

Lavalas: Completing the Revolution of 1804



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Social Movements for Emancipatory Development

Abstract:

In 1986, a social movement based in the Little Church (*Ti Legliz*) used liberation theology gospel, strikes, demonstrations, and targeted assassinations in an uprising referred to as the *Dechoukaj*¹ to force **Jean-Claude Duvalier** (Baby Doc) to flee the nation of Haiti. Led by a Salesian Priest named **Jean-Bertrand Aristide** this movement succeeded in dismantling a hated, seemingly intractable regime, carried out the nation's first and only democratic elections and dissolved the army that had, since the time of the American occupation had been used to violate the human rights of the Haitian people. The only social movement that truly represents Haiti's 8-9 million impoverished peasants is called "*Lavalas*", or "the cleansing flood". Since the fall of Duvalier, Aristide has been twice elected (1991 & 2001) and twice exiled (1991 & 2004) in two bloody coups. *Fanmi Lavalas*, the political arm of this movement, is officially banned from elections. A neo-Duvalierist pop singer was elected to the office of the President following the devastating earthquake of 2010. This briefing paper will attempt to analyze the historical foundation, rise to power, fall to repression and current capabilities of the Lavalas Peasant Movement and its underground political party "*Fanmi Lavalas*" (Lavalas Family) and what its actions will mean for the future of development, human rights and political landscape of Haiti.

¹ *Dechoukaj* is a Kreyòl word that literally means "uprooting". It refers to the political uprising in Haiti following the exile of Dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier on 7 February, 1986. During the *dechoukaj* Haitian peasants and city dwellers alike attacked their immediate oppressors; specifically known members of the Haitian Army (FADH) and the *Tonton Macoutes*.

Introduction: What is Lavalas?

Lavalas is a movement based on the idea that Haitians must triumph over their internal and external enemies, free their nation and win their promised human rights.

On January 1st, 1804 the nation of Haiti was born but to this day an illiterate peasant can speak of it and its leaders as though it had just recently occurred. That is because the history of Haiti is the history of how the European hegemon powers moved to contain an uprising and idea that is as threatening to globalization as it was to slavery and colonialism. The people of Haiti and their partisans in the *Lavalas Movement* are fighting to win a struggle begun over 200 years ago between the masters and the slaves.

Currently, 1% of Haiti's population owns 45% of its wealth. Its President Michel Martelly is a former pop singer with deep ties to the previously toppled Duvalier dictatorship. Life expectancy is 56. Haiti is occupied by a UN umbrella army called MINUSTAH. A disease called Cholera has killed over nine thousand people and infected over 700,000. There are over 10,800 NGOs operating in Haiti with little central coordination or planning. Of the roughly 9 billion delivered of the 16 billion pledged in development & reconstruction aid after the 2010 earthquake; most went directly to NGO or foreign military expenditures and a full \$224 million was used to build a 60,000 person capacity sweat shop complex called Caricol Industrial Park (Buss, 2008)(Farmer, 2011)(2012 MINUSTAH Reports).

One should not be dispassionate about the birthplace of Human Rights as a fact on the ground. For the "Rights of Man" as understood by the French Jacobins were for all people, but if Napoleon in 1800 turned that revolution into his personal bid for empire; shortly after an army of slaves would win the first stage of a campaign to make these rights a world order in the Americas. Lavalas is continuum of this historic effort. It is the majority supported, banned and persecuted underground movement for democracy which began in Haiti in the 1980's. Clearly with facts before us we see the birthplace of a Human Rights revolution that took simultaneous aim at slavery, colonialism, class structures and race relations. In 1815 Simón Bolívar and a group of Haitian guerrilla fighters exported this uprising to the entirety of Latin America².

Not until the socialist revolutions of the 20th century had there ever been a more direct threat to contain. And admittedly the masters, the elites of the metropol hegemony have contained populism, socialism, and national self-determination in near totality. A victorious indictment of the exploitation that emanates from European greed truly began in Haiti. Paul Farmer claims in his book *The Uses of Haiti*; her greatest modern *use* is to continuously discredit an idea (Farmer, 2005).

