



To the barricades, comrades. Michel Martelly supporters seize control of Port-au-Prince, in response to official election results.  
Photo by Bill Boyce, December 2010

## Post-election political paralysis

# No joke as carnival music stops

**T**he smoldering ruin of the ruling *Inite* party's headquarters on Avenue Lamartinière Port-au-Prince seemed to say it all. The roof was gone and part of the walls had been dismantled – useful building materials when you are still living in a tent or under a tarpaulin. The crowd of onlookers seemed to sport a collective smirk. They had rendered their verdict – not just on the election results but on their government's performance over the past year.

It was all part of an incredibly well-orchestrated campaign. Within hours of the announcement of the election results just after 9pm on December 7, Port-au-Prince had been brought to a standstill. Judiciously-located rubble barricades and burning tyres quickly freed the city's normally clogged arteries of all traffic.

Gaggles of protestors loitered around the embers of huge *Inite* poster bonfires to make their point to President René Préval and Jude Célestin, his personally selected *dauphin*.

Would they get the message? That was far from certain.

"This is not how the country is supposed to work," an apparently surprised President René Préval lamented the following day in a live radio address. The fact that he thought the country or his government had worked at all since the January 12 earthquake was news to most of his listeners. "Government? What government?" said one protestor manning a barricade of overturned rubbish skips and burnt out cars on LaLu (Avenue John Brown).

What government? It's a good question. As the *Haiti Briefing*

goes to press just days before the first anniversary of the devastating earthquake, Haiti is in the grips of a profound political crisis. As expected, none of the nineteen presidential candidates got an absolute majority in the general elections of 28th November.

Under Haitian electoral law there has to be a second round of voting between the top two candidates. That is theoretically scheduled for Sunday January 16th. Who will be in that second round in the presidential poll, whether it will take place and whether anyone will turn up at the polls even if it does, is another matter. Turnout in the first round was just 23% on electoral rolls which seem to have excluded hundreds of thousands of eligible voters. "Frankly, it's a joke," says Hervé Blain. "But sadly the joke is probably on us."

### Election Selections: The CEP Votes

Appropriate then that at the center of dispute is a comic. According to the nine-person Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) overseeing the elections, Michel Martelly, alias "Sweet Micky", the popular *konpa* singer/entertainer came third in the presidential race with 234,617 votes, or 21.84%.

He was edged out of the second round run-off by just 6,845 votes by *Inite*'s Jude Célestin, who claimed 241,462 votes or 22.48%. Both trailed former Senator, former first lady and university vice rector, Mirlande Manigat, whom the CEP awarded 336,878 votes or 31.37%.

The CEP's results, which took an inordinate nine days to announce, even though their task is purely one of compilation and tallying, all

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## A Haitian vision of reconstruction

# Fool the sun; no fooling the rain



Following their dream to the promised land, Canaan Camp. Photo: DEC/Tina Stallard



Ti kay, the height of aspiration here, under construction. Photo by Phillip Wearne, HSG

“Before you go, come up to the roof. I want you to see something,” says Philippe Mathieu, a former Haitian Minister of Agriculture, now head of Oxfam Quebec. Staring out over the mass of tarpaulins and tents that occupy every inch of space in the grounds of the Prime Minister’s official residence, Mathieu points at a cluster of specks on the lower slopes of a mountainside, miles away. “That, my friend, is Haitian reality,” he says. “Every day I come up here to see how many more have appeared.”

You can only know it when you make the 50-Gourde, 15-mile tap-tap ride to the specks but what is on display here is actually a live vision of what ordinary Haitians want from reconstruction efforts. For this is Corail Cesselesse, the Haitian government’s only official, relocation camp, on the sole tract of land bought for the resettlement of any of the 1.5 million people displaced by the earthquake. It is a barren, treeless, dustbowl, which any substantial storm turns into a floodplain as rain-

water pours off the denuded mountains that sheer up behind it.

“From what they told us we might have been going to Miami,” says Darlene Paul, a camp organizer in one of the six blocks that house an estimated 13,000 people in faded semi-tubular shaped tents. “But look at us now. No transport, no work, no shops and a school that has not opened since September. Here, we are crippled.”

The Haitian government’s longer-term vision is under construction further up the hill. Here scores of what are termed “transitional” houses – wood-framed, plywood-walled – are being erected within sight of the tents. No bigger than a large double bedroom, they are the height of aspiration here.

But there’s a problem. The land on which hundreds of such *ti kay* (little houses) are to be built is being swallowed up – by squatters, perhaps as many as 100,000 of them now, with more arriving every day. Corail, forlorn, without shade and remote, is, unbelievably, a

magnet. Corail, a displaced peoples camp of tents, now has its own shantytowns, on three sides.

