

Have the Latortues Kidnapped Democracy in Haiti?

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“More than a year after its establishment, allegations are increasing of widespread corruption in state institutions, reaching into the offices of the prime minister and the presidency themselves.”

International Crisis Group Report, “Spoiling Security in Haiti,” p. 8.

“At a lower level, the virtuous Gerard Latortue must, for his part, face his critics. He is blamed for retaining in his entourage his nephew, Youri Latortue, a person nicknamed ‘Mister 30 Per Cent’ because of the percentage he demands in return for favours. Worried, not without reason, about his own security, the prime minister pays 20,000 euros a month to this former police officer implicated in various scandals for ‘organizing an intelligence service’.”

Thierry Oberlin, Le Figaro, December 21, 2004, Quoted on Haiti’s Radio Metropole, December, 2004.

For the past two months, the coup-installed Haitian government led by de facto Prime Minister Gerard Latortue has been overseeing a climate of insecurity and generalized terror featuring, among other crimes, dramatic, high-profile kidnappings. The kidnappings and terror are – according to multiple sources – orchestrated by the PM’s nephew and Security Chief, Youri Latortue. But they are blamed, in media and government circles, on the principal victims: Haiti’s poor majority and specifically supporters of ousted President Jean Bertrand Aristide.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council has, through [UNSC Resolution 1608](#), extended the mandate of its ‘Stabilization Mission’ (MINUSTAH) to February 15, 2006, and augmented the number of personnel, adding a 750-strong ‘rapid reaction force’ to the 7,000 international troops already occupying Haiti, along with an additional 250 civilian police officers.

UNSC Resolution 1608 also calls upon the transitional government to conduct “thorough and transparent investigations into human rights abuses, “particularly those allegedly involving HNP (Haitian National Police) officers.” To counter the UN’s rapidly deteriorating situation in Haiti, the UNSC calls for a “proactive communications and public relations strategy, in order to improve the Haitian population’s understanding of the mandate of MINUSTAH and its role in Haiti.” The resolution echoed many of the recommendations made at the Montreal International Conference on Haiti, which brought together many members of the coup government with sponsors in the Canadian, French, and U.S. governments and business community. UNSC 1608 is at least in part a response to increasing calls from Haiti’s elite for a more “robust” security presence in response to the rise in violence that has Haiti in its grips.

The rise of kidnappings has contributed to the perception that Haiti is “plagued by insecurity,” “chaotic,” and that these criminal activities are among deliberate movements to “destabilize” the country before the elections, scheduled for October (local) and November (legislative and presidential) of 2005. Some are saying that the kidnapping enterprise affords pro-Aristide gangs “the means to arm themselves and wage an “urban guerilla war” while “holding slumdweller’s hostage” in areas such as Cite Soleil and Bel Air. The reality is different.

The Media’s Kidnapping Scourge

The “[kidnapping scourge](#)”, as NYT’s Ginger Thompson termed it on June 6th, has been responsible for hundreds of kidnappings for ransom in recent months, with an estimated 6 to 12 kidnappings taking place daily. Among these have been high-profile kidnappings of an Indian businessman, a Russian diplomat, two Mexican telecommunication workers, a Canadian man and a 65-year old businesswoman from Montreal. No Americans have been kidnapped to date, although a U.S. embassy vehicle was fired upon prompting the Embassy to issue a travel warning on May 25th “in the midst of a spate of kidnappings and carjackings in the country.” (St. Petersburg times, May 27, 2005)

On May 8th, visiting Chilean diplomats were quick to attribute the new violence on Haitian criminals that are being deported from the U.S. Over 30 such convicts have been deported since the February 2004 coup. Because the prison system is full of political prisoners, many of these criminals are free in Haiti. Interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue echoed the statements of the Chileans a few weeks later, saying (on May ?) “the origin of the insecurity, especially in matters regarding kidnapping, is something that is exported to us here,” implying that the Americans were doing the exporting.

On the heels of the U.S., Canada issued a heightened travel warning on May 27th, stating that “Kidnappings and carjackings are on the rise.” Ottawa reiterated this warning on June 21st, citing ‘an increasingly deteriorating security situation’. In a May 28th article discussing the travel warning after the kidnap and release of a Canadian man, the Canadian Press made sure to note that, in one case, “Police officers pursuing the abductors in the slum of Bel Air came under heavy gunfire from armed gangs.” Bel Air is known to be the launching point for large demonstrations calling for Aristide’s return.

