

# HAITI - Stealth Duvalierism: Haiti, Michel Martelly, and the Presidential Selection of 2010

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December 20, 2010 - [Znet](#) - In the media coverage of Haiti's ongoing electoral crisis, presidential candidate Michel "Sweet Micky" Martelly, whom ruling Unity party candidate Jude Célestin edged out of Haiti's Jan. 16 run-off by less than 1%, has been portrayed as the victim of voting fraud and the leader of a populist upsurge against Haiti's crooked Provisional Electoral Council (CEP).

Some have questioned his presidential suitability by pointing to his vulgar antics as a konpa musician over the last two decades, where he often made demeaning comments about women and periodically dropped his trousers to bare his backside.

The real problem with Martelly, however, is not his perceived immorality, but his heinous political history and close affiliation with the reactionary "forces of darkness," as they are called in Haiti, which have snuffed out each genuine attempt Haitians have made over the past 20 years to elect a democratic government. Far from a champion of democracy, Martelly has been a cheerleader for, and perhaps even a participant in, bloody coups d'état and military rule.

## Duvalierist affinities

Under the Duvalier dictatorship, Martelly ran the Garage, a nightclub patronized by army officers and members of Haiti's tiny ruling class.

At a recent press conference, Martelly spoke nostalgically of the Duvalierist era, when François "Papa Doc" Duvalier and later his son Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" enforced their iron rule with gun and machete wielding Tonton Macoutes, a sort of Haitian Gestapo.

"Today the dog is eating its vomit," lamented Marcus Garcia of Radio Mélodie FM in a Dec. 8 editorial. While "Michel Martelly openly defends the Duvalier regime in a press conference," the youth who have been duped into supporting him are "without memory of [the infamous political prison] Fort Dimanche-Fort La mort, without memory of the Nov. 29, 1987 electoral massacre," when neo-Duvalierist thugs killed hundreds of would-be voters.

In a 2002 article, the *Washington Post* explained how the konpa singer was a long-time "favorite of the thugs who worked on behalf of the hated Duvalier family dictatorship before its 1986 collapse." But the mainstream media of late has yet to pick up on the singer's past affiliations.

Duvalierist affinities should not be taken lightly. Human rights groups such as the League of Former Political Prisoners and Families of the Disappeared compiled a partial list of several thousand of the Duvalier regime's victims, which was published in *Haiti Progrès* in 1987, but total estimates of those killed under the U.S.-backed 29-year long dictatorship range from 30,000 to 50,000 people.

After Baby Doc's fall in February 1986, a mass democratic movement, long repressed by the Duvaliers, burst forth and became known as the Lavalas, or flood. Martelly quickly became a bitter Lavalas opponent, making trenchant attacks against the popular movement in his songs played widely on Haitian radio.

## The rise of Aristide and the 1991 coup

Following his dramatic election with 67% of the vote in Dec. 16, 1990 elections, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a former parish priest and Lavalas movement leader, was inaugurated on Feb. 7, 1991 as Haiti's democratically elected president, but then deposed by a military coup, for the first time, on Sep. 30, 1991, only eight months into his first term. Martelly "was closely identified with sympathizers of the 1991 military coup that ousted former President Jean- Bertrand Aristide," the *Miami Herald* observed in 1996.

The military junta that ruled Haiti between 1991 and 1994 was bloody and brutal. According to Human Rights Watch, some 5,000 people were murdered by the junta's soldiers and paramilitaries, and thousands more tortured and raped. Hundreds of thousands were driven into hiding and exile. Martelly became the coup's joker, applauding the junta while it was in power.

He was friends with the dreaded Lt. Col. Michel François, who, as Police Chief, was the principal director of the coup's executioners. For instance, according to a fact-finding report by former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark's Haiti Commission of Inquiry into the Sep. 30 Coup d'État, François drove a red Jeep leading several buses full of soldiers into large crowds demonstrating against the coup on the Champ de Mars in front of the National Palace on the night of Sep. 30, 1991. (A January 1991 coup d'état, nine months earlier, had been turned back by such massive demonstrations.) The crowds applauded the soldiers, thinking they had come to put down the coup. Instead, on François' signal, the bus windows opened, then police and soldiers mowed down hundreds of demonstrators with machine- gun fire.

