

Ex-singer tied to death squads named winner in Haitian vote

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Michel Martelly, the ex-Kompa singer who cast himself as a political outsider and champion of “change,” was named Monday as the winner of the second round of Haiti’s presidential election with 67.57 percent of the votes cast.

His opponent, Mirlande Manigat, the 70-year-old wife of the former right-wing president and historian, Leslie Manigat, was credited with less than 32 percent of the ballots cast. She denounced the results as the product of a “conspiracy” and said that the election amounted to a political “hold-up.”

From the start last November, the Haitian elections have been marked by wholesale fraud, disenfranchisement and gross intervention by Washington and the so-called “world community,” both bent on installing a pliant regime to help suppress the population in the impoverished and ravaged Caribbean nation.

Fifteen months after the January 2010 earthquake that killed some 300,000 people and leveled much of the country, Haiti remains devastated, with more than 800,000 people living in tent camps and half the population unemployed. A cholera epidemic continues to worsen, with a recent study by the Harvard School of Public Health projecting 800,000 more infections and 11,000 more deaths by November of this year. The country remains occupied by 12,000 United Nations troops and police, led by the Brazilian military.

Meanwhile, pledges made by world governments, including the US, in the wake of the earthquake remain unpaid. Of the \$5.5 billion promised over three years, only \$1.28 billion has been forthcoming.

The elections were effectively boycotted by three quarters of the eligible voters. Martelly, who proclaimed that the Haitian people had given him “a mandate to now change their lives,” in fact received just over 700,000 votes from an electorate that numbers 4.7 million.

While the mass media has focused largely on Martelly’s

reputation for provocative behavior as a musician—cross-dressing, dropping his pants on stage and drug use—the reality is that the new president-elect has a long history of intimate ties to the most reactionary and blood-drenched forces in Haitian politics.

The son of an oil company executive, Martelly, popularly known as “Sweet Micky,” was educated at an elite Catholic school in Port-au-Prince and attended college in the US.

His early success as a musician coincided with the fall of the Duvalier dictatorship and the rise of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a populist Catholic priest who became the country’s first popularly elected president in 1990, coming to power on a program of reforms that were bitterly opposed by the country’s wealthy elite. Within barely nine months, he was overthrown in a right-wing military coup led by Gen. Raoul Cedras, which inaugurated a reign of terror that cost the lives of some 4,000 Haitians.

In a 2002 profile, the *Washington Post* described Martelly as a “favorite of the thugs who worked on behalf of the hated Duvalier family dictatorship before its 1986 collapse.”

Before the 1991 coup, Martelly ran a Port-au-Prince nightclub that was a hangout for the military and elements of the country’s ruling elite, and he befriended those most directly involved in the overthrow of Aristide. He publicly proclaimed his friendship for Lt. Col. Michel François, a US-trained officer who became chief of the secret police under Cedras, the individual most directly responsible for organizing the bloody repression of that period.

Martelly was accused of joining the death squads organized by François to hunt down and murder leaders and members of Aristide’s Lavalas party.

After Aristide was briefly reinstated in 1994 in a deal with the Clinton administration, in which the populist cleric agreed to implement US and IMF policies, Martelly

moved to Miami, where he continued his music career.

After Aristide's second election as president in 2000, and as the Bush administration mounted an economic and political destabilization campaign against his government, Martelly returned to Haiti and became an outspoken opponent of the Haitian president.

Following the February 2004 coup that saw Aristide overthrown and bundled by US special operations agents onto a plane bound for exile in South Africa, Martelly organized a concert in Port-au-Prince—then occupied by US Marines—under the banner “Keep him out!”

While this is the president-elect's real political credentials, he tried to steer clear of them in the course of the election campaign, despite on occasion descending into filthy tirades against the Fanmi Lavalas party (“Lavalas Family”—“lavalas” is Creole for “avalanche” or “waterfall”) formed by Aristide's supporters. Though it is the sole party in Haiti with a genuine popular base, Fanmi Lavalas has been systematically excluded from running in elections since Aristide's overthrow.

Martelly owes his election victory directly to Washington. After the November 28, 2010, first-round election, he and 11 other candidates, including Manigat, issued a joint statement demanding the results be annulled because of mass disenfranchisement and pervasive vote fraud.

Washington and the UN occupation authorities, however, pushed for the elections to go forward, notifying Martelly and Manigat that they were the frontrunners, leading to their dropping their protest over the fraud. Thus, Madame Manigat was a direct accomplice in the “hold-up” that she now condemns.

When Haiti's corruption-ridden Provisional Election Council announced the results, however, Manigat was listed as first and Jude Celestin, the candidate of the ruling Unity Party and son-in-law of President Rene Preval, was placed second, with Martelly third. Martelly's supporters were allowed to riot for three days as the “international community” put pressure on Preval to amend the results and put Martelly instead of Celestin in the run-off.

This demand was driven home in January by a visit from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who indicated that Washington might reconsider its aid to the country if the results of the first round were not changed.

Once the Preval government bowed to these demands, Martelly waged an aggressive campaign that was heavily funded by business interests in both Port-au-Prince and Miami. The campaign was coordinated by the Spanish political consulting firm, Sola & Ostos, which advised

both US Republican presidential candidate John McCain in 2008 and Mexico's Felipe Calderon of the right-wing PAN (National Action Party) in 2006.

A Miami businessman reportedly put Martelly in contact with the Spanish consulting firm, which used his “bad boy” reputation as a pop star to craft the phony image of an outsider challenging the Haitian elite, of which he himself is a product no less than his opponent Manigat.

Martelly also enlisted the support of Wyclef Jean, the American pop star and record producer who tried unsuccessfully to mount his own candidacy for president of Haiti, a country that he had not lived in since childhood. Wyclef's uncle, Raymond Joseph, edited a right-wing Haitian newspaper *Haiti Observateur* in New York and was named ambassador to Washington of the US-installed regime after Aristide's overthrow in 2004. During that period, Wyclef Jean praised the death squads formed by ex-military and ex-*Tonton Macoutes* as “freedom fighters.”

Aristide flew back to Haiti March 18 on the eve of the second round of the election. It was his first time in the country since being driven into exile more than seven years ago. Greeted by tens of thousands of supporters, he failed to directly condemn the fraudulent elections, only lamenting the exclusion of his own party, Fanmi Lavalas, as the “exclusion of the majority.”

Final election results are to be announced on April 16, after a period for challenges. Manigat and her supporters have not indicated whether they will contest the results.

Despite Martelly's two-to-one lead in the presidential run-off, the Repons Peyizan (People's Response), the party on whose platform he ran, won only 3 out of the 99 seats in the lower house of the Haitian parliament, which remains dominated by the Unity party of outgoing President Preval.

Martelly, however, may seek other foundations for his political rule. One of the issues he campaigned on was the re-establishment of the Haitian army, which was disbanded by Aristide in 1995 after its decades-long record of coups and savage internal repression.



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