On June 2nd Canada’s National Post blamed the violence on “continuing confrontations with supporters of Jean Bertrand Aristide.” The same day, the Associated Press reported that “[U.S.] Ambassador James Foley said Haitian police, armed mostly with pistols and shotguns, are outgunned by pro-Aristide gangs armed with heavy machine guns. The gangs have been blamed for increasing violence and kidnappings.”

The frenzied atmosphere caused by the kidnappings prompted calls for “tougher action” on the part of Haiti’s business elite. Reginald Boulos, millionaire, President of the Haitian chamber of Commerce, longtime opponent of Aristide and Aristide’s popular movement, Lavalas, and longtime recipient of USAID funding, recently threatened to call a general strike if security measures were not increased. He also called on the government to allow people like himself to create their own private militias and be permitted to brandish their own automatic weapons.

The anti-Aristide Group of 184 spokesperson Charles Baker complained that MINUSTAH is protecting the “bandits,” and called for more guns and ammunition for the HNP to “fulfill

their duty.”

Haiti’s Police Chief Leon Charles said on May 30th: “We must say that it is a movement of destabilization. The truth is that there is a war in Haiti. Armed individuals are shooting at the people. It is urban guerrilla warfare. An urgent solution needs to be found to this situation. Actually, we are working with Minustah [UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti], despite all the misunderstanding, so that we can find a solution to these problems.”

In a June 5th article, the New York Times (NYT) wrote “Justice Minister Bernard Gousse and other officials said Friday that authorities planned tougher action against armed gangs in pro-Aristide slums, where victims of a recent wave of hundreds of kidnappings are often said to be held.” Reporting on a manifestation of this “tougher action,” the NYT documents how “As many as 25 people were killed in police raids on Friday and Saturday in the slums of Haiti’s capital after the government said it would get tougher on gangs.”

Just a few days later, on June 8th U.S. Ambassador James Foley and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Roger Noriega were on hand to present Charles and his HNP with \$2.6 million in police equipment.

Justice Minister Bernard Gousse, who resigned his post on June 15th after being publicly rebuked for incompetence and corruption by US Congressman William Delahunt and 10 other Congresspeople on June 10th, announced the creation of a new, multinational SWAT team as one of his final official acts on Radio Vision 2000 on June 4:

“Regarding kidnappings, there is a mixed SWAT team. A foreign SWAT team has arrived here and will work together with our local SWAT team to respond rapidly to kidnapping situations. There is an intelligence cell, which police spokeswoman [Jessie Comeau] Coicou has spoken about, that will reinforce the judicial police’s intelligence cell. We are also going to create other brigades that will face up to the bandits and intervene in the areas where the bandits operate. The purpose of this action is to prevent the bandits from feeling safe wherever they are in the metropolitan area.”

Gousse did not state what country the foreign SWAT team is from, and has not responded to interview requests.

On June 9th, Radio Vision 2000, which is jointly owned by Boulos and Andy Apaid, leader of the anti-Aristide and U.S. backed Group of 184 coalition, blamed “unabated” kidnappings on “bandits.”:

“It really seems as if armed bandits will not give Port-au-Prince residents a moment’s respite, because not a day has gone by without a kidnapping being committed in the capital.”

In a later [interview](#) with Haiti’s Radio Metropole, Apaid would characterize the violence and kidnappings as “part of a Lavalas plot to regain control.” Apaid refers to the kidnappings as being carried out in a series of “well coordinated waves”:

“I have no doubt that some sectors are doing this for commercial reasons or things like that. But most of the violence that we are undergoing today comes from these people that were armed by the former dictator [Jean-Bertrand Aristide]...It is clear that it is the armed branch of the Lavalas party, the armed sectors of the Lavalas party that are sponsoring the violence for the most part.

They are the ones that are sponsoring the kidnapping...The kidnapping is mainly a political instrument aimed at reinforcing this terror and bringing despair and discouragement in order to give better political options. Because there is a plan behind all this....The plan is to entertain such violence that should unseat and put everybody in a state of helplessness and discouragement.”

As the ‘kidnapping scourge’ reached a crescendo, the high-level delegation led by Noriega along with Canada’s special envoy to Haiti, Denis Coderre, and France’s Daniel Parfait. This visit, premised on a show of “solidarity” with Gerard Latortue by the primary “donor” countries, saw an increase in speculation about U.S. troops being sent in. On the show of support for Latortue, Coderre said, “ ‘We are here together to send a strong message: We want the elections to take place in time.’”

