

Haiti: Aristide's Party Fanmi Lavalas Taken Over by "Macouto-Bourgeois Group"

The Split in Fanmi Lavalas: How and Why It Came About, and What It Portends

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Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Global Research, December 12, 2013

[Haïti Liberté](#)

Last week, for the first time in its history, the Fanmi Lavalas (Lavalas Family) party publicly cast out two of its leading members. It hadn't done this for other prominent members, such as Dany Toussaint in 2003, Leslie Voltaire in 2004, or Mario Dupuy in 2011, all of whom, in one way or another, betrayed the party by allying with right-wing political enemies.

Instead, the two parliamentarians singled out in a Dec. 2 press statement have been spearheading the growing nationwide uprising demanding the resignation of President Michel Martelly and Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe.



Sen. Moïse Jean-Charles, seen here at a Dec. 1 rally in St. Marc, has led the charge against Martelly's malfeasance

"The Fanmi Lavalas Political Organization protests with all its might against any public declaration which comes from some people who present themselves as Fanmi Lavalas members, Senator Moïse Jean-Charles and Deputy Arnel Bélizaire," read the note signed by FL coordinator Dr. Maryse Narcisse and other Executive Committee members including former deputy Lionel Etienne, businessman Joel Edouard "Pasha" Vorbe, and former right-wing politician Claude Roumain.

Finally, a great schism, which has been growing in the party for months, burst into the open. The leaders of two currents - one accommodating, the other confrontational - stood glaring at each other.

Sen. Moïse Jean-Charles responded immediately to the note. The Fanmi Lavalas, he told radio stations, has been taken over by a "macouto-bourgeois group." (The Tonton Macoutes were the Duvalier's repressive paramilitary force.)

“I have spoken with [former] President [Jean-Bertrand] Aristide about it,” he said. “I told him it is destroying the party. I told him that unless he made a public declaration about it, I regret to say that the Fanmi Lavalas will cease being a party which defends the masses’ demands. The bourgeoisie will simply take it over completely and finish with it.”

Aristide’s response, according to Moïse: “I am no longer involved in politics.”

A Little History



Dr. Maryse Narcisse, the Fanmi Lavalas coordinator, once worked for USAID with U.S. Ambassador Pamela White and Sofia Martelly, according to Sen. Moïse Jean-Charles

Haiti’s Lavalas movement was born in the 1980s during the struggle against the Duvalier dictatorship and the neo-Duvalierist juntas which followed Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier’s flight from the country on Feb. 7, 1986. The goal of the movement was a national democratic revolution to break the chains of dictatorship and of foreign domination which had hobbled Haiti for decades.

Meaning “flood” in Kreyòl, Lavalas was an apt term for the movement which brought out rivers and seas of humanity in demonstrations which often ended with the chant “*Yon sèl nou fèb, ansanm nou fò, ansanm, ansanm, nou se Lavalas.*” (Alone we are weak, together we are strong, together, together, we are the flood.) It also connoted a movement that was cleansing, penetrating, and unstoppable.

The movement, which had been largely guided by relatively untouchable Catholic priests (most of them liberation theologians) under the Duvalier regime, coalesced around then Father Aristide in his Salesian parish of St. Jean Bosco in the Port-au-Prince slum of La Saline.

The popular wave finally carried Aristide to the presidency in a Dec. 16, 1990 election, with Washington-backed former World Bank economist Marc Bazin as his principal rival.

Aristide spent most of his first presidency in exile after a 1991-1994 U.S.-backed coup d’état, but then founded the Fanmi Lavalas Political Organization (he doesn’t like to call it a party) in November 1996, winning the presidency again under its banner in 2000.

Washington, with the help of Canada and France, again helped remove Aristide through a coup on Feb. 29, 2004, driving him ultimately into exile in South Africa, from which he didn’t return until Mar. 18, 2011, two days before a presidential election drew a record low 24%

voter participation in large part because the Fanmi Lavalas was excluded. On his arrival, Aristide called for “inclusive elections.” Former ribald *konpa* singer Michel Martelly won the Mar. 20, 2011 polling, although Haiti’s Electoral Council never ratified the vote, hence rendering it illegal.

