

4-4-2002

Governing Party Prime Minister

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen>

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Governing Party Prime Minister." (2002). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/8945>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Governing Party Prime Minister

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Haiti

Published: 2002-04-04

President Jean-Bertrand Aristide named Sen. Yvon Neptune to replace Jean-Marie Cherestal as prime minister in early March after the post had been vacant for more than two months. The new prime minister faces the same political standoff with the opposition and the same pressures from the international community as his predecessor. Neptune was interim president of the governing party Fanmi Lavalas, president of the Senate, and is a key Aristide associate.

Cherestal became prime minister just a year earlier. He resigned Jan. 13, just before he was to face a parliamentary inquiry into a scandal caused when he spent more than US\$1 million to buy his official residence. This seemed excessive even to Lavalas senators, coming at a time when Haiti was suffering a financial crisis caused by political turmoil and the cutoff in foreign aid. The inquiry, led by Lavalas senators, would have also asked Cherestal about accusations that he allowed corruption in his government. There were some street demonstrations protesting Neptune's appointment, and opposition members of the parliament objected to Neptune on grounds that he was a US citizen. There was also some difficulty in achieving a quorum in the Senate, and the issue of nationality delayed Neptune's confirmation until March 18.

Opposition says prime minister will not make a difference

The opposition coalition Convergence Democratique (CD) observed that Neptune takes over with the Cabinet of his predecessor Cherestal essentially still in place. They argued that Neptune would bring no new advantages to the post that could get Haiti out of its current crisis. The Organization of American States (OAS) and the US are still demanding improvements in the administration's human rights record, marred, they say, by attacks on opposition leaders attacks they associate with Neptune.

International donors are still withholding foreign aid that has been in the pipeline during the political uncertainty that stretches back to 1997 and the resignation of Prime Minister Rosny Smarth (see EcoCentral, 1997-06-12). The CD wants to see Neptune meet the OAS human rights and other recommendations. Members of the diplomatic corps attending Neptune's swearing-in ceremony said they wanted to see a political cease-fire between the administration and the CD. But the standoff between the two has so far been unaffected by several attempts at negotiation.

The Aristide side says it has proposed concessions that the CD has rejected so as to force the government to its knees. The CD's position is that the government is trying to subvert the opposition with police harassment and other measures so as to rule through tyranny. The alleged coup attempt in December 2001 is a case in point. The government said the armed attack on the National Palace was a coup attempt, but the CD said the government faked it to justify a crackdown on the opposition (see NotiCen, 2002-01-10). The CD wants Aristide to arrest everyone involved

in the attacks and to abide by the OAS resolution passed in January calling for an independent investigation of the palace incident and subsequent attacks on opposition leaders.

During his first days in office, Neptune was faced with CD-organized protests demanding more money for the police, an independent judiciary, a more vigorous investigation of the assassinations of journalists Jean Dominique and Brignol Lindor, new, clean elections, and other proposals on the CD political agenda. Aristide has offered more than once to hold new elections to wipe out the results of the bitterly disputed parliamentary elections of May 2000 (see NotiCen, 2000-04-27, 2000-06-01, 2000-06-12). He reiterated the proposal in March, suggesting November 2002 or early 2003 as possible election dates. Holding elections in November was proposed, he said, within "a policy of openness and transparency." The CD says it will agree on the condition that the two sides first reach agreement on all their outstanding differences.

While in Monterrey, Mexico, attending the UN International Conference on Financing for Development, Aristide said he would concentrate on "respect for human rights and fundamental liberties, the struggle against corruption, drug trafficking, and terrorism, and the utilization of resources with maximum transparency." However, the CD accuses Aristide of renegeing on earlier promises such as to make changes in the electoral council (Conseil Electoral Provisoire, CEP) which took most of the blame for the disputed elections.

-- End --