There was a slave general named Toussaint L'Ouvature who believed that the liberation of San Domingo could shatter a global structure of brutal exploitation. As described so eloquently by C.R.L. James in *Black Jacobins*:

"Leader of a backward and ignorant mass, he was yet in the forefront of the great historical movement of his time. The blacks were taking their part in the destruction of European feudalism begun by the French Revolution, and liberty and equality, the slogans of the revolution, meant far more to them than to any Frenchman. That was why in the hour of danger Toussaint, uninstructed as he was, could find the language and accent of Diderot, Rousseau, and Raynal, of Mirabeau, Robespierre and Danton. And in one respect he excelled them all. For even these masters of the spoken and written word, owing to the class complications of their society, too often had to pause, to hesitate, to qualify. Toussaint could defend the freedom of the blacks without reservation, and this gave to his declaration a strength and a single-mindedness rare in the great documents of the time. The French bourgeoisie could not understand it. Rivers of blood were to flow before

² In 1815 Simon Bolivar made an agreement with Haitian President Alexandre Petion that in exchange for Haitian arms and soldiers he would abolish slavery in Latin America. His historic campaigns brought an end to Spanish colonialism in Latin America.

they understood that elevated as was his tone Toussaint had written neither bombast nor rhetoric but the simple and sober truth.” (CRL James, **Black Jacobins**).

The truth about Haiti is that every conceivable effort has been taken by aggressive, capitalist European powers to break her people and annihilate the spirit of the original revolt (Rotberg, 1971) (Farmer, 2005) (Hallward, 2007).

Since independence was declared on 1 January, 1804; the world’s “first black republic” has been plagued by economic quarantine, endemic socio-racial fragmentation, civil war, periodic coups and foreign-backed totalitarian dictatorships. The office of the President has been persistently utilized to expropriate the national treasury and keep the Haitian people in a condition of permanent underdevelopment. Haiti is currently the most impoverished nation in the Western hemisphere³. The Haitian people, who are largely illiterate subsistence farmers, are not consulted or even included into Haiti’s narrative. Its history is a permanent rebellion from slavery toward a desperately yearned for, but forever fleeting emancipation. The Lavalas Movement with the Haitian people firmly behind them behind are getting closer to that collective dream than any before them. Their movement was able to conquer Duvalier, but has yet to vanquish the entrenched forces of Duvalierism (Dupay, 2007). To know the mind of the Haitian people it is important to understand their collectivism, their fearlessness, and their full connection to their real and imagined history.

The Lavalas Movement and its aspirations cannot be understood unless in context of historical events for the Haitian peasant’s claim of readiness to “complete the revolution” reflects a mental continuity of events that we too must grasp are we to be a participant not a perpetrator.

Micro brief on Haitian History; Part I: (1791-1857)

“The poor have long experience in creating a third way. They face death and death every day. They survive. In Haiti we have survived for hundreds of years this way. This may be a jarring notion for those who believe the poor are poor because they are stupid. If one believes this, one will always feel that the solution to poverty will not come from those who are poor. But in fact, if we are alive at all it is not because of aid or help from other countries, rather despite it. We are alive because of our tremendous capacity for survival.” (Aristide, **Reflections, p20**).

To understand what is happening today in Haiti one must always separate its people completely from their hyper-predatory government, but never ever separate the people from their history. The Haitian collective memory is product of resilience to trauma inflicted throughout the entirety of its past; its colonial existence, its revolution and it’s periods of repeated occupation.

Mats Lundahl, in his book *Poverty in Haiti* traces the track of economic and social devastation to five key historical events⁴. I have included five more. The first was the **European discovery** of Hispaniola in 1492. Within 50 years of arrival 100,000-8 million indigenous Taino Indians had been eradicated by forced labor and disease⁵. They were replaced by a slave labor kidnapped & imported from 40 African regional ethnicities which on the eve of the revolution numbered over 450,000 slaves. Slaves were perishing via the structural violence of the *St. Domingue* colony at such rates that by 1790; 40,000 new slaves were being imported per year (James, 1963). The second event was the **Haitian Revolution** itself which from 1791-1804 took the lives of an estimated 140,000 slave, mulatto and colonial inhabitants; as well as over 57,000

³ Human Development 2013 Index listed Haiti at 161 of 186 ranked nations categorized as “Low Development” via Inequality-Adjusted Human Development Index composed of income, education, and life expectancy.