Martelly Government Corruption



A crowd at a Fanmi Lavalas rally in St. Marc on Dec. 1 listen to Sen. Moïse Jean-Charles

Although at first grudgingly tolerated by the Haitian masses (“Let’s see what they can do” was the phrase often heard at the time), Martelly’s regime over the past two and a half years has become deeply unpopular after carrying out a long list of illegal and provocative acts including: the arrest of peaceful protesters, of Arnel Bélizaire (an immunity-protected sitting deputy), and of plaintiffs in a suit against government corruption; the unilateral taxing of international money transfers and phone calls, the millions of dollars in proceeds from which go into an opaque presidential-controlled account; the formation of several private right-wing militias; the release or protection of known criminals who are close to the President; and the ramming through of Constitutional changes and a bizarre, unlawful electoral council.

But the most salient feature of the regime is its unprecedented and unabashed corruption. Highlights include: a \$20,000 per diem for the President on his frequent trips abroad, on which he takes his family and large entourages who are given equally obscene per diems; 12 documented kick-back payments totaling \$2.6 million from Dominican Sen. Felix Bautista for post-earthquake construction contracts; and the disappearance into thin air of another \$100 million in post-earthquake international funds for rebuilding of a devastated Port-au-Prince neighborhood, which still lies in shambles.

The corruption centerpiece, however, is the regime’s siphoning off of about \$1 billion from a fund filled by revenues from Venezuela’s provision of all Haiti’s petroleum needs. Under the 2007 PetroCaribe agreement, Haiti only has to pay from 40% to 70% of its oil bill up-front, with the remainder going into a fund which has to be repaid over the next 25 years at 1% interest. The Martelly government “borrows” from that fund for an assortment of supposed poverty alleviation programs with catchy names like *Ede Pèp* (Help the People), *Ti Manman Cheri* (Dear Little Mother), *Aba Grangou* (Down with Hunger), and *Banm Limyè, Banm Lavi* (Give Me Light, Give Me Life). But the true beneficiaries, it turns out, are Martelly cronies and family members, like his wife Sofia and son Olivier, who pull down millions in salaries for supposedly running these programs.

Enter Moïse



Claude Roumain, the founder of the right-wing political party Génération 2004, now sits on the Lavalas Family's Executive Committee

Leading the charge to denounce this corruption, repression, and lawlessness has been Senator Moïse Jean-Charles, who represents the North Department after having served as the Lavalas mayor of Milot, the town beneath Henri Christophe's famed mountain-top Citadelle, a nationalist symbol. Starting in late 2011, he began to take to Haiti's airwaves weekly to [bare the details of Martelly's malfeasance](#). Government officials and fellow lawmakers would bring him juicy details of the Martelly regime's dirty dealings, and in Senate hearings, he would often grill squirming government ministers on the patent disappearance of funds from this or that project.

Moïse has also led the fight to end the almost 10-year-old Washington-backed foreign military occupation known as the UN Mission to Stabilize Haiti (MINUSTAH). He stewarded two unanimous Senate resolutions setting deadlines for withdrawal of the UN's 9,000 troops (now set for May 28, 2014) and has traveled to Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay to lobby government officials and lawmakers, winning a 90-day pull-out promise from the latter country's president last month.

With an almost photographic memory, a knack for numbers, and a charismatic presence even over the radio, Moïse quickly became the people's champion.

Deputy Arnel Bélizaire, who comes from and represents some of the capital's most rebellious neighborhoods in Delmas, was also embraced by Haiti's popular organizations, not only because of his arrest, but because of the progressive programming on his radio station RCH 2000 and his single-handed disruption of several unpopular votes in Haiti's largely-bought-off House of Deputies.

Meanwhile, the Executive Committee of the Fanmi Lavalas (FL) has remained completely mute on the crimes and excesses of the Martelly government and the continuing UN military occupation. "Inclusive elections" became its one and only call.

