

# Haiti's President Martelly eulogizes ex-dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier

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On October 4, former Haitian dictator Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier died of a heart attack. Having returned to Haiti in January 2011 from exile in France to live in luxury outside of Port-au-Prince, Duvalier was never brought to justice for the torture, murders, and disappearances of thousands of people by his government between 1971 and 1986.

Instead, a tweet from Haitian President Michel Martelly proclaimed, “despite our quarrels and differences, let us salute the departure of an authentic son of Haiti.” There has been talk of a state funeral, which would include three days of official mourning. Martelly spokesman Lucien Jura has advocated such an observance.

The “quarrels and differences” shrugged off by Martelly include the murders of tens of thousands of people by Duvalier and his father Francois, who ruled the country from 1957 to 1971. A transcript of a March 2013 conference call conducted by Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti attorney Nicole Phillips gives one chilling example.

In it, Phillips summarizes the 2013 testimony given against Duvalier by former soccer star Bobby Duval, who had been locked up in the infamous Fort Dimanche prison for having spent time abroad: “He was given about one bowl of cornmeal a day which he thinks is about 300 calories, which is how most of them lost pounds quickly and started to die. In the 8 months he was in Fort Dimanche, he counted 180 people die, and that when people died—the prisoners were kept in blocks of cells about 20 feet wide with 40 people per cell, and that when somebody would die they would knock on the door—the iron door of the cell so everyone could hear and the guards would come by and take the body out and throw it into a big hole near the prison.”

Press freedom was another subject of “quarrels”

under Baby Doc’s regime. Making use of a 1969 law that declared criticism of the government to be a crime against the state, Duvalier’s government tortured, exiled, and disappeared journalists.

After his return from exile, attempts were made to put Duvalier on trial. However, a trial court ruled in 2012 that he could be charged only for his financial crimes, and that the statute of limitations had passed for all of the murders, arbitrary arrests, and torture carried out by his regime. That decision was later overturned by an appeals court, but no new trial was held before his death. When confronted by former victims in the appeals court—after refusing to attend its first three sittings—he brushed off the accusations by mumbling that “deaths exist in all countries.”

As president, Martelly has employed many former Duvalierists, and he has deep ties to both them and the military figures who took power after “Baby Doc” fled the country in January 1986. Daniel Suppice, the head of Martelly’s 2011 transition team, had been a minister under Duvalier. Martelly actively opposed the first presidency of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and a 2002 *Washington Post* profile described the musician Martelly as a “favorite of the thugs who worked on behalf of the hated Duvalier family dictatorship before its 1986 collapse.”

Martelly’s predecessor Rene Preval, was president when Duvalier returned to Haiti in January 2011. Preval, a close associate of Aristide in the 1990s, did nothing to stop Baby Doc’s return beyond an arrest from which he was quickly released. A May 2010 *Miami Herald* article described how Preval merely tried to avoid seeing Duvalier in public until being forced to shake his hand at a funeral. Preval meekly told the *Herald* that “It was not a meeting. We were at a funeral, our paths crossed.”

The same article described Duvalier's lifestyle in the first few months after his return: "He's holding court at tony restaurants, hobnobbing with powerful players and greeting guests at his borrowed home high in the pleasant hills above the congested capital." Upon his death, the *New York Times* reported a similar lifestyle, which included attending events at Martelly's invitation. Duvalier died while having breakfast with a retired army colonel who had served under his regime.

Both Duvaliers—father and son—had the backing of US imperialism, which poured massive amounts of aid into the country, most of it going into the pockets of its dictator and his supporters. The Pentagon deployed a Marine training mission there soon after Papa Doc came to power in 1957, and it distributed large quantities of arms to the military and the dictatorship's feared death squads, the *Tontons Macoute*.

Washington's backing increased in the wake of the 1959 Cuban revolution, with Duvalier seen as a bulwark of anticommunism. During the 1971 transition, after the elder Duvalier's death, US warships were sent to the coast of Haiti. Nonetheless, the *New York Times*' obituary for the younger Duvalier tries to paint the US government as the innocent victim of the dictatorship's machinations: "He [Duvalier] curried favor with the United States, and exploited its Cold War aims to ensure that Haiti did not fall under Cuba's sway by bargaining for aid."

Ever the purveyor of cynical hand wringing, the *Times* quotes a Duvalier friend: "He was a gentle giant...not this tyrant."

After 16 years of brutal rule, Jean-Claude Duvalier was chased out of Haiti by a genuine popular uprising. Summing up that period, University of Virginia professor Robert Fatton told the *Miami Herald* this week, "The vast majority of the population fought against his regime and celebrated his departure. It is rather amazing that one needs to remind people that he did not exit power voluntarily. He was forced to leave the country because Haitians resisted his rule and mustered the will and courage to force him to do so."

However, the mass struggle undertaken by the people of Haiti at the beginning of 1986 for the "uprooting" of Duvalierism remains uncompleted, with the functions of suppressing the Haitian masses and subjecting them to relentless oppression and capitalist exploitation having been assumed by Martelly and his prime

minister Laurent Lamothe. The liberating tasks posed by the mass uprisings of 1985 and 1986 can be realized only by the Haitian working class carrying out a revolution to put an end to imperialist oppression and capitalist exploitation in Haiti as part of a global struggle for the socialist transformation of society.



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