

Torturing Democracy
An interview with Noam Chomsky on Haiti
January 25, 2003

The richest country in the hemisphere, the United States of America, has a long history of interventions in Haiti- the poorest country in the hemisphere. On November 8th, 2002 Faiz Ahmad sat down with Noam Chomsky, MIT professor and world renowned critic of American foreign policy, to discuss the current situation in Haiti.

I'd like your opinion on a situation quite close to home a situation which really hasn't received much press at all in Canada. The US government has vetoed the delivery of \$500 million in approved aid loans to Haiti from the Inter American Development Bank. These loans were earmarked specifically for improving education, health, and clean water. Ostensibly the loans are being withheld because the US government and the OAS believe that the votes for 8 senate seats were not counted properly in the May 2000 Haitian elections. Despite the fact that all senators involved have resigned their seats, the embargo remains.

It's totally outrageous. Haiti is the poorest country in the hemisphere. It's in miserable condition. It also happens to be the leading target of US intervention in the 20th century. Ever since Woodrow Wilson occupied it, restored slavery, overthrew the parliamentary system and basically turned it into a US plantation; ever since then the US has supported brutal dictators, a murderous national- all of whom never had an embargo on them no matter how many atrocities they were carrying out. In the early 90's Haiti had its first democratic election. To everyone's surprise they elected a populist priest who [won] through large scale organization and activism in the slums and the hills (who nobody was paying any attention to). The US moved in immediately to undermine the regime: it cut off aid, supported anti-Aristide elements, and a couple of months later a coup came.

The Bush administration, and later the Clinton administration supported the coup. They broke the OAS embargo that was an effort to oppose the coup leaders who were carrying out horrible atrocities and torture. Actually I was there at the time and I don't think I've ever seen such terror; the people were really terrified. The Bush and Clinton administrations supported [the coup], they even secretly authorized illegal dispatches of oil (in violation of presidential directives) to the military junta and its wealthy supporters.

When the United States government thought that the Haitian population had been tortured enough, they moved in and carried out what is called a "liberation." In fact they did allow the elected government to come back, but on very strict conditions; namely that it accept the policies of the candidate the US had supported in the 1990 Haitian election, who only won 14% of the vote, and who the population had voted against. So the Aristide government was allowed back in under the condition that it accept US demands for an extremely harsh neo-liberal regime which has pretty well devastated what's left of the country. And now they have the gall to impose an embargo.

Did they ever impose an embargo when the dictator Duvalier was in power? Even in the 90's when the OAS did impose an embargo the US was undermining it. This is so outrageous that it's hard to find words.

In fact it's kind of striking that the only two countries in the hemisphere that are under embargo are the former slave countries; Cuba and Haiti. There's talk

about paying reparations for slavery (not that it will ever get anywhere); but what's going on is the opposite: the former slaves have to pay us. Those are the two countries under embargo. There's a third which had plenty of slaves, Brazil; and today the US and Canada and other rich countries are desperately trying to undermine democratic elections by compelling the government through financial and other pressures to follow the policies the population voted against. If we had any honesty, we'd be looking at these things.

What do you think the US objective is in maintaining this embargo against Haiti?

Partially just revenge against an independent populist leader. Certainly not corruption. I'm sure it's corrupt, and brutal, and everything else they say, but not more than other countries that the US supports. If we start running down the list of countries the US supports, Haiti looks pretty good by comparison.

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For information on the current attack on Haiti, and to help fight against it please contact:

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