Martelly claims his moniker "Sweet Micky" (also the name of his band) came from a nightclub performance in 1988, but it's a nickname Col. Michel François also shared. U.S. documentary filmmaker and writer Kevin Pina recalls a concert at the El Rancho Hotel in Port-au-Prince in July 1993 where Colonel "Michel François, ... who was also called 'Sweet Micky' after the coup of 1991 because people claimed he would have a broad smile on his face as he killed Lavalas partisans, took to the stage" and "held up Martelly's hand announcing to the crowd, 'This is the real Sweet Micky.'" Pina adds, "That's the first time I ever heard Martelly referred to as such."

One concert that Martelly performed at the request of Michel François and military junta leaders was billed as a demonstration against Dante Caputo, the United Nations special representative to Haiti who was attempting to deploy UN human rights observers into the country. At that same time, the Haitian army and the infamous FRAPH death squads were slaughtering members of the anti-coup resistance.

Martelly, known at the time to have many friends throughout the military, explained to the *Miami New Times*: "I didn't accept [the request to play] because I was Michel François's friend, I did not accept because it was the Army. I went because I did not want Aristide back."

Most shockingly, Father Jean- Marie Vincent (who was killed by a coup death-squad on Aug. 28, 1994) accused Martelly of accompanying the Haitian police on deadly night-time raids to track down suspected Lavalas resistance leaders. "We have information that Michel Martelly has been traveling with death squads from the police when they go out at night to hunt and kill Lavalas leaders," Vincent told filmmaker Pina in a videotaped interview.

After Aristide returned to Haiti in October 1994, Martelly spent most of his time living "in a condo on Miami Beach," where he "had a regular gig at the Promenade on Ocean Drive, where his band Sweet Micky performed compas, rhythmic Haitian dance music," according to the *Miami New Times*.

In 2000, Aristide was overwhelmingly elected to a second term. But the George W. Bush administration, also coming into power at that time, launched a destabilization campaign to overthrow Aristide, which is detailed in Peter Hallward's 2007 book *Damming the Flood*. Martelly became a willing participant in that germinating coup.

In 2002, the noose was tightening around Aristide. Former soldiers had attempted a coup on Dec. 17, 2001, and the U.S. aid embargo was taking its toll. Nonetheless, Aristide's government had launched

several social investment programs including food cooperatives, the building of unprecedented numbers of schools, subsidization of school books, and other literacy promotion. In his 2002 Carnival song, Martelly referred “to recent riots at a dockside warehouse here that were sparked by word that officials from Aristide’s party were stealing from a food program for the poor,” wrote the *Washington Post*. Although corruption under Aristide paled next to that under the 1991 military junta that Martelly supported, his Carnival song hit a nerve.

By 2003, Martelly was on average spending \$150,000 to \$200,000 on his floats for Port-au-Prince’s annual Carnival, according to the *Miami Herald*. During Carnival, in which mockery of the government is a tradition, Martelly aimed extremely sharp and vulgar criticism at Aristide. During that time, “Kolonget manman ou Aristide” was one of Sweet Micky’s refrains, perhaps the worst curse one can make in Kreyòl, meaning literally “the slave master fucked your mother.”

### **The 2004 coup and its aftermath**

In February 2004, Aristide was driven from power yet again. A U.S. Navy Seal team took the president from his home – Aristide called it “a modern kidnapping” – and sent him into exile in Africa, where he remains to this day.

In the build-up to that coup, so-called “rebels” composed of former Haitian Army soldiers and former FRAPH death-squad paramilitaries, ran raids into Haiti’s Central Plateau and North, savagely executing dozens of Aristide supporters, government officials and some of their family members. Wyclef Jean, a friend of Martelly, described the “rebels” as freedom fighters “standing up for their rights.”

