

President-elect George Weah opens Liberia for plunder

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Former football star George Weah was declared the winner in Liberia's run-off election December 28, defeating incumbent Vice President Joseph Nyuma Boakai. Allegations of vote fraud by Boakai forced the runoff after a contested poll held in October. The run-off margin for Weah was a decisive 61.5 to 38.5 percent.

The contest for president took place between several representatives of the Liberian wealthy elite. Weah, the candidate of the Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) party, campaigned on an anticorruption platform. Weah's running mate for vice president, Jewel Taylor, is the former wife of imprisoned ex-president Charles Taylor.

Other candidates included Vice President Boakai of the outgoing Sirleaf government, Prince Johnson, the former Chief Training Officer of imprisoned ex-president Taylor, multimillionaire businessman Alexander Cummings, and MacDella Cooper, a fashion model and Weah's former girlfriend.

The election has been hailed by the corporate media as a major victory for democracy and the first peaceful transfer of power since 1944. Washington and the European powers telephoned to congratulate the newly elected president. International media have largely characterized Weah's victory as part of the sweeping to power of so-called "antiestablishment" political figures, such as Donald Trump in the US, Narendra Modi in India and Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines.

On behalf of Washington, White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders congratulated Weah in a statement: "This is Liberia's first peaceful transfer of power from one democratically elected head of state to another in decades, and represents a major milestone for Liberia's democracy. The United States is deeply committed to our longstanding relationship with

Liberia and its people. We will continue to support the success of this historic democratic transition and the peace and prosperity of Liberia."

In November 2016, when Weah was a senator, he congratulated Donald Trump on his election and made the vapid assertion that the "United States of America, exercise the very tenets of democracy they have introduced to other nations around the globe, the Americans did not disappoint as they proved to the rest of the world why they are a true role model and one of the prime architects of modern democracy."

That Weah casts the election of Trump as evidence that the ruling class in Washington "exercises the very tenets of democracy" is a telling exposure of Weah's own political orientation and social outlook.

As a wealthy ex-footballer and businessman, his claims of being antiestablishment are a fraud. Weah occupies the wealthiest layer of Liberian society.

Weah took advantage of widespread disaffection with the corrupt Sirleaf regime, seeking to redirect social anger away from the social catastrophe experienced by the masses by waging a hollow campaign against corruption, casting the blame on the Sirleaf government for Liberia's economic woes.

Revealing the true character of a Weah government before it has even been inaugurated, Weah gave a clear indication that he is prepared to offer up Liberia's economic resources and its masses to the transnational banks and corporations for plunder. In his first speech as president-elect, Weah declared that he was working to assemble a cabinet in the days before his inauguration on January 22, and was already pursuing the task of expanding Liberia's revenue base, stating, "To investors, we say Liberia is open for business."

Since it possesses immense economic resources, particularly minerals, oil and gas, American and

European corporations are lining up to carve Liberia up for profits and have expressed their pleasure at the prospect of a Weah government.

In the same speech, and after praising outgoing president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Weah issued empty threats to the corrupt clique making up Sirleaf's government: "Those looking to cheat the Liberian people through corruption will have no place." In condemning corruption, Weah seeks to assure investors that their money will be safe in Liberia.

As a measure of his cynicism in claiming that he will hold anyone to account for corruption, Weah indicated his willingness to pursue collaboration and peace with the country's former rulers: "We are not enemies. We welcome you with open arms as we try to build our country."

Weah takes the reins of power amid a slowing economy and exacerbated social misery for the Liberian masses. He will preside over a government wracked by corruption that metastasized over the 12 years of the Sirleaf government. The extent of corruption spooked banks and corporations, resulting in a further decline in Liberia's economy.

Liberia's economy has yet to recover from the devastating impact of the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak that gripped Western Africa, including Sierra Leone, Guinea and Nigeria, with Liberia experiencing the worst of the epidemic, with nearly 5,000 deaths. The outbreak had a devastating impact on the health care infrastructure of the country, which was criminally starved of vital funding from the outset.

After 12 years of corruption and mismanagement under the Sirleaf government, unemployment has skyrocketed in Liberia, along with chronic poverty. The majority of the population lives without access to electricity, and in the capital city Monrovia alone, only 7 percent have access to electricity. The cost per kilowatt-hour in Liberia is the most exorbitant in the world.

Liberia ranks 177 out of 188 in development, making it one of the poorest countries on earth. 80 percent of the population lives on \$1.25 a day. As 70 per cent of the total population is under 35 years of age, young people are left with little hope or prospects for the future.

Weah appealed to the masses' disgust over the failure of the Liberian ruling elite to ameliorate the

deteriorating economic situation by making cynical promises to eradicate the criminality of the Sirleaf government.

Exposing this cynical exercise to combat corruption as a fraud is the fact that Weah chose Jewel Taylor, the wife of former president Charles Taylor, now serving 50 years in prison after his conviction by the International Criminal Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity, as his running mate.

Notably, Taylor provoked an uproar when she stated during the campaign that the former president "still had promises to keep" and called for "putting Mr. Taylor's agenda back on the table."



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