Already the popular organizations which make up FL's base were not too enamored with Dr. Maryse Narcisse, who had been Aristide's and the party's spokesperson since 2007. (In May, at his first press conference since returning to Haiti, Aristide announced that Narcisse would be the FL's new coordinator, making her likely the party's next presidential candidate.)

Dr. Narcisse, who was born into Haiti's bourgeoisie, had never militated in any popular

organization and was considered something of an outsider who had been parachuted into her position of influence.

Furthermore, the FL's Executive Committee now included Claude Roumain, the former head of Generation 2004, a right-wing party which had been allied in 1990 with Marc Bazin's Movement for the Installation of Democracy in Haiti (MIDH) in an electoral front known as the National Alliance for Democracy and Progress (ANDP). When Bazin became *de facto* Prime Minister in 1992 during the first coup against Aristide, Roumain acted as his Secretary of State for Youth and Sports. According to the pro-Lavalas website ToutHaiti.com, Roumain was also a supporter of the 2004 coup against Aristide.

Despite popular grumbling about Narcisse, Roumain, and others on the Executive Committee and the growing gulf between the leadership and its base, the party kept up a brave face of unity.

Two Currents Emerge

As Moïse continued his crusade, increasingly calls emerged from the Haitian masses through radio programs and demonstrations for Martelly's resignation.

The tipping point came in July. In early 2013, a Haitian citizen, Enold Floréal (now jailed), initiated a lawsuit against Martelly's wife and son for corruption. The case was given to Investigating Judge Jean Serge Joseph, who issued subpoenas for Lamothe and other high government officials. Martelly was reportedly enraged by the inquiry, and on Jul. 11, he ordered the judge to back off, literally spitting curse-filled threats in his face. The secret meeting, with Lamothe and Justice Minister Jean Renel Sanon also in attendance, was held at the law offices of Martelly's legal counselor Garry Lissade, who had been the lawyer for 1991 coup leader General Raoul Cédras at the 1993 Governor's Island negotiations in New York.

On Jul. 13, two days after being chewed out by Martelly, the completely panicked Judge Joseph died from a cerebral hemorrhage brought on either by stress or poison. Both Martelly and Lamothe publicly and repeatedly denied having ever met the judge or attended the meeting at Lissade's office. But both the Senate and House of Deputies have [issued reports](#) based on the testimony of dozens of witnesses – co-workers, judges, security agents, family members, etc. – detailing the meeting and the regime's threats, lies, and attempted cover-up.

Both reports, as well as a resolution by 13 deputies and the entire Senate, called for Martelly's impeachment, and the firing of Lamothe and Justice Minister Sanon. But any impeachment proceeding must be brought by the House of Deputies, where the majority block – the Parliamentarians for Stability and Progress (PSP) – is firmly in Martelly's pocket.

With the legal road blocked, the masses have increasingly resorted to the streets to demand Martelly's resignation. At about the same time, Narcisse issued a statement saying the FL was opposed to Martelly stepping down before the end of his term. She called only for elections, and during the summer, the party began to organize electoral campaign rallies in towns around Haiti.

But tensions have grown when – in towns like Mirebalais, Miragoâne, Port-de-Paix, St. Marc, and Aux Cayes – Moïse has arrived and converted FL electoral rallies into anti-Martelly

mobilizations. His message was simple: no free, fair, and sovereign elections are possible under Martelly and foreign military occupation. The rallies usually end with the crowds carrying Moïse away on their shoulders to shouts of “Martelly out, MINUSTAH out,” leaving Narcisse and the Executive Committee fuming.

The Last Straw

Huge anti-Martelly demonstrations were held on Sep. 30, Oct. 17, and Nov. 7 in Port-au-Prince, Cap Haïtien, and other provincial cities. At another giant anti-Martelly demonstration on Nov. 18, Moïse announced a march on the U.S. Embassy in the Port-au-Prince suburb of Tabarre for Nov. 29, the anniversary of a 1987 election massacre.

Rumors spread on radios and websites (but were never confirmed) that U.S. Ambassador Pamela White had met with Aristide’s wife, Mildred, after the march was announced.