Following the coup, U.S., French, and Canadian soldiers occupied Haiti and set up an illegal de facto regime. As outcry against the February coup grew, Martelly held a concert in Port-au-Prince in April 2004 to counter calls for Aristide’s return. The concert was entitled: “Keep him out!”

In September 2004, Tropical Storm Jeanne flooded the northwest city of Gonaïves, killing some 3,000 people. U.S.-installed de facto Prime Minister Gérard Latortue was widely criticized for his ineffective and belated response to the disaster. One of his few initiatives was to hold a fundraiser with business leaders of the Haitian American Chamber of Commerce. Martelly, who had used his music only to undermine Aristide, headlined the Latortue gala, the *Miami Herald* reported.

In 2006, with Lavalas militants driven into hiding, jailed, or murdered, the Latortue regime held an election which brought former-President René Préval back to power. The Lavalas base supported Préval, thinking he would bring Aristide back, free all the coup’s political prisoners, and reverse the neoliberal march of the Latortue dictatorship.

But Préval betrayed these expectations, creating a government dominated by coup supporters and working closely with the foreign military occupation which had now been handed off to the UN. He soon became reviled by large swathes of the poor for failing to enable Aristide’s return or to restart many of Aristide’s popular social investment programs. By 2009, Préval’s CEP banned Aristide’s party, the Lavalas Family (FL), from partial senatorial elections and later presidential and parliamentary elections. Préval’s weak response to the catastrophic January 2010 earthquake accelerated his decline.

### **The 2010 elections and Martelly’s rise**

Finally, the CEP fixed general elections for Nov. 28, 2010. The Associated Press reported Dec. 10 that Martelly’s “political popularity took off in the weeks before the vote and seems to have surged since it appeared he had been narrowly disqualified from the race.”

This surge owes a lot to Martelly’s hi-tech campaign, which outgunned and outclassed his 18 rivals by launching tens of thousands of computerized messages asking people to vote for him.

Martelly hired a slick Spanish public relations firm to manage his campaign and break into the spotlight.

"The Madrid-based Sola, who played an indispensable role in getting Mexico's Felipe Calderón into the president's chair in 2006, has been running the Martelly campaign for the past seven weeks, which goes a long way toward explaining how the antic-prone musician suddenly emerged as a leading contender for Haiti's presidency," reported *The Toronto Star* on Dec. 6.

Calderón is widely considered to have stolen the 2006 election from leftist candidate López Obrador, a dirty victory which pleased Washington. The firm Ostos & Sola has also helped the campaign of Lech Walesa, the transnational elite's darling in Poland. Damian Merlo, Ostos & Sola's executive director and Martelly campaign point-man, worked on the presidential campaign of U.S. Republican John McCain before joining the firm. All of these associations raise questions about what "hidden hand" may be behind the Martelly campaign.

Investigating one possible source of financing behind Martelly's campaign, the *Toronto Star* pieces adds, "Today's \$50 million question: who is the Miami businessman who reached out to Antonia Sola to be Michel Martelly's campaign fixer?" The article adds, "Sola smiles at the question, all Spanish charm. He's not saying. 'A friend, a businessman, presented Michel to us in the U.S.,' he says."

The key to Sola's formula for Martelly was to present him as an "outsider," even though he had been the ultimate "insider" with the pro-coup bourgeoisie that overthrew Aristide twice.

On Nov. 28, as it became apparent that Haiti's election was riddled with fraud and disenfranchisement, Martelly joined with 11 other candidates to call for election's annulment. But later that day, Edmond Mulet, who heads the UN Mission to Stabilize Haiti (MINUSTAH), personally called Martelly to tell him that he was leading, *Al Jazeera* reported. Sweet Micky, without even telling the other candidates in the impromptu front, jumped back in the race.

The next day, Martelly denied he had ever signed the joint letter read in his nodding presence at the candidates' joint press conference on Nov. 28 calling for the election's annulment. He explained "his change of position by saying his candidacy had been leading in polling stations where there had not been fraud," *Chicago's Daily Herald* reported.