⁴ Lundahl (2011) p. 4-14; (European arrival, revolution, land reform, American occupation, and Duvaliers).

⁵ Logan (1968) p. 55. There is no realistic census of pre-colonial Taino demographics.

French, Irish, Polish, English and Spanish soldiers sent in to suppress it⁶. A plantation economy that was once providing 60% of the world's coffee; was a vital supplier of sugar, indigo, cotton and made up ¼ of the Pre-Jacobin French GNP was reduced to ashes and absolute ruin. The third event cited was the **1809 Land Reform** of President Alexandre Sabès Pétion who broke up most of the major land holdings established by the post-revolutionary leadership and laid the legal foundation for mass peasantry whereby only through periodic government taxation could any form of agricultural exploitation occur. Two events (of my own addition) are the **1822 enslavement of the Dominican Republic** compounded with the 1825 imposition of the **French Indemnity**, an estimated 21 billion dollar debt⁷ that Haiti would continuously pay until 1947 to France for “compensation” of its lost territorial and human property. From 1843 to 1915 Haiti had no less than 22 Presidents, 11 of which were in office less than a year little of this had much effect on the peasantry (Rotberg, 1971). The 1809 Land Reform sealed the fate of Haiti underdevelopment according to Lundahl, but it also made the bulk of the population cultivators of their own land without any firm infrastructure to engage in state predation. The fourth main event was the **American Occupation** which lasted from 1915-1934. The most tangible effects of this occupation were the forced conscription of the Haitians into infrastructure building projects, the full repayments of foreign debts, and the creation of the military forces that would soon after occupation become the *Forces Armees d'Haiti*, the Haitian Army (FAdH). It was this army and infrastructure that would set the stage for the fifth event sealing the nation into predatory state underdevelopment; the **Duvalier Dictatorship** of 1957-1986. I will identify the chief attritions of that father-son regime in the next immediate section.

The final three devastating events to Haitian development & democracy were the **Coup of 1991, the Coup of 2004, and the Earthquake of 2010** which killed between 100,000 to 316,000⁸ people and reduced the country to full blown a “Republic of NGOs”.

Micro brief on Haitian History; Part II (1957-1986)

The regime that Francois Duvalier built reflected a keen understanding of the Haitian people and the power centers that held the traditional predatory state in check. He maintained power and presided over (father then son) a period of state predation and totalitarian control unrivaled by any previous Haitian despot (Rotberg, 1971). Using “Noirist” political rhetoric and strategic brutality he contained the mulatto elites. Using the army he came to power then brought the army in line by creating his own hyper-violent personal army; the *Tonton Macoute*. He played on Cold War tensions to secure US aid for his militant anti-communist repression. He neutralized the Catholic Church by replacing all higher clergy with his own loyalists. He wrapped his entire brutal regime in the trappings of *voudoun*. He established a systematic network of local bosses called Section Chiefs on every level of the 9 Haitian departments. Through systematic killings, torture, rape and massacre he drove most of the intelligentsia and professional class into exile. When his son Jean-Claude Duvalier was handed power at age 19 an intensified period of looting began.

After the U.S. occupation from 1915-1934; via roads, rural pacification, and the creation a new Haitian proto-military; the necessary infrastructure was in place to transform Haiti's

⁶ From C.R.L. James *Black Jacobins* reconstruction and account of the Haitian Revolution.