On June 10th, the Miami Herald summarized Noriega’s trip: “Noriega calls for the UN “to be more ‘proactive’ in squelching ‘a coordinated campaign of criminality’ that is undermining efforts to restore peace to this troubled Caribbean nation.” In an Orwellian moment Noriega said, ‘The rights of the vast majority of the Haitian people are being violated by the ones who spread violence . . . It’s a deadly destabilization plan...’

The Herald concluded, showing how Noriega’s sentiments cater to the business elite, “Noriega’s comments echoed the sentiments of many Haitians who see the peacekeepers as too passive in the face of an onslaught of kidnappings, carjackings and shootouts.”

On June 14th HNP spokesperson Jessie Coicou announced the creation of a “special intervention unit...to combat kidnappings for ransom.” Coicou would attend the Montreal International Conference on Haiti two days later, and would subsequently get promoted to inspector-general of the HNP on June 22nd. Coicou also announced the arrests of several individuals in relation to kidnappings, including at least one Haitian police officer and someone supposed to be affiliated with Aristide, who was allegedly “caught while distributing money in Bel-Air to maintain the climate of violence.” After weeks of presuming the guilt of Aristide supporters, the government had finally taken what seemed to be a concrete measure to substantiate any of the claims.

Coicou’s announcements were well-timed to coincide with the conference in Montreal, where security in advance of the October elections was a central topic of discussion. Two days before the conference, the AP speculated that kidnappings and other violence could “undermine” the election process.

During a June 12 interview with virulently anti-Aristide reporter Nancy Roc, Denis Coderre feigned sympathy for the kidnap victims: “I would like to offer my condolences to all the victims of kidnapping,” Coderre intoned. Roc herself would flee the country just days later in the face of alleged kidnapping threats against her. The [NED-funded pseudo-human rights organization Reporters Without Borders](#) would quickly come to her defense, and [took a swipe at the exiled Aristide](#) in the process, writing that Roc “blamed the threats on drug-traffickers, linked, she believes, to the Fanmi Lavalas, militias that support ex-president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.”

Interestingly, RSF notes how Roc’s employer at Radio Metropole, Richard Widmaier, escaped a kidnapping attempt on June 11th. RSF neglected to mention Widmaier’s opinion on the kidnappings, captured in the Miami Herald on June 23rd: ‘We have a situation here that is

more similar to what you see happening in Afghanistan and Iraq. It's terrorism...You have guys who pretend to be supporters of former President Aristide, attacking people in the streets, burning cars and kidnapping people.'

An unidentified speaker on a June 15 Haitian Signal Radio broadcast referred to "'a very organized sector" that is executing the kidnappings. This was echoed in a June 20th Agence Haitienne Presse (AHP) article " citing a radio director from Quebec, "the kidnappers are well-organized gangs, formed, among other things, by Haitians who lived in Quebec and in the United States and who were expelled because of their criminal activities. White people living in Haiti could also be part of these criminal gangs." Signal Radio also warned of an "exodus" of Haitians fleeing the kidnappings and other insecurity.

On the official policy side, where examples of the kidnappings being used as a pretext to increase repression are slightly more transparent, we can turn to Canadian Foreign Minister Pierre Pettigrew, who [addressed the topic of kidnappings](#), to fellow "trustees," in Montreal on June 16th:

"The recent wave of abductions in Port-au-Prince is especially troubling. This climate of violence must change in anticipation of the fall elections...Port-au-Prince, where most of the violence has occurred, must be secured. We must study with utmost care the possibility of augmenting military and police contingents...Maintaining security, in addition to having benefits for Haiti's people, is necessary for the holding of free, transparent and democratic elections this fall."

In a special parliamentary hearing on Haiti on June 14th, Pettigrew and Coderre were called upon to discuss human rights in Haiti with other parliamentarians. Coderre must have picked up some counterinsurgency lingo from his friend Noriega, which he deployed in the meeting, volunteering the profound analysis that there is an "urban strategy to try to destabilize the situation."

Deflecting questions raised by NDP foreign affairs critic Alexa McDonough, Pettigrew referred to the kidnappings to illustrate his point about the danger of looking at things in a one-sided way: "When we had the kidnapping of the Canadian women, the Montreal women, two days ago, I had been the first to say that there were security concerns, so I'm not saying that raising them.... I'm talking about absolutism. I'm talking about taking only that part of the picture and focusing on it plays into the extreme elements of de la valeur, which don't want the rest of the picture... certainly I think it's our duty as members of Parliament, and for us as the government, to make Canadians well aware of the situation, so that they don't set their foot into a reality that they're not aware of."