"He saw all the fraud happening on election day," motorcycle taxi driver Weed Charlot told the Inter Press Service (IPS) about Martelly. "But now he sees he has some votes and power. So he'll accept the election."

The same day he spoke to Martelly, Mulet called candidate Mirlande Manigat to also tell her she was leading in the vote. She too pulled out of the candidates' annulment front.

Then, on Dec. 7, the CEP announced that Manigat was leading with Unity's Célestin in second-place, and hence the second-round. Martelly, who apparently came in third with just over 21%, about 6,800 votes short of Célestin, switched back into protest-mode.

Manigat lost in a 2006 presidential run-off, and her husband, Leslie Manigat, briefly ran Haiti in 1988 after coming to office in a military-overseen election that few Haitians and international observers viewed as democratic.

Popular anger was already high with Préval and the CEP for excluding the Lavalas Family (only 23% of Haiti's 4.7 million voters turned out, according to the CEP). The election mess was the last straw.

Furthermore, there was rage at MINUSTAH for attempting to cover-up that its troops in Mirebalais had accidentally introduced cholera into Haiti, where the disease is now a pandemic.

With Wyclef Jean at his side predicting "civil war," Martelly channeled the deep popular frustration to attack the government for "robbing" him of a victory he claimed should have been his.

The result has been a wave of election-related mayhem. "It is clear that most of the acts of violence in Haiti around the election have been carried out by Martelly's supporters," said Ricot Dupuy of Radio Soleil

d'Haiti, based in Brooklyn.

"Thousands of his supporters have paralyzed the capital and other cities in protests that included attacks on public buildings," Reuters reported.

Some people have died in drive-by shootings and skirmishes between Martelly's supporters and those of Célestin.

In late November, Haitian journalist Wadner Pierre witnessed a group of Martelly supporters at the Building 2004 voting center in Port-au-Prince throw rocks and chant: "If you don't let us vote, we will burn this building down."

Martelly supporters are responsible for burning a number of government buildings in the capital and in the southern city of Aux Cayes. They have also assaulted some opponents, while Célestin backers have been accused of killing at least one Martelly supporter.

Former Col. Himmler Rébu said on Haiti's Signal FM that he had witnessed the tactics of Martelly's troops in the street. "This is not something simple," he said, a Kreyòl understatement that implies there are hidden forces at work.

In short, there are two movements in Haiti today which are being simplified into one. There are the Lavalas masses mobilized against Préval's fraudulent exclusionary elections and the UN occupation, as well as for Aristide's return.

Then there is the bid by Martelly, using his and Wyclef's celebrity and Ostos & Sola's scientific techniques, to coopt this movement to bring him to power. To confuse people, he equates Préval with Aristide, pretending they are the twin governments responsible for the "failed policies" of the past two decades.

In reality, Haiti's sad state today can be mostly attributed to the 1991 and 2004 coups which Martelly supported. Furthermore, the power behind Préval - Haiti's pro-coup bourgeoisie - is close to Martelly, and he does not threaten transnational elites promoting further penetration into Haiti by TNCs. We are witnessing a fierce rivalry between political factions which share the same two backers: Haiti's anti-Lavalas business class and transnational elites with the U.S. as their most powerful state apparatus.

As Martelly explained to the *Huffington Post*'s Georgianne Nienaber, he is very much in tune with Washington's prescription for Haiti, supporting "anything that will help exports... anything that will help the private sector."

Secondly, Martelly does not support the people's call to end the UN occupation of Haiti: "I want to say to the international community, the diplomatic corps, and non-governmental agencies that we need them," he said in the same interview.

Ultimately, Martelly is not a "dark horse" candidate, as Canada's *Globe & Mail* suggests, who has come out of nowhere to lead "Haiti's young and dispossessed." He is a man with a long history of service to Haiti's "Morally Repugnant Elite."

During his campaign, Martelly was fond of saying that in Haiti "it's more about the man than about the plan." If this is true, Haitians should have grave misgiving about a man who has backed two coup regimes that used death-squads to silence the poor majority and throttle Haiti's nascent democracy.