From that point on, the newly formed DC declared its "Option Zero" strategy that consisted of rejecting the results of all the elections and demanding nothing less than the resignation (voluntarily or otherwise) of the re-elected president. For the next three years, the DC refused all offers of negotiation by Aristide and his

party, and discarded all efforts by the OAS to negotiate a settlement to the crisis that Aristide had endorsed, even if not wholeheartedly. These included not only a power-sharing arrangement with the DC, creating a new independent Provisional Electoral Council, and holding entirely new parliamentary elections. The Bush administration, especially with Roger Noriega as its Permanent Representative to the OAS (and later Assistant U.S. Secretary of State for Western Hemispheric Affairs),[8] encouraged the intransigence of the DC by blaming Aristide for the failure to reach agreement at every turn in the negotiating process. By so doing, the Bush administration in effect granted the DC a veto power over the OAS-CARICOM mediations with Aristide. In this sense, it is legitimate to conclude, as did Amy Wilentz, that by refusing all meaningful negotiations with Aristide, the so-called democratic opposition "was being used to foment and mask what was essentially a coup against democracy by the island's elite, in concert with right-wing elements of the Republican Party" (Wilentz 2004; Dupuy 2003).

None of this is to say, however, that Aristide did not undermine his legitimacy by his actions, or was not also responsible for creating the conditions that ultimately led to his downfall. True, the Haitian elite was against him, a U.S.-backed coalition was challenging his re-election and demanding his removal, and the United States and the international financial institutions were imposing a foreign aid embargo on his government. In light of such obvious threats to his government, Aristide was determined to prevent a repeat of 1991 when he was ousted by a coup d'état seven months into his first term, and the military junta went on to kill an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 of his supporters (Dupuy 1997:139). Unlike in 1990, Aristide's party also won an overwhelming majority of the seats in both houses of parliament in 2000, thereby making it possible for him to govern without significant legislative opposition. In short, Aristide was determined the second time around to monopolize political power and govern with little or no opposition. His initial refusal to agree to a second round for the eight contested senate seats in the 2000 elections, much less the opposition's demands for entirely new elections, must be seen in that context.

But none of that justified the ultimate course that Aristide took to deal with the crisis. Not trusting or wanting to rely on the police alone, Aristide and/or his government created an independent force of vigilante gangs called chimères. The government armed them, along with other government and local officials, his popular supporters, and other lumpenproletarian elements in the ghettoes of Port-au-Prince and other cities.

It is immaterial whether or not Aristide had a direct role in creating and directing the chimères.[9] What matters is that he never condemned or declared them illegal, fought against them, or held them accountable for their actions during his time in office. The chimères did Aristide's and the government's dirty work and, along

with the police, attacked and killed members of the opposition, violently disrupted their demonstrations, burned their residences and headquarters, intimidated members of the media critical of the government, and engaged in countless other human and civil rights violations. Some leaders among them also became a force in their own right by forming criminal gangs that acted autonomously, turned their neighborhoods into wards under their control, engaged in drug trafficking and other criminal activities, and even requisitioned the government itself (Lemoine 2004; Caroit 2004; Dupuy, in press).

Internecine conflicts between rival factions of the ruling party and corruption became rampant among elected and government officials. Drug traffickers paid off public officials to use the country to transship cocaine to the United States. Police officers and elected officials with close ties to Aristide have been implicated in drug trafficking, kidnappings, and bank robberies. Vast sums allocated for micro-projects or road construction, whether from domestic or foreign sources, were not used for those purposes and were unaccounted for. In short, as Michèle Montas, widow of Jean Dominique, the renown slain journalist and once ardent defender of Aristide and the Lavalas movement, said, the Lavalas government had been transformed into a "balkanized State where weapons [made] right, and where hunger for power and money [took] precedence over the general welfare, causing havoc on a party which, paradoxically, [controlled] all the institutional levers of the country" (Montas 2002). As events have shown, however, Aristide never fully controlled the national police force, or even the chimères.

There is no doubt, then, that the government had abused its powers, or that it increasingly took on an authoritarian character. But rather than characterizing the second Aristide government as a dictatorship, as Aristide's critiques and opponents have, it may be more accurate to see it as a "hybrid" regime that combined features of both democracy and authoritarianism. Put differently, Aristide and the legislature were elected democratically and, unlike the Duvalier regimes (1957–1986) or the military junta (1991–1994), the Aristide government never fully suppressed political opposition, freedom of organization, or of the press. At the same time, the government and its armed supporters used violence to intimidate, and even kill, members of the press and of the opposition, and it sought to use the institutions of government, such as the judiciary and especially the police, to further its goals of monopolizing political power, even if it never fully succeeded in doing so. In the end, it could be said, Aristide became the victim of his own politics. It was Butteur Metayer, a chimère gang leader and member of the so-called Cannibal Army in the city of Gonaïves, and a one time Aristide supporter, who started the armed rebellion against Aristide in early February 2004. That event created the opening for the former members of the Haitian Army to cross over from the Dominican Republic, change the character of the rebellion by taking control over large sectors of the

country, and make their final push toward Port-au-Prince to unseat Aristide (Lemoine 2004).

