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Dance to the sound of Duvalierism!

José Antonio Gutiérrez D.

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Seven years ago, a bloody coup sponsored by the CIA and nostalgic elements of the good old days of the monstrous Duvalier dictatorship, and carried out by paramilitary thugs linked to the old Haitian armed forces, toppled president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. That moment started an ongoing military occupation in the country, first by French, Canadian, Chilean and (of course) US troops. The latter kidnapped Aristide, who was no revolutionary, but did advocate a number of minimal reforms that were unbearable for both the US and the Haitian elite, and put him on a plane to the Central African Republic on February 29th 2004. Then, in June, the military occupation was handed over to a UN force, the MINUSTAH, led by Brazil and composed almost entirely of Latin American armed forces, as well as other “freedom-loving” armies such as that of Sri Lanka, Nepal, Angola, Morocco, etc. 10,000 died as a direct result of this act of international gangsterism. The Haitian armed forces had been disbanded back in 1995 by Aristide himself because they were good for nothing, save toppling heads of State and run as dictators. So this UN military occupation is the armed backing of the dictatorship that came into effect after 2004.

First, we had the government of Latortue and then, in 2006, after sham elections, the old associate of Aristide, René Prével, came to power. On 28th of November last, there were elections again, and just as in previous ones, the locals call them “selections”. In both elections, 2006 and 2010, dozens of presidential hopefuls participated, except for a candidate from the most popular party in the country, Fanmi Lavalas, the party of Aristide, which has been unofficially banned (their candidates just get disqualified by the Electoral Committee). As you can imagine, the turnout was something in the order of a mere 20% and the two main candidates Mirlande Manigat, widow of a former dictator, and Michel “Sweet Mickey” Martelly, a popular *kompas* singer who flirts with Duvalierism (he announced that deposed dictator Baby Doc Duvalier would be his presidential advisor), and collaborated with fascist death squads who murdered 5,000 people during the Cedras neo-Duvalierist dictatorship (1991–1994). They received the meagre endorsement of 6% and 4%, respectively, of the total electorate. Furthermore, the whole process was riddled with irregularities, votes were lost and even dead people voted... For example, Jude Celestin, the candidate favoured by president Prével, had technically more votes than Martelly, but the OAS decided to exclude him on the grounds of irregularities – when the whole process was irregular, you can’t just handpick a single candidate because you don’t favour him! With the exclusion of both Celestin and Fanmi Lavalas, the president would be handpicked by the occupying community. Yet this, according to both the UN and the OAS, proved once again the international community’s commitment to democracy-building.

So the run-off between Manigat and Martelly took place on March 20th... the “selection” was won by Martelly (67% of votes), with less than 25% voter turnout. His first meeting was with the IMF, the World Bank and the US State Department in Washington, showing who really runs the show in that God-forsaken Caribbean island – after all, he was the first choice of Obama, who made sure Celestin was taken out of the contest. Martelly has declared his

intention to rule the country in “Fujimori-style” (a reference to the former Peruvian dictator) and has proposed banning demonstrations and strikes. Also, he is in the process of reconstituting the army with the thugs that participated in the 2004 coup and tortured, raped and killed at will. No wonder Obama is pleased with his own new little monster.

So what does the future have in store for Haiti? With 80% unemployment and 50% of the population without access to basic services and living on less than US\$1 a day (in a country where, believe it or not, the cost of living is similar to that in the US, since *everything* is imported) the future seems grim as grim can be. If you also consider that over a year after the terrible earthquake that shattered the country, and after billions poured into NGOs (most of that money remaining in their own bank accounts and in the pockets of overpaid staff), only 5% of the debris has been removed, reconstruction has prioritised the premises of Free Trade Zones and assembly factories, while over one million Haitians still live in refugee tent camps. This is not a mere model of inefficiency of the international community; it is also a model of what they want for the future of Haiti: a population with no hope nor future, living in refugee camps, willing to work for whatever in sweatshops.

After the earthquake, there was the possibility that a different type of Haiti could be built. But reconstruction, carried out in its entirety by US firms and designed by Washington through a committee of reconstruction headed by former president Clinton (with the negligible participation of Haiti’s vice-president, who is a yes-man anyway), was designed to deepen the model already in place in Haiti – a sweatshop country with its countryside entirely in the hands of agrobusiness. The recipe for economic disaster was contained in Paul Collier’s report to the UN, in which there is nothing to be learned from 40 years of failed neoliberal experiments. Well, failed from the point of view of the Haitian poor... greatly successful from the point of view of the elites and multinational corpora-

tions operating in the Free Trade Zone. But who minds the 80% of Haitians left out in the cold? Charity, of course.

Now, the significance of Martelly's election does not reside in the continuation of the good old neoliberal model, even if exacerbated by the reconstruction scheme. It actually resides somewhere else: in the fact that the Haitian elite sees him as the man who will close the cycle of restoration of Duvalierism that is the sole obsession of a ruling class that does not want to see again someone who will challenge, even in the mildest of terms, the unjust state of affairs in Haiti. All the political efforts by both the Haitian oligarchy and its bosses "up north" should be read in one direction: to restore the infamous Duvalierism as the natural social and political model for Haiti and, with it, get rid of that bothersome popular movement, get rid of all its symbolic reference points, destroy the social network that was woven by the people from below with solidarity and kill off any kind of popular threat to their privileges. They want to tell the Haitian popular movement "all your struggle for more than twenty years was worth nothing, don't dare challenge us again, you will never win".

Martelly is a man fit for that job, contrary to those who are warning that he has no experience in politics (after all, who cares about politics in Haiti? Decisions are taken somewhere else anyway). He is a popular kompa singer, he is well known to Duvalierists and paramilitary thugs, he is trusted by Washington and he will do two wonderful things for the elite: restore the army and get Baby Doc (who shamefully returned to Haiti with absolute impunity in January) as his advisor, so the sweet music of dictatorship will be played loud and clear. After this, when Haiti is stabilized with a Caribbean Fujimori strongman, with a native army, and dogmatically applies the sweatshop model of fake development to nowhere, the international community will congratulate itself on the wonderful job done to promote "democracy" in Haiti and champagne will be poured to celebrate that Haiti will be able to rule itself by itself again. Mission accomplished boys, now pack up and head off

somewhere else in the tropics where there's a revolution looming on the horizon.

In the meantime, let's all dance to the rhythm of Martelly and his neo-Duvalierist thugs!