

Haitian street protests grow as US intervenes in political crisis

By John Marion
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Demonstrations continued throughout Haiti Tuesday, following Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe's resignation over the weekend. Lamothe's ouster has not resolved the political crisis among the country's ruling elites, nor quelled growing street protests that target not only President Michel Martelly but also inflation and the imperialist machinations of the US and UN.

The protests have been going on since at least October, but have become daily in recent weeks. While centered in Port-au-Prince, the capital, protests have also been reported in the cities of Cap-Haitien, Gonaive, Petit Goâve, and Jacmel. On December 3 a three-month-old infant died from inhaling tear gas fired by police in the north of the country.

Video widely circulated on the web showed United Nations MINUSTAH forces firing teargas and semi-automatic weapons at protesters in Port-au-Prince Friday. On Saturday, a man in his thirties died amid the protests in the capital.

Pouchon Ernst, a protester from the Port-au-Prince neighborhood of La Saline, was quoted by Canada's *La Presse* as saying: "We want a government for the people, not for the rich."

Former US President Bill Clinton's defense of Lamothe and the government has only deepened popular anger. A protest organizer named Volcy Assad told the *Miami Herald*: "Bill Clinton says that this is 'the most consistent and decisive government' he has ever worked with, yet you have thousands of Haitians in the streets, who are hungry and protesting because they are not happy with the situation ... Economic interests are at play here, not Haitian interests."

One protest banner in the capital read "Aba Okipasyon," Kreyol for "down with the occupation." MINUSTAH forces, under the guise of "peacekeeping"

and "stabilization," have been used by the United Nations to subdue the population since Jean-Bertrand Aristide was forced out of power in 2004.

Lamothe and his tourism minister, Stephanie B. Villedrouin, pushed while in office to expand existing resorts and open new ones. Their purpose was to cater not only to wealthy tourists but also to Carnival Cruise Lines and other corporations, which would pay the country no taxes on their profits for the first 15 years of operation. One such resort planned for the southern town of Cotes-de-Fer would have its own golf course and airport.

According to a report published by the World Bank and the National Observatory on Poverty and Social Exclusion this month, 60 percent of Haitians live on \$2 or less per day and 2.5 million people are in "extreme poverty."

Even those with a bit more are faced with high inflation. The October 2014 inflation figures from the Ministry of Economy and Finances show a 5 percent yearly increase in the cost of food and drink, and nearly 11 percent increases in the categories of health, lodging, and energy.

Lamothe, a cofounder of the telecom giant Global Voice Group before becoming Prime Minister, cynically told the Haitian-Caribbean News Network in August that "as far as the future tourists are concerned, it is worth it to know that the money that you are spending while having fun is helping someone to get out of poverty ... This should be very rewarding, and that is what I call a tourism of solidarity."

The crisis leading to Lamothe's resignation stems from the failure of the Haitian Senate and President Michelly to agree on a law governing legislative elections and the details of the Provisional Electoral Council. Without an election between now and January

12 — and such an election cannot possibly be organized — the terms of most legislators will expire. Martelly, a Duvalierist, would then be able to govern by decree at least until the presidential elections scheduled for next October.

The resignation of Lamothe is part of a frantic effort among the ruling elite—which included an 11-member Commission appointed by Martelly and chaired by Reginald Boulos, the head of Haiti’s National Chamber of Commerce and Industry—to address the crisis. Yet the only alternative they have to a Martelly dictatorship would be to extend the terms of the legislators. In either case, there will be no democracy for the country’s workers and peasants.

Martelly has sought to blame the crisis on six senators who have opposed the electoral law he proposed nine months ago. Yet no elections have been held since he assumed power in May 2011, despite the fact that municipal elections were due to happen three years ago.

The opposition senators have no more interest in democracy than does Martelly. In May 2013, Senate President Dieuseul Deras Simon made headlines when he asked the Chilean government to militarily back the opposition in the event of a crisis.

The US State Department has intervened both to influence Lamothe’s resignation and to control the opposition parties. US Ambassador Pamela White called a December 2 meeting with representatives of MOPOD, Fusion, Ayisyen Pou Ayiti, INITE. Fanmi Lavalas and Kontra Pep La were also “solicited” for the meeting, but did not attend.

Even *Le Nouvelliste*, which publishes in French for Haiti’s more privileged layers, was forced to admit that White is acting more like the head of a political party than a credentialed diplomat.

Haiti Special Coordinator Thomas C. Adams and “Counselor” Thomas Shannon were given the job of meeting with the government and the crisis commission appointed by Martelly. When asked about their role during her Daily Press Briefing last Friday, State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki said that “we welcome the December 9th recommendations offered by the consultative commission established by President Martelly as a basis for dialogue ... our position as the United States is that we broadly support dialogue and compromise leading to a solution in Haiti.” The

“solution,” of course, is to be a government favorable to US interests.

Protesters in Port-au-Prince, meanwhile, have been seen holding photos of Vladimir Putin with an appeal underneath reading, “Please Help Us!”

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