

Haiti: Martelly to rule by decree

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Haiti's parliament stopped sitting on January 12, when the terms of all 99 deputies in the lower house and 10 of the country's senators expired. The remaining 10 senators are scheduled to serve another two years but cannot meet without a quorum consisting of half the members of each house. The Senate is supposed to have 30 members, the terms of which 10 expired two years ago without elections to replace them.

Under Haiti's 1987 Constitution, deputies serve four-year terms, the duration of a parliament, and senators serve six-year terms on a staggered schedule.

There have been no parliamentary elections in the country since 2010. The current crisis was brought about by the refusal of President Michel Martelly and the Senate to agree on a law for administering elections. While blaming the crisis on a group of six opposition senators, Martelly is the clear beneficiary and the US government has come down on his side.

With backing from the US and UN, Martelly is now able to rule by decree until at least the fall, when the next presidential election is due. Having been forced—by a commission chaired by the head of Haiti's National Chamber of Commerce and Industry—to fire Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe in December, Martelly waited until after parliament's dissolution to install a new government.

Martelly's new Prime Minister Evans Paul is a career politician who has moved dramatically to the right since he managed Jean-Bertrand Aristide's presidential campaign in 1990. In January 2014, Paul appeared alongside Martelly, Jean-Claude Duvalier, and former coup leader General Prosper Avril at a ceremony commemorating the 210th anniversary of Haiti's revolution against French colonialism.

After being sworn in as prime minister, Paul met dutifully with US Ambassador Pamela White and the US State Department's Special Coordinator Thomas

Adams. White had visited parliament on January 11 with the Canadian Ambassador and a UN official in an attempt to convince the deputies and senators to extend the end dates of their own terms. The diplomats were concerned about maintaining a pretense of democracy in the face of growing street protests. Several senators are reported to have skipped the last session out of spite.

Meanwhile, the social conditions for the masses in Haiti continue to deteriorate. A strike by public transportation workers over the price of gas and diesel fuel received widespread public support on Monday, shutting down commerce and schools in Port-au-Prince. The government, which buys petroleum from Venezuela at a steep discount through the PetroCaribe treaty, nonetheless sets the price of gasoline at more than \$4 per gallon. The strike was sold out by the unions after only one day.

The US openly backs Martelly, a former musical performer linked to the old Duvalierist dictatorship. In a January 16 phone call to Martelly, US Vice President Joe Biden also took the position that parliament is to blame for the electoral impasse and praised the president's attempts at "compromise." He went on to implicitly approve a Martelly dictatorship, stating "the United States remains Haiti's committed friend and partner ... as President Martelly's administration works to build a more prosperous and secure future for the Haitian people."

On Tuesday, *Le Nouvelliste* published an interview with an unnamed businessman involved in forcing Lamothe out of office. After telling the paper that the government should not print more money to cover its debts, this power behind the throne noted that US \$250 million will be needed just to keep the government afloat until the next scheduled elections. Such money is likely to come from foreign governments, and he who pays the piper calls the tune.

For his part, Evans Paul warned the CEP (Provisional Electoral Council) not to spend too much on democracy. Martelly appointed the latest version of the CEP—there have been five during his presidency—after parliament’s dissolution, in violation of Haiti’s 1987 constitution. Promising “good elections at a better cost,” Paul stated: “we cannot always make elections and see that it is others who pay for us.”

Such thrift will not apply in protecting the interests of imperialist nations and Haiti’s bourgeoisie. MINUSTAH, the UN occupation force that has been in place since 2004 and which introduced cholera to the country, has a budget of US \$500.1 million for the year ending June 30, 2015.

Representatives of the 15 member states of the United Nations Security Council visited Port-au-Prince and Cap Haitien this weekend. While making noises about the need for elections, they also concerned themselves with reviewing Martelly’s national police force (PNH). The UN has been insisting that Haiti create a national police as a condition for withdrawing any of the more than 7,000 uniformed MINUSTAH personnel still in the country. The army, which historically had carried out this policing function, was disbanded by Aristide in 1995.

Reacting to the possibility of a MINUSTAH draw-down, the new Minister of Justice Pierre Richard Casimir said, “I reiterate to the UN Security Council our request to not reduce the Minustah forces during the electoral process. On the contrary, it is necessary to reinforce the UN contingent in Haiti; indeed, electoral periods are sometimes marked by tensions and troubles.”

Martelly’s own ascension to the presidency in 2010-2011 was anything but democratic. Voter turnout in the first round of elections was less than 23 percent, in part because of the devastation wrought by the earthquake but also because Aristide’s Fanmi Lavalas was excluded on a technicality.

In November 2010, Jude Célestin, the candidate of the Inite party of then-president René Préal, placed second ahead of Martelly in the first round. This result qualified Célestin for the runoff election against frontrunner Mirlande Manigat, but there were immediate accusations of fraud. After the intervention of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the Organization of American States, Célestin withdrew.

A post-election statistical analysis carried out by the Center for Economic and Policy Research found that if all disputed ballots were excluded, the participation rate was only 20.1 percent of eligible voters. Martelly received support from only 4.5 percent of eligible voters in the first round.

An “Expert Verification Mission” from the Organization of American States, of which nearly all members were from the US, Canada, and France, advocated giving Martelly second place in the first vote. In a January 2011 debate at the UN Security Council, then-US Ambassador Susan Rice “threatened Haiti with a possible cut-off of aid if the government did not accept the Mission’s recommendations,” according to CEPR. Préal was also threatened with exile if he didn’t comply.

The CEPR’s statistical analysis found that the OAS completely excluded 1,053 disputed tally sheets. These were from areas “that were more pro-Célestin than the general electorate.” The OAS admitted to CEPR that these should have been included, and also that it had not done any statistical inference from the sheets it did count.

Voter participation was only 23 percent in the second round, which occurred four months later. Martelly beat Manigat in that election by at least 20 percent, in part because of support from a public relations firm with ties to John McCain. The firm, Ostos and Sola, also had a hand in the election of Mexico’s Felipe Calderon in 2006. In the second round, Martelly’s campaign spent about US \$6 million on electronic messaging in a country where more than half of the population lives on less than \$2 per day.



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