⁷ The indemnity has been calculated to be between 12.5 billion and 21 billion

⁸ There are radically different estimates made difficult by lack of any kind of census since 2003. 100,000 to 316,000 deaths (the higher figure is from a government estimate widely charged with being deliberately inflated; a figure of 159,000 is provided in a 2010 University of Michigan study; the 100,000 figure is suggested by the U.S. Geological Survey. An unpublished USAID report puts the number as low as 50,000.

illiterate peasant class into a vast pool of cheap, expendable labor for use in an envisioned island wide export processing zone⁹ focused on garment assembly in Haiti and on the Dominican side; sugar cane harvest. Both Duvaliers and their Dominican counterparts Trujillo/Balaguer played on racialist rhetoric to consolidate rule, but both regimes found common cause in conscription of Haitians to work Dominican sugar plantations. With the exception of the Parsley Massacre in 1937¹⁰ both sides used their militaries exclusively to make war on their own populations (Wucker, 2000). Backed intermittently by US aid, plunder of state assets and narco-dollars during the height of the Cold War, the Duvalier Regime which lasted from 1957-1971 under Francois Duvalier (*Papa Doc*) and continued under his son Jean-Claude Duvalier (*Baby Doc*) 1971-1986 presided over one of Haiti's longest periods of organized internal violence and state looting. Backed by foreign aid and reinforced via a vicious secret police (*Milice de Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale*/Militia of National Security Volunteers/MVSN, better known as the *Tonton Macoute*) over 50,000 Haitians were viciously annihilated, hundreds of thousands were driven into exile and hundreds of millions dollars were funneled out of the country into private slush funds in foreign banks¹¹.

There were by 1980 only four strategic fields that the Haitian peasant could use to resist the brutality of the regime; popular mutual aid associations called *Konbits*, the spiritual field of liberation theology via the *Ti Legliz*; urban youth gangs and the resources of the Haitian diaspora.

Haiti's Konbit System

Haitians survive via a vast informal economy providing subsistence for 70% of the urban workforce (Lundahl, 2011). No public assistance from any government has ever meaningfully replaced this framework.

In the late 1980's US subsidized rice replaced Haitian grown rice. The 1985 US Farm Bill began subsidizing 40% of the cost of domestic rice and dumping it via "aid" on foreign recipients. By 1996 Haiti was importing 196,000 tons of US rice up from just 7,000 tons in 1986. Eradication of the Haitian black pig began in 1982. International aid agencies told Haitians that the pigs were sick and had to be killed, and they were over next 13 months. Replaced with a larger Iowa pig "*prince a quatre pieds*". This affected numerous issues. Decapitalization of peasant economy, soil and agricultural productivity, and the people didn't even like their taste. These two events are often associated as the Haitian peasantry's first mass interactions with globalization (Hallward, 2007).

In 1809 Petion's Land Reform Act transformed the newly liberated Haiti into a nation of small-holding rural peasants. The cycle of political coups and violence centered around the capital Port-Au-Prince and due to lack of infrastructure and mountainous topography the Haitian peasant was until the American occupation an almost ahistorical actor. Until roads and the military were in place, until Section Chiefs and Macoute were available to extort and coerce, until NGOs and missionaries arrived with "development projects"; the Haitian peasant relied on his or her village Konbit to survive.

⁹ The International Labor Organization (ILO) has adopted a broad definition of what may constitute an EPZ, namely 'industrial zones with special incentives set up to attract foreign investors, in which imported materials undergo some degree of processing before being (re-)exported again'. Under this definition, EPZs can include free trade zones, special economic zones and maquiladoras in Mexico. 'Special incentives' take a range of forms, but typically include tax breaks, duty free imports and exports, and provision of infrastructure. EPZs tend to be located in regions where workers are plentiful and wages are low. In the last 10 years there has been a rapid expansion in the number of countries with EPZs, in the overall number of EPZs, and in the number of workers employed there.

¹⁰ In 1937 Trujillo ordered the Dominican military to kill 20,000-30,000 Haitian civilians living on the border between the two countries. Haitians were asked to say the Spanish word for Parsley which is very different in pronunciation from the Creole version. Those who pronounced it "incorrectly" were killed.

¹¹ Rotberg (1971) pp. 342-370 on Francois Duvalier and Dupay (2007) pp. on Jean Claude Duvalier pp.47-54. It is estimated by scholars Prince & Hooper that by the time of their 1986 exile Jean Claude, his wife Michele and their collaborators stole an estimated 505 million from the public treasury.