Two days later, the FL announced that on Nov. 29 that it would hold a march to lay flowers at the Argentine School at Ruelle Vaillant, the site of the worst bloodshed 26 years ago.

The two currents now stood face-to-face. Whose call would the Lavalas popular organizations and the masses heed?

On the morning of Nov. 29, Venel Remarais of the FL-aligned Radio Solidarité and Haitian Press Agency (AHP) issued a bitter editorial against the march on the embassy, in which he accused Moïse (without naming him) of being a “Rambo,” an “individual, a revolutionary with great political ambition,” of suffering from “vertigo from having a swollen head,” and of thinking “he is the center of everything.”

“It is in respecting the rules of the game that all victory is possible, not in rebellion, hot-headedness, and charging ahead,” Remarais said.

He even suggested that a “rarely seen personality,” an apparent reference to Aristide, might be at the Ruelle Vaillant flower-laying.

In the end, only a few hundred people turned out to the Executive Committee’s Ruelle Vaillant demonstration, while many thousands marched on the embassy, although Haitian police dispersed the demonstration with teargas and gunshots in the air before demonstrators reached the building. The people’s inclinations and allegiance were clear.

The coup de grace came two days later during a Dec. 1 FL rally in St. Marc. Moïse again electrified the event, with a passionate speech calling on the people to beware of “traitors who are in the National Palace, who are in this crowd, who are everywhere... *Veye yo, veye yo, veye yo!*” Keep an eye on them!

“We demonstrated and marched on the National Palace [Sep. 30 & Oct. 17]. Then we went to see Pétion in Pétionville [Nov. 7]. Then we decided to go visit Uncle Sam, but a few of them didn’t want to come with us... For their personal interests, they’re afraid of Uncle Sam. But since we are the children of [Haiti’s independence war leader and founding father Jean-Jacques] Dessalines, we are not afraid to look [the Americans] in the eye. [The Americans] bombarded us with their gunshots. But we’re going back there.”

Warned by other FL officials at the St. Marc event about Moïse’s fiery speech, Narcisse and other Executive Committee members decided not to even show up. The next day they

issued their note.

What Lies Ahead?

In his spirited response to the FL Executive Committee, Moïse removed the gloves he's worn for months.

"Maryse Narcisse used to work for USAID alongside Pamela White and Sofia Martelly," Moïse told *Haïti Liberté*. "It is no wonder she today adopts the positions she does."

"I have been twice elected mayor of Milot under the Fanmi Lavalas banner," he continued. "People like Claude Roumain cannot put me out of a party which they have never even belonged to."

Meanwhile, Aristide has maintained his silence, making no public statements in support of either side.

The FL leadership appears ready to go into municipal and partial Senate elections at some point in early 2014, as the Martelly regime's Electoral Council has promised and as the U.S. would like. Washington has already kicked in \$10 million and the European Union 5 million euros for the election. The Deputies, in extraordinary session, finally passed the long delayed Electoral Law on Nov. 28. On Dec. 10, the National Palace announced that the new law had been sent for promulgation in the official journal, *Le Moniteur*.

Will the prospect of elections break the mobilization to uproot Martelly? Will the FL leadership enter into an agreement with the Martelly regime to take part in elections, from which the party has been excluded for the past decade?

"Anybody thinking of going into Haitian elections with Martelly should look at the [blatant electoral fraud](#) just committed in Honduras," said Henriot Dorcent, a leader of the Dessalines Coordination (KOD), a political grouping which [organized a Sep. 29 Popular Forum](#) to come up with a formula for a post-Martelly provisional government that could hold elections. The solution about 150 popular organization delegates came up with was very similar to the transitional government which held Haiti's highly successful 1990 elections which brought Aristide to power for the first time.

"Martelly cannot even hold an honest Carnaval," quipped Moïse, referring to how the president illegitimately intervened in the picking of bands for Haiti's yearly celebration. "How can he be expected to organize a fair election, especially after all that we have seen he is capable of doing?"

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