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New Electoral Board Appointed in Haiti

by LADB Staff

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Dec. 9: Haiti's provisional government announced it will hold national elections Jan. 17, while three of the leading presidential candidates from the Nov. 29 elections said they would refuse to participate. Marc Bazin, Louis Dejoie and Gerard Gourgue issued a joint communique saying they will not run in elections called by the National Government Council, charging that its abolition Nov. 29 of the independent electoral board was unconstitutional.

Last week, a fourth front-runner, Sylvio Claude, rejected any effort by the government council to arrange a new election. The four political parties that would probably have obtained the largest number of votes in the Nov. 29 balloting have refused to participate in new elections until the provisional government reinstates the dissolved electoral board. Bazin and Gourgue have refrained from demanding the government's ouster. Bazin, 55, is a finance expert who served periodically with the World Bank for 18 years before returning from exile to Haiti last year. Gourgue, 61, is a teacher and veteran human rights activist. Claude, 53, is a Baptist minister popular for his long-time opposition to the Duvalier dictatorship. His son, Jean-Claude, has demanded that the government council step down.

Dejoie, 59, a wealthy civil engineer, has expressed similar demands. Another group of candidates has emerged since the collapsed Nov. 29 elections who accuse the old electoral board of corruption and fraud and attack the front-runners as "leftists." These candidates, including Gregoire Eugene and Hubert de Ronceray, say they will cooperate with the government council and run in any election it organizes. Eugene, 62, fought many political battles against the Duvaliers, and is of the conservative Social Christian Party. De Ronceray broke with the Duvaliers in the early 1980s. In an evening newscast, the government council said in a communique it will name a new electoral board

Dec. 11. The government will select all nine members, since seven out of eight institutions that it asked to name new electoral delegates have refused.

Dec. 11: The four leading candidates in the failed elections (Bazin, Dejoie, Gourgue and Claude) demanded the immediate ouster of the provisional government. They announced that they had initiated conversations to propose to the country an alternative government toward ensuring the transition to democracy. These conversations included contacts with the Organization of American States and other international organizations to discuss the possibility of providing "international supervision" for elections.

Dec. 12: Clement Maurice Barthelemy, a 40-year-old math teacher, was appointed to the civilian council that is to organize the next presidential election. Barthelemy said, "In principle, I don't participate in politics. But my country needs me. We're in a crisis. I'm a citizen and so I felt I had to serve." In a 20-minute ceremony conducted by the 11-member Supreme Court, he and eight other civilians were sworn in. At least three of the new council members work for the government, while

another is a retired public employee. Two are teachers and two others are lawyers. According to the New York Times, the remaining two declined requests for interviews and it could not immediately be determined what they do.

The Supreme Court was one of the institutions that refused to name a delegate to the new board. Several council members indicated that they thought all candidates would be permitted to run. The original council had disqualified 12 candidates under a constitutional provision barring close associates of the Duvalier family from holding public office.

Gen. Henri Namphy's government council has sought to gain control of the election process since June 22, when it issued a decree restricting the autonomy of an electoral board whose members had been appointed, under terms of a 1987 constitution, by the Catholic and Protestant churches, the Supreme Court and other institutions independent of the government council. Namphy was forced to back down after two weeks of strikes and widespread street protests. He then refused to help and protect the electoral board while it attempted to organize presidential and legislative elections, and then dissolved it on Nov. 29, after violence forced the board to call off the elections. (Basic data from various reports, AFP, Washington Post, New York Times)

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