Nonetheless, when compared with the 30-year Duvalier dictatorships or the military junta that ruled Haiti between September 1991 and October 1994, the human rights violations committed under Aristide between 2001 and 2004 pale in comparison, though that does not justify them as a result. Summarizing Amnesty International's reports covering the years 2000–2003, Peter Hallward puts the number of those killed under Aristide and attributed to the police or his supporters at around 20 to 30 people per year. At the same time, former army soldiers and paramilitaries, as well as other opponents of Aristide and supporters of the opposition killed at least 20 police officers and supporters of Aristide in 2001, and another 25 in 2003. To these numbers must be added the estimated 300 people killed since the uprising against Aristide began on February 5, 2004 until his departure on February 29. While most of those killed were Lavalas supporters, Aristide supporters also killed many people themselves. By contrast, 50,000 were killed under the Duvaliers' 30-year rule, or an average of 1,700 people per year, and the military junta that ruled Haiti between 1991 and 1994 killed an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 Aristide supporters (Hallward 2004:40; Associated Press March 27,2004; National Coalition for Haitian Rights 2004). As I show below, the human rights situation under the interim Latortue government has been far worse in ten months than under the three years of Aristide's second term.

One of the purported priorities of the interim Latortue government is to pacify the country by disarming both armed supporters of the deposed president and the rebel forces of the defunct military and the FRAPH, and end impunity and human rights abuses by bringing all those involved in or accused of crimes to justice. The MINUSTAH was also to "support the Transitional Government to ensure a secure and stable environment within which the constitutional and political process in Haiti can take place" (UN Security Council 2004). In practice, however, the interim government and the Haitian National Police (HNP) have pursued, persecuted, killed and sought to disarm mainly Aristide supporters, with both the MIF and the MINUSTAH either remaining on the sidelines or joining in some operations against them. For their part, the leaders of the rebel forces, many of whom have been accused of, or convicted in absentia for, murders and other human rights violations, have kept their weapons, established themselves as a surrogate authority in many parts of the country since February 2004, and operate freely even in Port-au-Prince and the wealthy suburb of Pétion-Ville despite the presence of the peacekeeping forces. Moreover, the rebels freed many former army and FRAPH members who had been sentenced and jailed for their human rights abuses and other criminal activities (Amnesty International, March 2004 and June 2004). As Brian Concannon, Jr. wrote, in March 2004 alone, 1,000 bodies, presumed to be

Aristide supporters, were dumped and buried in a mass grave at Titanyen, according to morgue employees at the general Hospital in Port-au-Prince (Concannon, July 2004).

Once in office, IPM Latortue and his Cabinet wasted little time in showing their priority and with whom they were aligning themselves. With talk of reconstituting the Haitian Army by Interim Interior and National Defense Minister, and former General, Hérard Abraham—a key demand of the rebel forces that toppled Aristide—IPM Latortue hailed the rebels as "freedom fighters" on March 21. Among those embraced by Latortue were many accused or convicted of grave human rights violations, including killings of Aristide supporters, and involvement in drug trafficking. Latortue also announced that one of the top priorities of his government would be to "neutralize" pro-Lavalas chimères and other Lavalas partisans who had committed crimes before focusing on those who perpetrated crimes against Aristide supporters and associates, either after the coup d'état of 1991 or since (Amnesty International, June 2004).

The government's actions, however, belie its feigned commitment to justice, at some future time, for the criminals it called "freedom fighters." To prove the point, on August 17, the government acquitted Louis Jodel Chamblain, a former FRAPH leader, and former military police Captain Jackson Joanis, of crimes they had committed after the 1991 coup d'état against Aristide. Chamblain, along with 13 other members of the military, had been convicted in absentia for the murder of Antoine Izméry in 1993, a businessman and pro-Aristide activist, and for his implication in a massacre in Raboteau in 1994. Joanis was also convicted in absentia for the murder of Izméry. Both he and Chamblain were sentenced to life imprisonment at forced labor. Chamblain fled to the Dominican Republic where he stayed until he returned to Haiti in February 2004 to lead the rebellion against Aristide. Joanis, who had been deported back to Haiti from the United States in 2002 to serve his sentence escaped from prison during the February rebellion against Aristide, but like Chamblain he had turned himself in to the police after Aristide left Haiti, presumably knowing that they eventually would be freed and exculpated by the interim government.

