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# NEWSLETTER

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## SPECIAL STUDENT ISSUE

## Editorial: Haiti and Playing Democracy

Descriptions of the January 17th electoral proceedings in Haiti sound like scenes from some Orwell-Saturday Night Live Players collaboration. In spite of widely reported irregularities, the ruling National Council of Government (CNG), headed by General Henri Namphy, came out with a post-election statement that the elections had "taken place well and beautifully", contributing to the overall absurdity of the day's activities. However, when the violence that prefaced the previous attempt to hold presidential elections is recalled, whatever black humor can be found in these election day vignettes is revealed to be only part of the greater tragedy that is the Haitian reality. (For more on the recent elections, see country update on Haiti in this issue-p.19)

Unfortunately, the Haitian elections were not an anomaly in the Latin American context. Government-sponsored violence and fraud tend to be the norm rather than the exception when elections are close at hand and government interests are likely to lose. In Guatemala and El Salvador, citizens who abstain from voting risk arrest, which may in turn lead to torture or even "disappearance." In Chile, Dictator Pinochet's alternative to fully open,



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democratic elections is the plebescite--whose outcome is undoubtedly easier for the bureaucracy beneath him to control. And yet, the Reagan Administration, for all its claims to be concerned with democracy, hardly condemns such blatantly fraudulent elections in practice. To the contrary, El Salvador and Guatemala are being upheld as the "new democracies" of Central America, with the reward of a combined sum of over half a billion dollars in military and economic aid annually to continue their progress. Similarly, aid to the hated Pinochet regime has been far from decreasing during the Reagan years. Ironically, it is Nicaragua--the one country that in 1985 international observers praised for having held the most democratic presidential elections in years--that has been cast as the hemisphere's villain by the Administration (which, not coincidentally gives itself the leading role as model and promoter of democracy). Not only is the threat posed by this 3 million person nation, according to the Administration, great enough to justify cutting off aid and trade relations, it is sufficient to warrant a full scale attack, complete with stateside-supplied monies and organizing tips. So, while the Administration may not have expressed overt pleasure with the January elections in Haiti, they must not be too disappointed with the outcome. For despite the relatively brief period of time it has been onstage, Haiti's ruling CNG has learned quickly from its Latin neighbors, (as well as its own history) the essentials to putting on a good show of democratic elections...or at least one which proves acceptable to the director in the Hemisphere, the United States.

-Kathy Simmonds