

EIR Feature

International team observes Michigan election atrocities

by Bruce Director

Eight prominent international observers compared the conduct of the March 11, Michigan Democratic Caucuses to the practices of Nazi Germany and the segregationist U.S. South. Speaking at a Washington, D.C. press conference on March 13, the delegation told reporters how Michigan Democratic Party officials physically threatened them and voters, harassed supporters of Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., prevented qualified voters from voting, refused to count votes cast for LaRouche, and conducted other practices that are a shocking violation of all international standards of free and fair elections. The observers found these events particularly horrifying, in light of the U.S. State Department's willingness to condemn the election practices of other countries (see box on Peru).

The group was composed of Dr. Ernst F. Winter, a professor at the Diplomatic Academy in Vienna, Austria; Dr. Godfrey Binaisa, the former President of Uganda; Amelia Boynton Robinson, a 60-year veteran U.S. civil rights leader who led the fight for voting rights in Selma, Alabama 35 years ago; Dr. Hunter Huang, chairman of the National Committee for the Reunification of China; Ortrun Cramer, a representative of the Geneva-based non-governmental International Progress Organization; Gabriele Liebig, editor of the German weekly newspaper *Neue Solidarität*, JL Chestnut, also of Selma, Alabama, the former attorney for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; and Hannah Warnke from Poland.

The observers were asked to come to Michigan by supporters of LaRouche, because the Michigan Democratic Party, in coordination with the Democratic National Committee, had announced its intention to prevent LaRouche's supporters from participating in the caucuses, despite the fact that LaRouche had won over 12,000 votes in Michigan's Feb. 22 primary. LaRouche's name was not on the caucus ballot, and voters were told that if they wrote in LaRouche, the vote would be disregarded.

Each observer, with their varied backgrounds and experiences, had different insights and observations, but all were shocked by what they saw. Dr. Winter, a



A press conference by international observers in Detroit, Michigan, March 10. The next day, they witnessed Democratic Party caucuses in several cities, expressing their “deep disturbance about the democratic process in the United States.” Left to right: Ernst Florian Winter, Hunter Huang, Bruce Director, Sheila Jones, Amelia Boynton Robinson, Godfrey Binaisa, Hannah Warnke.

retired, 32-year veteran of the United Nations system who has observed elections in Bosnia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine, told the press conference that, at first, he doubted that such election violations could occur in the United States. But, after witnessing the Michigan caucuses, he compared the proceedings to those in Nazi Germany:

“Sixty-two years ago, Austria was occupied by the Germans. The very first thing they did, was they organized a plebiscite. And then, in the first few days, they imprisoned 70,000 people, mainly the leading elite, and had a plebiscite. And I must now say, that my major impression—I was in only one Congressional District caucus—but my major impression was that I was witnessing a plebiscite. . . .

“When the vote was taken, I compared it to seeing things that I had seen 62 years ago in my own country. . . . The delegates were asked to stand up. And after they stood up, they were asked to raise their right arm high. It was like this! It was like a whole crowd of Hitler people standing there, raising their hands. It was pretty incredible.”

Physical intimidation

Dr. Winter went on to describe the climate of intimidation surrounding the caucuses. “This shook me up a great deal, really I must say that. Emotionally, I was numb for a while, because of the intimidation, the physical intimidation, the verbal intimidation. They were practically trying to grab me, and throw me out physically, but we stood our ground. And I tried to argue with Congressman [John] Dingell, Christopher

Smith, and some of the top people in the Democratic Party, that this is counterproductive. They’re not going to achieve anything thereby, because the more negative the actions are, the more publicity they will be getting. And I have to report back that there is a nation in the UN that is interested, and also in the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] that is interested.

“And so, they were saying—this is very interesting—the Democratic Party was, and is, a private organization. They can set their own rules, and they can do what they please. And they set their rules that *nobody*, even as an observer to the LaRouche participation in this caucus, is allowed to come in. In fact, they printed a sheet which said *only observers that are for Al Gore can come in*. And it seems incredible that these things are done in black and white. One can imagine there would be some back-door arrangements, but to print all this up in black and white, and take the risk of having it spread all over the world, is very, very counterproductive.

“We also had a young man, who in a sense did interrupt the discussion, because he raised this treatment, and wanted to speak for LaRouche, and of course was forbidden to do so. Two very well-built American football players were supposed to drag him out, and he refused to be dragged out—in fact, he held onto his chair—so that then police were called. I was really speechless. Three policemen came, and dragged this man out.