Living under tattered, torn tarpaulins, old bed sheets, cardboard and the odd piece of corrugated iron, the squatters have nothing at all – no water, no toilets, not even a closed school.

But talk to any of them and it’s clear they are voting with their feet for their own vision of reconstruction – formal title to the smallest plot of land on which to build their own house. Their movingly modest aspirations are reflected in the biblical names of the Corail “suburbs” – Canaan, Jerusalem, Jericho. This is their promised land.

“We heard that the government bought this land and was settling people here,” explains William Soneus. “We’re staying.” Underpinning every conversation here are suppositions about critical mass, natural rights and time. The thinking goes like this: if enough displaced people squat long enough they will have to be settled. This is where the government, an invisible entity

to all here, has to finally do something for ordinary people.

Some of the new arrivals clearly think the land is theirs anyway – a touching dose of political nous given that it is indeed their government that bought it. And with the government doing nothing to halt forced evictions from the numerous camps on private land, Corail, the magnet is becoming a potent source of political pressure to accelerate a popular, people-centric, pro-poor reconstruction vision – mass housing.

Leading the charge is a coalition of nearly 30 popular organizations known as FRAKKA (The Force for Reflection and Action on Housing). “We’re mobilizing people in the camps to make sure they know housing is a right,” says Reynold Sanon, a FRAKKA coordinator. “Our vision is to make housing a focal point of people’s struggle.”

The legal resistance to forced evictions led by FRAKKA and the Bureau des Avocats Internationaux (BAI) has raised the profile of the issue – in particular, the complete lack of focus to

date on housing. To mid-September, a mere 17,654 transitional homes had been built post-earthquake.

Legally FRAKKA and BAI have plenty of scope. Article 22 of Haiti’s 1987 constitution enshrines the right to adequate housing, a right ignored in the past but, like so much else, brought into much sharper relief in the past year. “These houses can fool the sun, but can’t fool the rain” runs a well-known Haitian proverb. It is a maxim given a whole new resonance when you are living in a weekend camping tent or under a tarpaulin.

“All our problems are rooted in the housing issue – security, gender-based violence, health, disease and sanitation,” says one relief worker. “The lack of housing gets to the heart of it all: the government’s refusal to declare eminent domain over land, to tackle land tenure issues, to enact rent controls. No government movement on housing, no development.”

Ironically, the one area the government seems to be focused on is a 25-block area in

the very center of Port-au-Prince – the Fort National/Champs de Mars area where most government ministries and the National Palace are located.

Here a very different view of reconstruction may be taking shape: one dominated by the foreign donor governments who make up 50% of the Interim Commission for the Reconstruction of Haiti (CIRH), the body nominally leading reconstruction efforts. The government has declared eminent domain over this area and the suspicion is that the displaced people occupying the parks and open spaces here will be relocated, with the remains of their homes in the area cleared for a complete redevelopment.

A major financial services center, hotels, retail complexes as well as a raft of new government buildings are all on the drawing board. “It could be the urban equivalent of the wholesale elimination of fishing villages for corporate tourist development post Asian-tsunami,” says one development expert. “I’d say watch this space – literally. Watch it very carefully. ■

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votes being actually counted where they are cast at close of poll, were widely derided.

With thousands of observers able to watch the counting process at election *biwo* (bureaus) throughout the country on the evening of November 28th, there was near universal agreement that Manigat and Martelly had topped the poll, but that neither had got the 50% plus one needed to win outright.

Despite a massive and hugely expensive campaign – much of it using government resources – Jude Célestin seemed to have come third, at best. Indeed, at the *Institution Mixte David Mondésir* on Delmas 31 where HSG and others observed the count at eight separate *biwo*, Célestin’s vote was an embarrassment.

Even if the *dauphin* had legitimately scraped into the second round, there was enough evidence of fraud and irregularity to call the whole process, not just his tally, into question – as in fact the EU-funded Haitian National Observer Team did. Even the U.S. embassy made the connection, pledging to

“thoroughly review irregularities in support of electoral results that are inconsistent with the will of the Haitian people.”

Sensing the public mood as rubble rained down on its two offices and the UN troops guarding them, on December 10th the CEP announced a “rapid and exceptional” recount of the tallies under the supervision of a special “verification commission” to include international observers.

But by then the CEP, a government-appointed and, as most see it, government-directed body, had lost whatever shreds of credibility it had left. As of press time, Manigat and Martelly were both refusing to subscribe to the re-count process under the existing CEP. Many Haitians took to calling these elections “selections” as soon as the CEP eliminated nearly half the presidential candidates in September. Now it seemed they had selected the winners as well as the runners.