According to Haitian law, both Chamblain and Joanis had the right to a re-trial because they had been convicted in absentia. But a government-arranged and rigged trial acquitted them one day after it began.[10] Haitian and international human rights organizations and media have roundly condemned this trial as a travesty of justice, and even the U.S. State Department saw the need to express its "deep concern" over the acquittal. But the Latortue government was unperturbed by such criticisms, especially since Interim Justice Minister Bernard Gousse had indicated previously that the government might pardon Chamblain because of "his great service to the nation" (*New York Times*, August 2004).

The message the Latortue government sent through this trial was clear: no one would be prosecuted in Haiti for killing or abusing Aristide supporters. The stated priority of Latortue, after all, is to "neutralize" Lavalas, an objective his government has pursued relentlessly since coming to power. In this, Latortue has the full backing of the United States and its allies, as well as the Haitian business and political classes. The former, including the UN, have not publicly condemned the abuses committed under the Latortue government; and the latter have always relied on the armed forces to protect their interests from what they call "the mob," and openly welcomed the return of the "liberators" who toppled Aristide. Indeed, a recent report issued by the Center for the Study of Human Rights at the University of Miami School of Law directly implicates a top business leader of the Group of 184 and another businessman for financing gangs and leaders of the armed rebel forces who kill Aristide supporters, and for protecting them from being arrested and brought to justice (Griffin, November 2004). As Brian Concannon Jr, Director of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti pointed out, "When 20 to 30 people were getting killed a year there was a cascade of condemnation pouring down on the Aristide government. Now that as many as 20 to 30 are getting killed in a day, there is silence . . . It is an obvious double standard" (Lindsay, November 2004; Arthur 2004). The silence and double standard Concannon is referring to is simply the expression of the class interests of the critics for whom justice is not a neutral concept.

To "neutralize" Lavalas, the government adopted what the Council on Hemispheric Affairs called a "scorch earth policy towards [its] supporters." (Council on Hemispheric Affairs, November 2004). One side of the strategy is to round up prominent Lavalas party officials, former elected and appointed members of government, and well-known party activists under the guise of hunting for "terrorists," defined as anyone "thinking, planning or somehow linked to others thinking of violence." Some of those arbitrarily arrested, like Father Gérard Jean-Juste, a renown pro-Lavalas advocate of non-violence, have been released. Others, like former Prime Minister Yvon Néptune and former Interior Minister Jocelerme Privert, who had been incarcerated for months without being charged, were recently after they went on a hunger strike and mounting international pressure on the government to either bring them to trial or release them. The other side of the "scorch earth" policy consists of the police, former soldiers, and paramilitaries pursuing, repressing, and killing the chimères and other grassroots party activists (Council on Hemispheric Affairs, November 2004; Evans 2004).

For example, Concannon documented more than 70 killings and disappearances between March and May 2004. Most of those targeted were Lavalas grassroots activists and residents of poor urban and rural areas in Haiti. The police killed an estimated 170 people in raids in September after pro-Aristide gangs allegedly killed

and decapitated two policemen earlier in the month. In October, police officers in black balaclavas reportedly killed at least 12 people said to have been Aristide supporter. For its part, the National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR) put the number of people killed between September 2004 and January 2005 at 403. Because the government does not investigate extrajudicial killings, disappearances, or most other human rights violations, such as rapes, beatings, and burning the houses of targeted individuals, human rights observers agree that, though very high, it is difficult to assess the actual number of victims of such acts. The situation is further complicated by the fact that a good number of the killings is done by rival gangs, both pro- and anti-Lavalas, and police officers who had been dismissed for their implication in serious human rights violations under Aristide. But much, if not most of the killings and other acts of violence are carried out by the police, former soldiers, paramilitaries, and supporters of the former opposition against Aristide supporters or critics of the government, including members of the media (Concannon 2004; Lakshmanan 2004; *Reuters*, November 2004; Lindsay, November 2004; Adams 2004; National Coalition for Human Rights, 2005:1–2).