A *Konbit* is a collective labor framework utilized on nearly every level of rural Haitian society to extend mutual aid to secure basic support for education, healthcare, agriculture, and other needs. These agreements and their associations were one of the four mechanisms that allowed clandestine organization in the face of Duvalierism.

Less important to the resistance are the various arrangements of Konbits that existed at the time of the 1986 uprising or continue today. More important was and is the Lavalas ability to harness these collective frameworks into strikes, demonstrations, social programs and until 2004; votes.

The Little Church: *Ti Legliz*

Rhetorically Lavalas organizers are liberation theologian priests and/or young leftist grassroots activists that draw on the messages of the Christian gospel to reinforce socialist conceptions of economic distribution and social justice.

Under the Duvalier most of Haiti's traditional power centers firmly squared away. The mountainous interior was under the control of a Macoute infiltrated voodoo hierarchy and the notoriously exploitative 'Section Chiefs'. The army and Macoute tortured and disappeared an estimated 50,000 citizens. The official Catholic Church, once recognized in Haiti after the Duvalier purge of all non-Haitian clergy was a mouth piece of the regime. In this was physical repression, spiritual repression, and civil political repression were absolute. But Jean-Claude Duvalier (Baby Doc) was more of a playboy beholden to technocrats than his strong man despot father ever was.

The average Haitian living on less than a dollar a day finds more use for a konbit than any non-existent civil service. They turn to a god that will give them justice and since the Macoute infiltrated voodoo and Catholicism the *Ti Legliz* became the predominant platform to organize the assault on the regime.

Chimères & Diaspora

Haiti is a place of extremes. There is no traditional middle class to speak of. A tiny mulatto and noire elite of un-apologetic Duvalierists, or post 1986 neo-liberal "neo-Duvalierists" have lorded over the larger peasant population via the Macoutes and the army. Lavalas was and is a peasant movement which harnessed Konbit collective frameworks and liberation theology to mobilize the people into the streets. The overwhelming numbers belayed the fact that this movement had neither the arms to fight the army or the finding to play international politics, but defeated both for a time.

Haiti has nine geographic "departments" and over one million expatriates abroad make up the 10th department responsible for between 400-600 million in remittances. The Haitian diaspora with major population concentrations in Boston, New York, Montréal and Paris are not only disproportionately wealthy and educated as a diaspora, they have been highly excluded from Haitian politics. The diaspora support would prove vital to restoring President Aristide after the military coup of 1991. It is vital to the future of the movement to harness this 10th department.

Unfortunately the Haitian Diaspora is fickle. Dual citizenship is illegal and as many in Diaspora fund or support Neo-Duvalierist candidates (such as Martelly), or are completely disinvolved; as place support behind Lavalas.

In *Cite Soleil*, the largest slum in the western Hemisphere 400,000 people live on but 2.5 square miles, sleeping in shifts for lack of space. Aristide and other Lavalas leadership could rely on both the slums and the diaspora for support intermittently in crucial ways. In place like *La*

Saline, Bel Air or Cite Soleil Street gangs of young urban men rallied behind the Lavalas flag. These gangs which were never any military match for the FAdH, FRAPH or MINUSTAH¹² but they were the only violent counter balance Lavalas has had to the sheer volume of repression used against the movement. They are referred to the *Chimeres*.

Lavalas strongholds have been most consistent in the places of greatest desperation. Numerous military efforts have been directed against these youth gangs under the auspices of “security” since 2004 and the French/American press uses them as evidence that Aristide ruled also with terror and force.

In the time leading up to the uprising of 1986 the *Chimeres* were perhaps the most audacious and violent counter balance available to fight the *Macoute*. The slum gangs and peasantry carried Lavalas via Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide to the office of president in 1991. The diaspora has yet to decide completely what if any side they are on in Haiti’s future.