“So, this is very counterproductive. But, there was a positive aspect to it, at the very end, these three policemen were

State Dept. conditions for democracy in Peru

On March 9, two days before the Michigan Democratic Party caucuses, the U.S. State Department issued a press statement, insisting that Peru abide by the following conditions in its April 9 Presidential elections:

1) "Provide opposition political candidates meaningful access to the media and encourage improved coverage so voters can make informed and free choices at the ballot box.

2) "Launch a public campaign to educate the electorate on the procedures for voting in the upcoming elections, emphasizing that the vote is secret and that the integrity of the process may be guaranteed through the active participation of poll watchers.

3) "Cease *ad hominem* attacks on opposition candidates, domestic election observers, [and Ombudsman Jorge Santistevan].

4) "Investigate reports of harassment of opposition candidates and domestic election monitors and take action against those responsible.

5) "Continue cooperation with the National Democratic Institute/Carter Center, OAS, and other international and domestic election monitors.

6) "Implement a directive that makes clear that the misuse of state resources for electoral advantage will be severely sanctioned; and

7) "Complete a vigorous investigation of allegations that signatures in support of the registration of 'Peru 2000' were forged."

informed by this man that I was here as an observer, with a UN practice and background; and these three policemen didn't quite know what to do, and they came up and scraped and bowed and didn't say a word, but I saw from their gestures that they were excusing themselves. And they decided they were not going to throw this man out, but allow him to sit next to me. So, he came and sat next to me."

The physical intimidation was also described by Dr. Binisa, who was treated very poorly, despite being a former head of state. He told the press conference: "They rejected us, and told us to sit outside in another room, until Congressman John Conyers came in—I think that was his constituency—and he talked to us, and he talked to the lady who had rejected us, who was a retired superintendent of schools in that area. I was escorted into the room by the Hon. John Conyers, Congressman. I was very intimidated; I feared that perhaps I would meet the same fate as my fellow African, Amadou

Diallo: I would be shot. I was so intimidated."

Other observers reported similar physical threats. Mrs. Amelia Boynton Robinson, the 88-year-old veteran civil rights leader who was beaten nearly to death on the "Bloody Sunday" march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, on March 7, 1965, said she had been physically prevented from observing the voting in Michigan, and that only after a physical confrontation was she allowed in to watch the ballot counting. "And then they had big men—there were three of them, and they called themselves goons, and one man called another one, and said, 'Come over here,' to one of the goons, 'Put them out.' They said, 'You have to leave the building.' And it was cold, very cold. And Sheila [Jones] said, 'I'm not going out there; it is cold out there.' 'Well, you can't go anywhere they're casting their votes.' 'Well, we *are* going, because we are here to observe.' Then, the door opened at 11 o'clock, though some people voted around 9:30, and the doors were closed after they left, and they wouldn't let anybody in there until 11 o'clock, when they opened the door. And we made an attempt to go in, and they said, 'You can't go in there.' And Sheila said, 'Oh yes, I am going in there.' 'Oh, no, you can't.' And they called another guy to come and throw her out. And she said, 'I'm not moving. If you touch me, if you hit me, you hit me good, and I'll certainly have it in all of the newspapers.' So, they wouldn't bother her, but they didn't want to let her go in. Finally, she said, 'Can you call the person who's in charge?' And they called the lady. And she said, 'Well, you can come in.' "

Journalist Gabriele Liebig reported having her camera knocked out of her hands by party officials, as she tried to snap a photo of the voting boxes. Were it not for the intervention of a LaRouche supporter, Liebig reported, she feared the physical confrontation would have gone much further.

Liebig also reported seeing civil rights attorney JL Chestnut thrown out of the caucus. "I was shocked to see Martin Luther King's attorney treated this way."

Hannah Warnke reported, "Just the fact that we mentioned Mr. LaRouche's name caused nervousness, as one of the ladies in charge yelled, 'Not LaRouche! Not LaRouche! He's not on the ballot here! . . . He's *Other!*' This woman had a trembling voice, a trembling hand, and was in general, a trembling person, when she was challenged on LaRouche being a bona fide candidate. 'Absolutely no! This is a time for registration! You will not be allowed!' "

No longer a model for the world

Dr. Binisa, former President of Uganda, spoke of the international implications of the destruction of free elections in the United States. "You are the only country in the modern world that won your independence after eight years of bitter fighting against the British, to establish the first democratic republic in the whole world. And yet, you are doing so badly, that you are no longer a model, you can't be a model to us, when you continue like this.

