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Baby Doc returns to Haiti

The Duvalier Restoration

José Antonio Gutiérrez D.

January 19, 2011

“I’ve come to help”. These were the words of the grotesque dictator Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier after his return – in glory and majesty – to Haiti, a country that between 1971 and 1986, was subject to bloodshed, murder, torture and the loss of its finest to exile, while his kleptocratic regime embezzled the nation with the complicity of France and the USA. Since then, Baby Doc has been living in luxurious exile in a villa on the Côte d’Azur, while in Haiti the dechoukaj unfolded, a popular revolution of huge proportions in which the people sought to uproot and demolish all remnants of the hated Duvalier. In the late ‘80s, Haiti seemed to be on the verge of social revolution.

Meanwhile, the business elites, the military and their imperialist partners in Washington, tried to restore Duvalier’s “order”, without Duvalier. This neo-Duvalierism seemed to have been defeated with the victory of Jean-Bertrand Aristide in the first democratic elections in the country in 1990. From then on, the popular movement would channel its efforts not towards revolution, but into a democratic reform movement which, despite being quite tame, provoked horror among the oligarchy used to having absolute control over the country and unwilling to

make even the slightest concession regarding their privileges. The subsequent history of coups, political destabilization and international pressure, as well as the mistakes made by Haiti's own Left, undermined the foundations of the many-headed hydra that was the popular movement which had emerged in the mid-'80s, up to the current state of affairs, which sees Haiti being plundered as never before, militarily occupied, and every social network weakened by repression, demoralization and outright violence.

All the political efforts by both the Haitian oligarchy and its bosses "up north" should be read in one direction: to restore the infamous Duvalierism as the natural social and political model for Haiti and, with it, get rid of that bothersome popular movement, get rid of all its symbolic reference points, destroy the social network that was woven by the people from below with solidarity and kill off any kind of popular threat to their privileges.

With the arrival of Baby Doc back in Haiti, the cycle opened by the extraordinarily tragic popular revolts of 1986 can be said to have come to completion. The restoration strategy of Duvalierism has succeeded, at least for now. Mouthing pious words about relief and wiping the crocodile tears about the misery they have created from their eyes, the "international community" has spared no efforts in helping the neo-Duvalierists bring about the Restoration.

Exactly one year ago, when the devastating earthquake of 12 January 2010 completely destroyed the country, we warned that this natural disaster — in line with the doctrines of "humanitarian imperialism" and "the strategy of shock" — would be used to increase Haiti's dependence, its neo-colonial situation and the military occupation of the country. Unfortunately, time has proved us right. The complete devastation that the country now finds itself in is being used not only to justify the furtherance of "economic development" through maquiladoras or the arrival of US occupation troops. This devastation is also

being used as a subterfuge for Duvaliers to return to the country they have done such incalculable damage to, despite their claims of being “moved” by all the suffering, to use the the hypocritical words of the tyrant’s current wife, Veronique Roy.

The response of the colonial administration in Port-au-Prince has been typical. Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive said that like any citizen, Baby Doc had the right to return to the country. Like any citizen?! So why was Aristide not allowed back, then? Are the Duvaliers in some way better citizens than Aristide?

Of course, Bellerive is not quite so understanding when it comes to Aristide returning to the country. Both Préval and Bellerive both objected strongly to the return of exiled president Aristide, who was brought down by a (very particular) coup in 2004 in which – due to the absence of an army (which had been abolished in 1995) – paramilitary forces trained by the CIA in the Dominican Republic were used. Every time the issue of a return by Aristide is mentioned, both men visibly change and get worked up.

So why the differing reaction? Why all the fluster at the mere thought of Aristide returning and the tolerance for Duvalier?

Aristide will not be allowed to return to Haiti because, with all his flaws and political limitations, both personal and concerning the movement he leads, for better or for worse, Aristide symbolically embodies the spirit of social change that swept Duvalierism away in 1986. He symbolizes the movement of the “*descamisados*”, Haiti’s poor, who built popular power through their movements at various times in the recent history of Haiti. He represents a threat, moderate as it may be, to the absolute privileges of the ruling class and US hegemony in the country.

US officials, affluent liberals and the recalcitrant Haitian elite all admit that while Duvalier may be a son-of-a-bitch, at least he’s THEIR son-of-a-bitch. And he’s a son-of-a-bitch who has

been adopted by the international community too as their own. Because the scene was set for the return of Duvalier by the UN, by the OAS, by all the countries participating in the military occupation of Haiti, mainly Latin American countries like Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Peru and even countries who call themselves progressive, like Bolivia and Ecuador.

All of them will have to answer to history on the sad role they have played since 2004 in the task of restoring one of the most heinous dictatorships in the hemisphere.

The Latin American left and popular movements will also have to answer for their complicity and the disgraceful silence they have maintained for many years regarding the occupation, ignoring the fundamental truth that the destiny of Haiti is not and cannot be divorced from the fate of all our peoples. Its struggle is closely tied to our struggle, each victory of ours makes their progress easier, and each advance they make is a step closer to our own liberation.

It seems such a long time since the days in the late '80s and early '90s when the human avalanche stormed throughout Ayiti like a purifying fire! How long it seems since the days when public offices bore signs saying "*Makout pa ladan!*" (No Macoutes allowed — a reference to Duvalier's thugs, the Tonton Macoutes). Now the Chief Macoute, the Macoute of Macoutes, no lesser personage than Baby Doc himself, is strolling freely around Haiti as if none of that had ever happened. The whole world has gone mad!

The oligarchy and imperialism must be under no illusions: the Haitian people are perfectly capable of rising up once more. One cycle of struggle seems to be coming to a close, but at the same time another cycle is beginning and will produce new collective leaderships, new webs of resistance from below. These webs are not being formed with the patience of someone with their arms crossed, but with the patience of the Cimarrons, looking for the right moment to free themselves. Of course, the Haitian left and popular movements are not exempt from

making mistakes and will have to make their assessments in a cold, measured manner. Failures can become victories when they are used so that the process of emancipation can gain experience, greater vision and greater depth. And we are confident that this will be the case. The Haitian people will have to make many sacrifices in this fight, but they will never sacrifice their hope or their dream for the final victory.

Viv yon Ayiti Lib!