It is worth noting that the government justified its repression against Lavalas activists by claiming that the killing and decapitation of two policemen in October were part of an alleged destabilization campaign by Aristide supporters referred to as "Operation Baghdad." But, as Reed Lindsay pointed out, the term "Operation Baghdad" was coined by IPM Latortue, and not used first by Aristide supporters. According to *The Economist*, the Lavalas gangs termed their revolt in late September as "Operation Without-Drawing Breath." Moreover, the government so far has offered no evidence that Lavalas supporters either carried out the decapitation of the police officers, or are fomenting a campaign of destabilization (Lindsay, October 2004; *The Economist* 2004).

What is clear, then, is this. The Latortue government, backed by the Haitian elite, the United States, its allies, and MINUSTAH, has aligned itself with former army soldiers and paramilitaries, and the police, to carry out a campaign of repression against Aristide and Lavalas supporters. This campaign is reminiscent of those of the 1991–1994 military regime, and the Duvalier regimes of 1957–1986. The campaign may be having its desired effect. The Lavalas party is not only fragmented but could well be undergoing a process of disintegration. It remains to be seen, however, whether new leaders will emerge to reorganize the party in time for the newly announced national and presidential elections in October and November 2005, respectively, or whether the party's leaders—to the extent that they speak for the party as a whole—will decide to boycott them. The latter outcome is precisely what the Latortue government has been working to achieve. If that were to be the case, one should not expect the United State or its allies, the United Nations or the

Organization of American States, to insist, as they did in the case of the Democratic Convergence against Aristide, that Fanmi Lavalas must participate in the upcoming elections for them to be considered legitimate.

At the same time, the alliance between the Latortue government and the former soldiers and paramilitaries is shaky. Interior Minister Abraham has integrated former high-level officers from the Haitian Army into his staff. He is also recruiting former soldiers into the national police pending a full reconstitution of the army. But many of the rebel leaders and rank-and-file soldiers are insisting that the army be reinstated immediately, and that they be given 10 years in back pay. Accusing the government of betraying them, they have threatened to overthrow the government unless their demands are met. To placate the former soldiers and buy time, the government started to pay back the soldiers, and intends to do so to all the 6,000 members of the former army at an estimated cost of $29 million, even though many of those who have already received checks were not in the army when it was dismantled (Haiti Support Group 2004; Delva 2004; Brackern 2004).

That measure may not be enough, however. Since last February, the power of the rebel soldiers has increased significantly through their control of several port cities and provinces, which they have used to expand their finances through smuggling, and to recruit and rearm hundreds of new fighters. Sensing they may be dealing with the government from a position of strength, the former soldiers may refuse to back down from their main demand (Kramber 2005). This situation could lead to more confrontations between the former soldiers and the interim government, and force the latter to call on the MINUSTAH peacekeeping forces to help the national police force to suppress the defiant soldiers.

Given this precarious balance of power, combined with a crippled economy, mounting insecurity, a deplorable human rights record, and gross incompetence, it is not surprising that Latortue and his government are coming under criticism from every corner of society. Calls for his removal are coming not only from former soldiers who thirst to turn the clock back to 1991, but from disaffected university students and other middle class sectors who also played an important role in eroding support for Aristide in the remaining months of his presidency. Others are suggesting placing Haiti under a multilateral protectorate to prevent it from imploding, while the Latortue government is trying to project confidence in the future by declaring that "the worse is behind us" (Jacot 2005; Latin American Newsletters 2004). For now, at least, the United States, its allies, and the international financial institutions are standing firm behind their jackal prime minister. It remains to be seen whether or not the interim Latortue government will last until new elections are held. But while the elites and their foreign backers are contemplating how to ensure their unchallenged dominance, the past and recent history of Haiti has shown that the people have a way of spoiling the best plans laid out by

those who take them for granted and think them incapable of unmasking the particularistic class interests camouflaged in lofty pronouncements about the general interest.

Notes

[1]The fact that Aristide had to rely on a foreign firm for his personal security rather than the Haitian police was symptomatic of the climate of insecurity, the absence of checks and balances in government institutions, and the precariousness of his power.

[2]See Amnesty International (June 21, 2004). The revolt by the former soldiers was not surprising. On July 27-28, 2001, armed members of the former Haitian Armed Forces attacked the Haitian National Police Academy and three other police stations, killing five police officers and wounding 14 others. And again on December 17, 2001, former members of the army attacked the National Palace in Port-au-Prince but failed to gain control of it and fled to the Dominican Republic. Though these attacks were not intended to overthrow Aristide at the time, they were in my view trial runs for "another, and more targeted, attack [that] could come later." See Dupuy (2003:6–7).

[3]Aristide had to contract with a private U.S. security firm for his personal protection because he never trusted the police to do so, despite his attempt to politicize and control that force.

