Ten Steps to Dictatorship: Why the Grassroots Movement in Haiti is Taking to the Streets Against the President

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At great personal risk, Haitians have been demonstrating massively in cities throughout the country for the last several months calling for President Michel Martelly to step down.They held demonstrations even on30 September and 17 October, dates of important coup d'états in Haitian history, and 29 November, the date of an election-day massacre in 1987.

By choosing these historically significant dates, the Haitian grassroots majority is clearly saying they want an end to Martelly and to the 10-year UN military occupation that followed the coup that overthrew elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide on 29 February 2004. Martelly's police force brutally broke up some demonstrations with tear gas and beatings.

Demonstrators reported that police used a very 'powerful' gas, which surprised them in its potency and aerial reach. In late October 2013, students in Cap Haitien, demonstrating to support teachers demanding an increase in pay, were tear-gassed so viciously that 60 were injured, four seriously.

The next day, students in the State University of Port-au-Prince, demonstrating in support of attorney Andre Michel (see #7 below), were gassed for hours, even after they had been pushed back to their campus. The gassing went on so long that some legislators went on the radio to demand that it be stopped.

On 6 November, lawyers marched in Port-au-Prince demanding an end to threats against and harassment of those willing to take on cases involving Martelly's corruption. They also called for the resignation of the chief prosecutor. And on 7 November, thousands marched, chanting 'Aba Martelly' (Down with Martelly). Haitian police attacked the demonstration with tear gas and beatings. Three people were shot and wounded.

Who Is Michel Martelly?

Martelly grew up during the 27-year dictatorship of Francois 'Papa Doc' Duvalier and his son, Jean Claude 'Baby Doc'. He reportedly joined the Duvalierist death squad, the Tonton Macoutes, at the age of 15, and later attended Haiti's military academy. Under Baby Doc, Martelly, a popular musician, ran the Garage, a nightclub patronized by army officers and members of Haiti's tiny ruling class. After Baby Doc's fall in February 1986, a mass democratic movement, long repressed by the Duvaliers, burst forth and became known as Lavalas ('flood'), from which emerged Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a popular liberation theology Catholic priest, who was elected president in 1990 with 67 per cent of the vote in the first free and fair election in Haiti's history. Martelly quickly became a bitter opponent of Lavalas, attacking the popular movement in his songs played widely on Haitian radio.

Martelly'was closely identified with sympathizers of the 1991 military coup that ousted former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide', the *Miami Herald* observed in 1996, and ran with members of the vicious FRAPH death squad from that period, infamous for gang rapes and killing with impunity.

On the day of Aristide's return to Haiti in 2011, after eight years of forced exile in South Africa, and two days before the 'run-off' election, Martelly was caught in a video on YouTube insulting Aristide and Lavalas: 'The Lavalas are so ugly. They smell like s**t. F**k you, Lavalas. F**k you, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.'

The Fraudulent Presidential Election of 2010-2011

In the presidential election cycle of 2010-2011, Haiti's Electoral Council banned Aristide's FanmiLavalas Party from

participation, which de-legitimized the whole corrupt process. Voter turnout was less than 25 per cent in the primaries and less than 20 cent in the "run-off." The top two candidates announced after the sham primaries were the wife of a former pro-Duvalier president and the son-in-law of Rene Preval, the president at the time. Martelly was declared third, but his supporters demonstrated violently. An OAS commission, with the full support of Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, who flew to Port-au-Prince at the height of the Egyptian revolution, ruled that Martelly had finished second. He received $6 million from an anonymous donor in Florida to hire a PR firm that had worked on the campaigns of Felipe Calderón in Mexico and John McCain in the U.S.

Corruption

Corruption scandals have followed Martelly since he refused to divulge who funded his campaign for president.

• Bribes

Award-winning Dominican Republic journalist Nuria Piera broke the story in April 2012 (later reported in Time) that Martelly was alleged to have accepted $2.6 million in bribes during and after the 2010 election to ensure that a Dominican construction company would receive contracts under his Presidency.

In addition, the vote to make Laurent Lamothe the Prime Minister is known in Haiti as the "tout mounjwenn vote" ("everyone got their cut" vote).

• Surcharge on international calls and money transfers for "education"

Questionable new taxes have also fed controversy. A $1.50 tax on money transfers and a 5 cent per minute tax on phone calls to Haiti are alleged by Martelly to support education, but the poor majority continue to face unaffordable school fees, and critics say no money from this tax has gone to schools. Moreover, Haitian teachers have been marching to demand back pay. Martelly's new taxes were not ratified by or presented to Haiti's Parliament, making them illegal.