In the minutes it took to make its announcement, the CEP had managed the impossible: to make the official results even more irrelevant than the campaigns themselves.

The candidates had all studiously avoided addressing the country’s real problems: 1.2 million still homeless and without the absolute basics, a cholera epidemic, a UN occupation force, now numbering 12,000 and minimal progress on the massive task of rebuilding the country. “Other countries might have an elephant or two in the room during an election campaign. We had a whole herd,” noted one Haitian journalist.

### Comedians: Back to the Future

What has happened here? Both Manigat and Célestin represent the political establishment – Manigat the old, Célestin the new. Martelly is anything but, and seems, on the face of it, to be the beneficiary of Haitians’ propensity to opt in large numbers for the candidate most opposed to the widely-depised *klas politik*, the political class considered responsible for Haiti’s condition today.

Martelly’s campaign was the US Comedy Show’s Jon Stewart in Haitian Kreyòl drag. It was one long satirical extravaganza, making irreverent fun of his rivals and by extension the country’s tra-

ditional rulers. It was the ultimate anti-politics politics. There were no policies and apart from the *kanaval* (carnival) sense of turning the world upside down, reversing power relationships, status and wealth, no politics either.

“He has proclaimed himself king of the *kanaval*, now he has become king of the *kanaval* that are our elections,” says Georges Werleigh of ITECA, a leading Haitian civil society organization. Martelly agrees, recognizing that as his appeal. “The others think I’m a joke, that they are the serious ones. In fact it’s the reverse. They are the joke, I’m deadly serious.”

Take him at his word because Michel Martelly may be wearing the ultimate *kanaval* mask. The “outsider” has strong inside associations, many of the least salutary dating back to Jean-Claude Duvalier and the leaders of September 1991 coup.

He was a bitter opponent of the popular, progressive *Lavalas* movement that swept Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power and was shamefully close to the brutal police chief, Colonel Michel François, with whom he shares

his nickname, Sweet Micky. François played a leading role in murdering an estimated 5,000 *Lavalas* supporters between 1991 and 1994.

Martelly’s power base is his youthful *konpa* audience – 18-30 year olds who have no direct memory of this period – yet bizarrely, sometimes through their parents, have tapped into a Martelly strain of nostalgia for the “order” and “certainty” of the Jean-Claude Duvalier era. Thirty years back is change to this generation and change for the better to some of their parents.

### Who’s Left? What’s Left?

So what of the left? *Fammi Lavalas* (FL), former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s party was banned again for the third consecutive election, but the first presidential one, on the absurd technicality – carried over from previous CEP election rulings – that the relevant party submission papers did not have former President Aristide’s verifiable signature on them. Enforced exile on another continent makes that all rather difficult.

When senior U.S. Republican Senators like Richard Lugar and 45 members of the US House of Representatives warn that the CEP and its banishment of FL are major impediments to valid elections months before a ballot is cast, you know the Haitian establishment, the UN and Washington need to take heed. Sadly none of them did. At a time when foreign governments and the UN are all but running Haiti, no one flexed a muscle to try to prevent the political crisis now engulfing the country.

FL’s absence from the ballot, not to mention the party and its leader’s fate in power, explains a lot of the turnout, or rather the lack of it at just 23%. FL is not only the most popular political force in the land but just as crucially is the only real national one. That represents a double threat to the traditional establishment whose inability and unwillingness to form effective political parties is legendary.

On polling day, HSG made a point of visiting the largest polling place in the central Port-au-Prince district of Bel Air, an FL stronghold, badly hit in the repression of 1991-94 and 2004-05, then again

by the earthquake. “No one is voting. See those ballot papers? Those are all party workers votes,” said one foreign observer pointing to the few papers in the see-through ballot boxes.

In the dozens of mini-camps that dot the neighbourhood here, there was no doubt why people were not voting. “What will change if you vote? And who is there to vote for?” asks Régine Mateus. And Aristide? “No one speaks up for us like he did.”

But while nowhere on the ballot, Aristide and FL were everywhere in this campaign, a sort of spiritual, haunting presence. Several presidential candidates had strong FL ties and one Jean-Henry Céant, fourth in the CEP’s results table, made a pledge to bring Aristide home the centerpiece of his campaign.

Thousands of former FL organizers and activists appear to have been co-opted by other parties, not least by *Inite* itself. But many retain a strong sense of what *Lavalas*, in its original form at least, stood for. Social justice issue campaigns run by civil society organizations are building again –

not least because they are so necessary post-earthquake and so ignored by the parties allowed to run in the elections.