“We had gone there only to observe, to act as observers; we had no business to vote or do anything of the kind. But what happened sent shockwaves down my spine. It would have sent shockwaves down the spines of all Africans, if they had been there. Very recently, Vice President Gore went to Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia, and gave a dressing-down to the Malaysian leadership. He said, among other things, that they are undemocratic, that they don’t observe human rights, and so on and so forth. And the Malaysians, were they angry! And rightly so. And now, the same man, who is now standing as a candidate to govern this country as President, is doing even worse than Mahathir Mohamad, the Prime Minister of Malaysia. It’s really a shocking experience.

“I told my friends, that if this goes on, we in Africa, who are we going to look to for leadership? Who are we going to copy? Who are we going to emulate? There’s nothing left, because today this country is the only remaining superpower. They have no competitor; the Soviets are gone. So, are they going to govern the whole world under a dictatorship? . . . You are creating kings. You are going back to feudalism; you are going back where one of the candidates, George W. Bush—he’s a kind of an anointed prince, because his father was President. His grandfather, Prescott Bush, was a Senator. Then you have Al Gore. His father was a Senator from Tennessee for many years, and Al Gore himself has been a Senator and is now the only candidate for the Democratic Party.

“So now, you are moving back to where you—I mean, you tried to get rid of the King of England during the eight years you fought, and now I don’t know what you are going to. Really, I think you will end up creating a feudal king, who will have all the powers, because he has the history of governing others in him. He’s not qualified at all, but here comes a man who is asked, ‘Do you know the President of India?’ (I think it was). He didn’t know the President of India, and yet India, after China, is the most populated country in the world: 900 million people. But, he didn’t know the President of India. So, who *does* he know? I think he is only fit to govern in his own household. You cannot say that he is fit to govern this great country of the United States.

“I was horrified myself, and that’s the kind of message I’m going to pass on to my fellow Africans, who like to know what is going on in the United States: Are they democratic, as they pretend to be? Or is it a mere window dressing to say that they are democratic, when they don’t follow the first principles of democracy of having a fair and free election?

“This is not a fair and free election at all; I think the powers that be have decided that it must be either Bush or Gore. But, I think from the look of things, they decided that Bush will be the man, but Gore will accompany him to his throne. And this, I think, is going to happen. I don’t like to speculate about what may happen to prevent that from happening. Maybe there might be what you call in law *actus intervenius*, something that intervenes, like the collapse of the financial system, as we know it today.

“Maybe, people may have a chance to think again. But,

the way things are going, Africa cannot emulate the United States today. Even Asia cannot. Whatever they may say in the newspapers, we’re not going to listen to any more, because of what is going on today.

“You’ve got to do something, and some of us maybe will help you, but by helping you, we are also helping ourselves. Because you are the only country, the United States of America is the only country which can help Africa, I’m telling you. No other country. It would be a lie to say that any country in Europe today can help Africa. No, none. Because you’ve got the wealth, you’ve got the population, you’ve got the expertise, you’ve got the know-how, you’ve got everything. But please, do it; use it, use it to benefit not only yourselves, but us, too, in Africa.”

Like the segregationist South

Amelia Boynton Robinson drew the comparison with the segregationist South:

“I was very surprised when I found out that the United States of America has taken the tactics that were used back then in the 1900s, to control the parties. I’m surprised, because I had seen this thing happening earlier, in the ’20s and ’30s in the South. And they’re doing the same thing that they did back then in those days. I have been involved in seeing that people have the opportunity to register and vote. I fought to see that the right to vote became a reality for everybody, and I see now that it’s being destroyed. I have witnessed in Michigan, that they are destroying it, and it’s becoming a part of the whole nation. . . . Now, it seems as though we are reverting to the 1900s or 1910. . . . And we are reverting to the same thing: To say that we are not going to count the votes of Lyndon LaRouche, we are going to throw them out. Aren’t we going backwards instead of forwards?

“That is the reason why we can’t sing, with feeling, ‘My country ’tis of thee, sweet land of Liberty.’ Because liberty is being thrown out, and we will have to fight for liberty, for justice, regardless of whoever it might be that brings it to the forefront.”

Low voter turnout

Several of the observers noted the restrictive methods by which the vote was held, discouraged broad participation and voter turnout. Ortrun Cramer observed that only 3,600 voters attended caucuses statewide in Michigan, compared to the more than 12,000 votes cast for LaRouche in the primary. Registration took place between 10 and 11 a.m., at which point the doors were locked. Gabriele Liebig reported that she saw voters turned away.