Dechoukaj: “The Uprooting”

“One does not adhere to Lavalas as one becomes a card carrying or dues paying member of a party. One joins freely a movement which transforms the eternal vassals, the serfs into free human beings. We are all free human beings. Lavalas was the chance of all men and women...it was the opportunity for the army, the mercenary institution yesterday, to become united with its people. It was the chance for the bourgeoisie to opt for a democratic transition rather than a violent revolution. It was the chance for the church to come closer to its people. The idea of Lavalas – the torrent that cleans everything in its path- was growing in the people’s opinion-unity; the unraveling of the *Macoute* system. To unravel. To uproot. To be born again.” (**Aristide, Prophet and Power, p.91**)

The *dechoukaj* affected every intuition and population center in Haiti, especially the institutions of the Haitian Voudoun religion, whose principals and traditions had been directly tied to the dictatorship; the Section Chiefs, the army and all known members of the *Tonton Macoute* (Wilentz, 1989).

From the fall of Duvalier to the election of Aristide in 1991 the Lavalas Movement directed and encouraged mobilization in defense of civil rights, but not attacks on known members of the brutal secret police and security forces that so immediately preyed on the masses. This occurred rather spontaneously. Haitians all over the country took advantage of the uprising to execute or apprehend as many agents of the regime as possible. “Necklessing” was the preferred means. Placing a burning tire around the neck of the captured *Macoute*. While accused by Western media of contributing to the violence Aristide and Lavalas largely directed efforts at sustaining the popular movement while over thirty years of tyranny were assailed in the streets (Hallward, 2007).

Duvalierism had driven the population into previously unknown levels of deprivation. The Little Church aggressively mobilized against the regime and worked hard to ensure that the military could not impose a new president for life upon them. The movement was highly decentralized and took form around a variety of priests that utilized their congregations as mobilizing platforms. After a cycle of mass protests and retaliatory massacres escalating to a point of possible revolution Jean-Claude Duvalier fled in 1986 leaving the army in control of a completely bankrupt country on the verge of total class war.

¹² FAdH was disbanded in 1995 after the US intervention restored Aristide to power. FRAPH formed by former military and *Macoutes* on CIA payroll worked to kill LAVALAS supporters in the 1991-1994 period of chaos after the first coup. They successfully toppled the Lavalas government in 2004. MINUSTAH which has been in Haiti since 2004 has militarily engaged the *Chimeres* on multiple occasions but done nothing to disarm FRAPH or other right wing paramilitary factions.

Election and Coup Pt. 1 & 2

In 1991 Aristide was elected with 67% of the vote in Haiti's first truly open and democratic election (Hallward, 2007). He defeated a full range of other candidates backed by the army, the United States, neo-conservative backers and overt Duvalierists. Lavalas as a movement had no structures political machine, no media platform, no foreign funding even from the diaspora or party apparatus. But the Haitian people elected him with a mandate to defeat Duvalierism and defend free Haiti. The United States State Department and intelligence community, long Duvalier supporters were not very pleased.

“We are not against trade, we are not against free trade, but our fear is that the global market intends to annihilate our markets. We will be pushed to the cities, to eat food grown on factory farms in distant countries, food whose price depends on the daily numbers game of the first market. ‘This is more efficient,’ the economists say. ‘Your market, your way of life is not efficient,’ they say. But we ask, ‘What is left when you reduce trade to numbers, when you erase all that is human.’” **(Aristide, Reflections, p.10)**

A C.I.A. backed coup carried out by the army toppled Haitian democracy in just 8 months forcing Aristide to flee the country for his life as the military killed and tortured an estimated 5,000 Lavalas activists and supporters between 1991-1994.

The Lavalas Social Movement in Haiti was responsible for toppling the Duvalier regime, later dissolving the military in 1995, introducing unionization, raising minimum wage and establishing widespread social services while carrying out Haiti's first period of democratic elections bringing Jean Bertrand Aristide, a liberation theologian priest into the Presidency in 1991. Eight months later when he was toppled and exiled in a military coup the diaspora rallied behind him and the US restored him to power in 1994. He was reinstated via U.S. military intervention and he was forced to adopt neo-liberal trade policies upon re-assuming office. His term ended in 1996 and he stepped down in the first peaceful transition to opposition Haiti as ever had. He was re-elected in 2001 with 90% of the vote. During this tumultuous period the newly formed Fanmi Lavalas party incarnation of the Lavalas Movement under the leadership of Aristide implemented major reforms in healthcare, education and human rights attainment with Cuban support. The US cut off aid to Haiti and the Lavalas government was without any funds. In 2004 Aristide was exiled yet again in a second coup. This time he was kidnapped by US soldiers and placed under house arrest in Central African Republic¹³ as right wing FRAPH paramilitaries¹⁴ stormed the country (Sprague, 2012).