“Look these elections are not even a sideshow,” says Didier Dominique of *Batay Owriye*, preparing protest posters with a large black cross through mug shots of each of the candidates. “All of these mugs are irrelevant but the issues – housing, employment, sanitation, the minimum wage – are more relevant than ever. It’s happening, but don’t look for it at the polls.”

### A Good Government *Blan?*

Two coups to overthrow Aristide (twice) and two massive disappointments in the René Préval presidential terms punctuating them, have in the past twenty years made Haitians wary, if not cynical, of what elections, or candidates, can deliver.

But undermining the credibility of the political process is part of a broader agenda of electoral or, more accurately perhaps, electorate control. It is a multi-pronged attack with the CEP at the

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tip of the spear. It might be crystallized in three words: entry threshold, electoral rolls, and money.

Firstly, threshold or access to the ballot. FL was just one of 15 parties denied access to the ballot by labyrinthine, arbitrary rules of which the CEP is the sole judge, jury and executioner and against whose judgment there is no appeal.

Secondly, electoral rolls. The poor, most likely to opt for non-establishment candidates and now easier than ever to identify and corale, simply because they are overwhelmingly those still in displaced peoples camps, are being increasingly excluded from the electoral rolls.

In some districts this exclusion reached farcical proportions in these elections. Of the estimated 300,000 eligible voters in Cité Soleil – one of the poorest, potentially most radical districts in the city – just over 100,000 were on the rolls. In the Corail Cesselesse camp (see inset article) just 39 of an estimated 7,000 eligible voters were registered.

Then there is the money. This, by Haitian standards, was a very expensive election, with saturation media, poster, billboard and cell phone texting efforts and some of the best campaign managers in the world on the leading candidates' payrolls.

If that all reminds you of somewhere else, then you are thinking what I am. This correspondent came to the Haitian polls straight from the U.S. mid-term elections. The growing similarity between the two electoral systems is alarming. Twenty years ago, a penniless, popular insurgency could win power in Haiti. Under current electoral conditions that could not happen now.

Yet this is Haiti. And the lessons of history in Haiti are just as stark as that reality. The more you try to control the process, the people, the politics, the less predictable the results. Two hundred and twenty years after the outbreak of the Haitian revolution, and the beginning of a continuous process of attempted control, it is a lesson that both the interna-

# 19 MALÈ PANDYE SOU AYITI



## YO TOUT KONT NOU!

Vreman vre, yo youn pa di anyen pou Minista ale! Yo youn pa di anyen sou salè minimòm lan ak kondisyon travay. Yo youn pa di anyen sou zafè grandon k ap toupizi ti peyizan, ak lajistis pouri nou konnen an ki toujou ap apiye yo. Sou refòm agrè ki nesèsè a. Yo youn pa di anyen sou pratik abolotcho palmantè yo k ap vann travayè yo, vann peyi a, vann konsyans yo nan benefis a boujwa. Yo youn pa di anyen sou granmanjè yo k ap souse leta epi remèt sèvis piblik yo bay boujwa. Yo YOUN pa janm di kidonk pap janm fè anyen pou chanje rapò sosyal akayik ki kontinye ap egziste nan peyi a.

Se paske yo TOUT se ak grandon, granboujwa, granmanjè, gwo peyi k ap souse nou yo ak tout Minista yo a yo YE! Se LA enterè yo chita tout bon, kidonk se enterè SA yo yo TOUT pral defann. KONT NOU!

*Batay Ouvriye, Modep, Tèt Kole, PEVEP, CATH, KRd, Kowalisyon òganizasyon k ap batay pou tout timoun jwenn lekòl gratis, Bri kouri nouvèl gaye, Inivèsite Popilè, FRAKKA, GREPS, MODJE, Sèk Gramsci. Novanm 2010.*

**Yo tout kont nou! They are all against us! Civil society organizations poster protesting presidential candidates' refusal to address the real issues.**

tional community and the Haitian elite have yet to absorb.

The international community, which post-earthquake has not even bothered to pretend that it is not running the country, is now in a real fix. Even a half legitimate, fig leaf Haitian government is now looking unlikely, if not impossible.

At the entrance to a polling station in Martissant, a working class Port-au-Prince district, a young man shouted at me as I left. "Have you chosen me a good government, *blan*?" It was a stunning

question, not for its jest or cheek, that's Haiti, but for the depth of its political perception.

The predicate is obvious: that my vote in the UK, the US, or wherever, would probably count for more than his, at his polling station, in his country. "Can't be worse, can it?" I replied. Four weeks later, I'm not so sure. Haiti's not so hidden collective *blan* government, the governments that represent me and you, have proven as incompetent as his own. ■



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