• Travel Expenses

When traveling, which he does often, Martelly's entourage receives an outrageous per diem from the Haitian government. According to Senator Moise Jean-Charles, Martelly gets $20,000 a day, his wife $10,000 a day, his children $7,500, and others in his inner circle get $4,000 daily.

A plan to establish an illegal parallel customs system to circumvent legislative control

This allegedly involved the selling of a membership card and gun to anyone who wanted to be part of the Martelly gang. The membership privileges included tax-exempt status at customs. The program had to be scratched when US DEA complained about members facilitating drug transport on the strength of their membership.

Rewriting and Undermining Haiti's Constitution

The overthrow of Baby Doc in 1986 led to the creation of a new democratic Constitution in 1987, ratified in a referendum by an overwhelming majority of Haitians. It recognized Haitian Kreyol as an official language, along with French, and legalized Vodun, the spiritual practice of the majority of Haitians. It provided for grassroots participation in national decision-making, decentralized the nation's finances and political structure, and provided for protection of human rights. On June 12, 2012 Martelly announced new amendments, which concentrate executive power and herald the return of Duvalier-style dictatorship. The new illegally amended Constitution, written by non-legislators, and never seen nor voted by the Parliament prior to its publication creates a top down method of choosing a Permanent Electoral Council to run elections, undermining grassroots participation and centralizing control from above.

It allows the president to appoint the prime minister after merely "consulting" the heads of the two chambers of Parliament instead of requiring Parliamentary ratification. In cases of "presidential vacancy," the new amendments make the prime minister the provisional president, so presidents can resign, appoint the prime minister to succeed them, and thereby maintain perpetual control.

New amendments provide that a "general budget" and a "general expenditures report" can replace line item annual budgets, thus limiting parliamentary oversight of the budget.

New amendments return Duvalier era and other retrograde laws, including:

- A 1935 law on "superstitious beliefs," which would ban Vodun once again
- A 1977 law establishing the Court of State Security to increase state surveillance and repression.
- A 1969 law that condemns all "imported doctrines", thereby attacking freedom of thought and freedom of association. Violation of this new law can result in the DEATH PENALTY. The 1987 Haitian Constitution had eliminated the death penalty.

Restoring the Army

In one of the most popular moves of his administration, President Aristide disbanded the hated Haitian army in 1995. Since the coup that overthrew Aristide for the second time in 2004, UN troops and police, currently numbering 8,754 uniformed personnel, have occupied Haiti. One of Martelly's campaign promises was to restore the Haitian Army, and now new Haitian troops are being trained by Ecuador and Brazil. In addition, well-armed former military and paramilitary personnel have occupied militia camps since early 2012, supported by Martelly.

Return of the Death Squads

Martelly has issued pink identity cards with a photo for $30 to selected supporters, promising many benefits to those who hold them, like jobs and impunity from prosecution. During the Duvalier period, every Tonton Macoute received a card that provided many privileges, like free merchandise from any store entered, entitlement to coerced sex, and fear and respect from people in general.

Senator John Joel Joseph has identified Senators that he claims are marked for assassination. He identified the people who have been paying the "hit squads" on behalf of Martelly. He denounced one of the men as an escaped criminal who had been caught red handed with a "near death" victim behind his vehicle. Said victim sent the police to a house where two more victims could be found. Senator Joseph identified the leader of the death squad and his vehicle, denouncing the group as the one which recently assassinated a grassroots militant. He accused the president and his wife of pressuring the chief of police to remove the senators' security detail, in order to facilitate their assassinations. He denounced a previous instance when

Martelly tried to pressure former police chief Mario Andresol to integrate a hit-man into the police, to assassinate Senator Moise Jean Charles.

Death of a Judge

Martelly set up his wife and son as head of governmental projects, but with no parliamentary oversight. A Haitian citizen, Enold Florestal, filed suit with attorney Andre Michel before Judge Jean Serge Joseph, maintaining that the Martellys were siphoning off large amounts of state monies, which the Haitian Senate has no jurisdiction over. Judge Joseph moved the case to the next judicial level, which required depositions from the Martellys and various governmental ministers. Enraged, Martelly and Prime Minister Lamothe called two meetings with the judge (which they deny took place) to demand he kill the case, the second on July 11. The judge drank a beverage offered him at that meeting.