“Inside Haiti Aristide's government had been ‘denounced by virtually every element of the coalition that supported his rise to the presidency in 1990’. This is true if ‘virtually every’ means ‘everyone except the poor’. The anti-Aristide movement united a broad spectrum of the elite, from Marxists and anti-globalization crusaders to Duvalierists and sweatshop owners. But every indicator, from Gallup polls to the relative size of demonstrations, showed that the government enjoyed solid support from the vast majority of Haitians who were not an ‘intellectual or artist of note’. The anti-Aristide camp knew this, and so refused to allow legislative elections. The ease with which Haiti's leftist elite and its foreign supporters joined sweatshop owners, Duvalierists and the Bush administration in a crusade to overthrow Aristide says more about the fluidity of their own political commitments than about Haiti's government. The real cleavage in Haiti has always been not left-right but up-down. When push came to shove, class allegiance trumped any professed commitment to social equality or democracy.” **(Concannon, Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti)**

¹³ Chompsky, Goodman, Farmer (2004) p. 97-107.

¹⁴ Sam Goff, Brian Concannon and Father Luis Barrios took part in an International Action Committee investigation into the Dominican Republic's role in the coup. They were able to determine that the Haitian rebels – former military and FRAPH members – were incorporated into the Dominican army in 2000. These paramilitaries were initially trained by the Dominicans, and funded by the International Republican Institute and the National Endowment for Democracy, the CIA front group established by Reagan in 1983. They later also received training from US Special Forces (Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti).

The UN “stabilization mission” began shortly after. Since the 2004 coup Fanmi Lavalas has been banned from participating in elections. Neo-liberal development reforms have been reinstated under a “Republic of NGOs” and a mulatto pop singer and open Duvalierist has been “elected” President but Lavalas remains the predominant social movement and party representing the poor in Haiti.

“On the tarmac in CAR, Aristide thanked the Africans for their hospitality, and then said: ‘I declare in overthrowing me they have uprooted the trunk of the tree of peace, but it will grow back because the roots are l’Ouverturian.’ (Chompsky, Goodman, Farmer 2004)

The Banned Majority

Why does Haiti a ruined and impoverished nation and an underground movement of peasants matter?

In January of 2011, a year after the devastating earthquake, both Aristide and Duvalier ended their respective exiles and returned to the country. Aristide was greeted fanfare and thousands of supporters, Duvalier with barricades and an “arrest for his safety”. Both are now on trial for corruption with ongoing highly politicized proceedings. Both represent diametrically opposite ideological schools of opinion on what will determine the future of Haiti under the “build-back-better” era of Michel Martelly.

Lavalas is still banned from elections as of March 2014 and remains highly polarizing in Diaspora, but widely supported in Haiti.

There are a staggering number of challenges facing the people of Haiti. They have many enemies and many more indifferentists. It is vital that those who are defenders of human rights and allies of the Haitian people support the only movement that has ever represented the impoverished of that long abused nation.

The rhetoric of the “development enterprise” and the full misery of poverty hides the underlying reality that for over 200 years the Haitian peasant and Haiti herself are via their very survival, are a revolutionary and existential threat to colonialism then and globalization of today. Therefore, Lavalas is not just a “preferential option for the poor.” It seeks victory over oppressors internal and international; it views its survival as an act of resistance; and it seeks to wash away, to uproot the mechanisms that keep the Haitian people still as perpetual serfs¹⁵.

¹⁵ Farmer Vol. 26 No. 8 · 15 April 2004 28-31

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