[4]The parties and groups included were the following: the Organization of the People in Struggle (OPL in French—*Organisation du Peuple en Lutte*), which broke from Aristide's Lavalas organization in 1996; the Joint Space (EC in French—*Espace de Concertation*), a coalition of five organizations: Democratic Unity Confederation (KID in Creole—*Konfédérasyon Inité Démokratik*); Generation 2004 (*Génération 2004*); Haitian Progressive Nationalist Party (PANPRA in Creole—*Pati Natyonalis Progresis Haytien*); National Congress of Democratic Movements (KONAKOM in Creole—*Kongres Nasyonal Mouvman Démokratik*); Haiti Can (*Ayiti Kapab* in Creole); Patriotic Movement for National Salvation (MPSN—*Mouvement Patriotique pour le Sauvetage National*), a coalition of neo-Duvalierist parties which included: the Movement for National Development (MDNP in French—*Mouvement pour le Développement National*), Haitian Christian Democratic Party (PDCH in French—*Parti Démocrate Chrétien Haitien*), and the Alliance for the Liberation of Haiti (ALAH in French—*L'Alliance pour la Libération d'Haiti*), Christian Movement for a New Haiti (MOCHRENHA in French—*Mouvement Chrétien pour une Nouvelle Haiti*); Union of Progressive National Democrats (RDNP in French—*Rassemblement des Démocrates Nationaux Progressiste*); and Haitian Democratic Party (PADEMH in French—*Parti Dèmocrate Haiten*).

[5]While the right-wing parties recently formed the *Grand Front Centre-Droite,* the Big Center-Right Front, several of the social democratic parties within the DC, such as the KONAKOM, PANPRA, and Ayti Kapab, agreed to form a "Fusion of Social Democratic Parties." They invited the OPL, also a social democratic party, to join the new alliance, but it refused. Believing that it may be the best organized and having long-standing rivalries with KONAKOM and PANPRA, the OPL has so far opted to go it alone in the next elections. See the Résolution de la Coordination du KONAKOM (2004) and Claude Moïse (2004).

[6]See Wilentz (2004). Haiti is often portrayed in the media as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. But it also has a rigid class system and a highly uneven distribution of wealth and resources. In 2002, whereas 4 percent of the population possessed 66 percent of all assets in the country, 1 percent appropriated more than 50 percent of the national income. At the other end of the class

structure 70 percent of the population possessed about 20 percent of revenues. Haiti's per capita income has declined for the past decade at a rate of 5.2 percent per year and is now at $250, less than one-tenth of the Latin American average of $3,320. Two-thirds of the population (about 4.8 million) live in rural areas; 80 percent of them are poor, and two-thirds of those are extremely poor. See Dupuy (2003) and Dupuy (in press).

[7]The crisis was caused by a method the CEP used to calculate the vote tally for the Senate seats. This consisted of counting the votes cast for only the top 4 candidates in each race rather than including all the votes for the less popular candidates. Consequently, the percentage of the vote received by each of the top 4 candidates was higher than it would have been if all the votes had been included. This made it possible for 8 Lavalas candidates to obtain more than 50 percent of the votes in the first round and avoid having to go to a second round. Thus, instead of only 10 Lavalas candidates winning outright in the first round, 18 did so as a result of the CEP's method, allowing Lavalas to capture 18 of the 19 seats contested (out of 27 seats for the Senate as a whole). For an analysis of the 2000 elections and the crisis it generated. See Dupuy (2002), Organization of American States (2000), and Wilentz (2000).

[8]As Ron Howell points out, Roger Noriega started his political ascent with his ties to North Carolina Republican Senator Jesse Helms who was by far the most arch-conservative foe of Aristide in the Senate until his retirement in 2002. Since then, Noriega's "influence over U.S. policy toward Haiti has increased as he climbed the diplomatic ladder in Washington," and he never wavered from his determination to oust Aristide from power. See *New York Newsday* (2004).

[9]There is disagreement on Aristide's role in creating the chimères. Some, like Maurice Lemoine, maintain that it still remains to be proved whether Aristide personally created and directed them or simply left that ask to others. Others, like Danny Toussaint, once a powerful baron of Fanmi Lavalas and close ally of Aristide who was implicated in the murder of renowned journalist Jean Dominique and suspected of involvement in drug trafficking by the U.S., accused Aristide of personally directing the chimères, especially in the tumultuous and chaotic days preceding his departure.

[10]The trial was conducted without a proper investigation, without using evidence contained in government documents, and with one witness for the prosecution stating he had no idea why he had been called to the stand. See Amnesty International (August 2004) and National Coalition for Haitian Rights (August 2004).

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