On July 12 Judge Joseph became violently ill and died on July 13. Haitian police arrested Florestal on August 16 after viciously beating him, and Haitian authorities have issued a warrant for the arrest of Attorney Michel, who has gone into hiding. A commission of the Haitian Parliament is now calling for the impeachment of Martelly based on illegal meetings with the judge, interference in legal matters, and threats to those involved in the case.

Since then Enold Florestal and his brother, who's completely uninvolved with the case, have been arrested and remain in jail. On October 22, police stopped Attorney Andre Michel and demanded to search his car. He refused without a judge present to prevent tampering or planting of evidence. The action quickly turned into a standoff between police forces and a large crowd that was gathered to defend Michel. Michel was eventually summoned to appear in court the next day.

In court the prosecutor told the judge he did not have charges to file, but for Michel to not leave the courtroom. Several Deputies and Senators who were present whisked Michel out of the courtroom and took him to an unknown location, where he remains at the time of writing.

Corrupting the Judiciary and Parliament

The Martelly regime is working to establish executive control over the judicial system through the use of "controlled" prosecutors and judges. In violation of the constitution, he appointed as Supreme Court chief justice, Anel Alexis Joseph, who is 72. Haitian law says a judge must be 65 or under to be named to this position. The chief justice also leads the commission that regulates the entire judicial system, so Judge Anel Alexis Joseph is using his power to block an investigation into the death of Judge Jean Serge Joseph and to protect Martelly and his henchmen from all legal challenges, thereby granting impunity.

Martelly has also corrupted the legislative branch that could bring charges against members of the executive. He ordered the arrest of Deputy Arnel Belizaire in spite of parliamentary immunity and his legal council's advice. He has so far failed to call elections for 10 Senate seats in January, and is trying to force the 10 Senators whose terms he says are up (they say in 2015, not 2014) to leave office. Since elections have still not been held for 10 additional seats, if these new 10 seats are vacated, it would leave the 30 member Senate without a quorum, allowing Martelly to dissolve the Parliament and rule by decree.

Reactionary Economic Policy

Martelly enforces the Clinton Bush plan for economic "development" of Haiti through sweatshops, tourism, and the selling of oil and mining rights to transnational corporations. Under this plan, money donated for earthquake relief has been used to build a duty free export manufacturing zone in the north of Haiti, which was not affected by the earthquake, and several luxury hotels in Port-au-Prince. The Clinton Bush Haiti Fund made a $2 million equity investment in a hotel called the Royal Oasis, to give foreign tourists and investors an "oasis" to escape the miserable conditions under which the majority of Haitians live. At the same time, the Martelly regime viciously represses the economic activities of the poor super majority. The phone and money transfer taxes cut into their incomes. Taxes have been arbitrarily increased on imports, affecting small merchants. Thugs wearing masks have burnt markets in different cities, causing merchants to lose capital they had been accumulating for years, forcing them to raise new capital through usury loans. Street vendors are harassed and removed forcefully, then after hours, their stands are looted.

Duvalierism Returns to Haiti

Martelly warmly welcomed the January, 2011 return to Haiti of Jean Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, one of the most brutal dictators of the 20th century, after his decades of luxurious exile in France. Duvalier still has many supporters in Haiti, some of whom are armed and have a history of killing political opponents. Martelly's government is filled with Duvalierists: hardline former Haitian army officer David Bazile is now Interior Minister. Magalie Racine, daughter of notorious former TontonMacoute militia chief Madame Max Adolphe, is Martelly's Youth and Sports Minister. Public Works Secretary of State Philippe Cinéas is the son of longtime Duvalierist figure AlixCinéas, who was a member of the original neo-Duvalierist National Council of Government (CNG) which succeeded Duvalier after his fall in 1986. In addition, Duvalier's son, Francois Nicolas Jean Claude Duvalier, is a close advisor to Martelly.

Conclusion

A major objective of the Duvalier dynasty was to institutionalize dictatorship through death squad brutality, supported by the United States and other powers. Martelly is an example of their policies having come to fruition. He's restoring a government of impunity per the Duvalier era, building an administration of right wing ideologues who believe in dictatorship, and who collaborate to sidestep all legislative and judicial controls.

His goal is to implement extreme neo-liberal economic policies on behalf of Haiti's less than 1% with control over all natural resources. The people will be at their mercy for factory work and other "subservient" positions, under the boot of a UN occupation force of 8,754 army and police personnel, the beginnings of a restored army, paramilitary training camps, death squads, gangs and mafias that use the cover of the corrupted executive and judicial systems to operate.

The Haitian majority does not accept this return to the bad old days, however, and has been actively and massively protesting this repression for the past year. They deserve the support and solidarity of freedom loving people everywhere.