Dr. Huang said, “One percent of the voters are making the decisions for 99% of the people. That is wrong.” Huang also was dismayed that the results of the vote in the caucus he observed, were never announced.

While he was treated politely, Huang said, he felt very sad about what was happening.

Cramer also criticized the lack of a secret ballot. “Voters

had to fill out a form with their name, address, birthdate, and e-mail address, and then vote on the same ballot.”

The low voter turnout also troubled Hannah Warnke. “We regret that in Poland, only 60-80% of the population votes. How could this be called an election, when less than 1% of the population participated? How could this be democratic, when people were forced to declare their choice, while having to give their names, addresses, phones, e-mail addresses?”

Liebig remarked that she had expected that a caucus vote would not be secret, but she did expect an open discussion and debate, with the candidates making presentations. Instead, she saw a closed procedure, with almost no discussion at all. When a local attorney tried to speak for LaRouche, he was prevented. After the intervention of a state legislator, the

LaRouche supporter was only allowed to speak without a microphone, in contrast to the Gore supporters, who were afforded the run of the caucus.

Dr. Winter expressed a note of hopeful optimism that Americans would reject these disgraceful tactics. “But, as we left the building, some of these local people came up, and said, ‘We are really sorry this happened,’ or ‘We are surprised that this happened.’ Looking in the faces of these people, I saw them as being maybe auto workers, engineers, of Polish descent, or Irish descent. People who had worked all their lives, and are now proud to be able to help with a caucus and were actually quite shocked at what happened.”

The delegation will produce a detailed report of its findings, which will be submitted to the OSCE and other international organizations.

The delegation’s findings

The following is excerpted from a press release issued following the international delegation’s observation of the Michigan Democratic caucuses on March 11.

A group of international observers came to watch the Michigan Democratic caucuses on March 11, 2000, because it had been brought to their attention that the Democratic National Committee issued a directive that any vote cast for Democratic Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche in those caucuses, would not be counted. . . .

What happened at those caucuses turned their concern into deep disturbance about the Democratic process in the United States, because: 1) Indeed, in all except one caucus, LaRouche’s votes were not counted; 2) To the extent that the international observers were not banned from the caucus proceedings altogether, what they saw provided shocking insights into the utterly undemocratic way in which one pre-arranged candidate, Al Gore, is being imposed on the people, who have no clue of what is being done to them.

- Three of nine observers were excluded totally from the caucuses. One of them was JL Chestnut (caucus in UAW Building, 15th Congressional District). Despite the fact, that according to the law, all Presidential candidates have the right to have observers in the caucuses.

- In several caucuses, goons physically threatened both voters, who sought to support LaRouche, and also the international observers.

- In one caucus, voters even had to raise their hands for the candidate whom they wanted to vote for; to which Dr. Winter, of Austria, commented that this reminded him of “plebiscites practiced by the dictatorships of unhappy memory.”

- In only one caucus, could LaRouche supporters speak up for LaRouche with the consent of the caucus manager, who explained to the voters present the possibility of writing in LaRouche’s name on the ballot. Only in one other place were LaRouche supporters allowed to speak, and only after a verbal fight, and without a microphone.

In addition, the international observers expressed their shock about the caucus procedure as such:

1. They called it a mockery of the rule of free and secret elections. If voters have to fill in their ballot, their address, telephone number, e-mail, etc., in front of the sergeant-at-arms, and if they have to stand in line, in front of different ballot boxes, in the name of Gore, Bradley, and others, Professor Winter, who observed the last election in Bosnia on behalf of the United Nations, pointed out, this represented, in fact, a strong factor of voter intimidation, which was underlined by the fact, that in several caucuses, Bradley votes were found in Gore ballot boxes, apparently, because voters were too frightened to go to the Bradley box.

2. International observers strongly criticized the behavior of a party, which has a public function and hence, cannot act as a private club. But here, in the Michigan caucuses, the caucus managers who were observed, did not seem to comply with any standard rule, and, in fact, in many cases, didn’t even seem to know about such standards.

3. The international observers found it particularly disturbing that here, less than 1% of the registered voters in every Congressional District would determine the election of a candidate.

Therefore, the international observers are asking: Is this the standard for free democratic elections, which the U.S. government is demanding be observed by nations around the world? . . .