Rather than raise a question that drew from the independent and meticulously documented human rights report by Thomas Griffin of the ["http://www.law.miami.edu/news/368.html"](http://www.law.miami.edu/news/368.html) University of Miami, which the Canadian government and Pettigrew specifically have dismissed without counterargument, slurring it as 'propaganda,' McDonough based her question on the most recent International Crisis Group Report (ICG), released on June 1st. Partially funded by the Canadian government, the ICG report has, in theory, a far greater influence on policy than the numerous independent reports on Haiti. Interestingly, the ICG report is much clearer than Pettigrew or Coderre on the possibilities of transitional government and international complicity in the crime wave, kidnappings, and drug trafficking.

Where the ICG does mention “factions sympathetic to Aristide” as among the “powerful spoilers” who have “much to gain” from insecurity and violence, they also refer to “elements of the business elite, drug traffickers, or other criminal organizations” as having an interest in delaying elections.”

“Powerful people” have an “overarching long-term objective,” which is to “prevent the creation and development of solid and effective state institutions which would reduce or halt their current activities.”

“Groups linked to criminal activities, particularly drug-trafficking and contraband (in Haiti and abroad) are behind much of the current wave of violence.”

Noting that “the HNP and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) have arrested many individuals linked to Fanmi Lavalas,” the ICG emphasizes that “only suspects believed to be close to Lavalas have been detained in combined HNP/DEA operations. They continue:

“The perceived inaction of international law enforcement agencies with regard to the transitional government has led many in Haiti to believe that their actions are driven in part by political or strategic reasons. The roles of U.S. agencies such as the DEA and CIA, therefore, continue to be controversial.”

Faced with McDonough’s question, Pettigrew deferred to Coderre. Before addressing the ICG report, Coderre, knowing that human rights activists had met recently with Alexa McDonough, was quick to define his position on independent reports, characterizing them as “propaganda reports,” which he also claimed are lying. Coderre presented no evidence and refused to address any of the facts, interviews, photographs, or other damning context, in these so-called ‘propaganda reports’.

He called the University of Miami report which he and dozens of Members of Parliament have been presented, “disgusting.” He cited allegations of Canadian police misconduct as “baloney.” Turning to the the ICG report, Coderre changed his tune: “a lot of the report is good,” he said, and “we should provide some credibility” to it. Coderre seems to believe that “credibility” can come only from the Canadian government or, presumably, Washington, and not from the evidence itself, which he ignores.

While it is unlikely that Coderre himself understands this, aspects of the ICG report are, indeed, credible. Youri Latortue’s career confirms a number of the report’s assertions about the Haitian government’s involvement in kidnapping and insecurity. There is, however, much missing from the ICG report: Specifically, the extent to which the US/Canada/French-backed regime is involved in kidnapping, drug smuggling, massacre, and arms trafficking. All this, too, is illustrated by focusing on Youri Latortue.

Kidnapping Reality and the Latortues

Before Jean Bertrand Aristide assumed the Presidency in early February, 2001, Youri Latortue was second-in-command at the General Security Unit of the National Palace (USGPN) under President Rene Preval. After Aristide’s accession, other USGPN policemen found him “hostile” to his new President, who worried about his involvement in a “plot”, according to Haiti’s elite-owned radio station Signal FM on February 21, 2001. By this time, Youri Latortue’s friends Guy Philippe and Jackie Nau, son-in-law and security chief for today’s Foreign Affairs Minister Herard Abraham, had been implicated in a plot to overthrow

Preval's government in October 2000, one month in advance of Haiti's Presidential elections. Nau's brother-in-law, Roger Alteri, would be arrested for helping the coup-plotters escape to the Dominican Republic. At the time, Alteri was "a contractor for the U.S. embassy." (Signal Radio, November 7, 2000) . Philippe and Nau 's names would come up in relation to other early coup attempts in July and December, 2001, and Philippe would emerge as a central figure in the February 2004 "uprising" against Aristide, where he stated quite openly that his idols were, fittingly enough, Augusto Pinochet and Ronald Reagan.

After being kicked out of the USGPN, Youri Latortue was transferred to the HNP (Haitian National Police). While there are numerous mentions of Youri Latortue the security agent in media prior to 2001, I found no reference to him in Haitian or international media from February 2001 to February 2004. After his transfer to the HNP, Youri Latortue disappeared from the media to reappear only three years later, after the 2004 coup.

In a phone interview on June 12, 2004, Youri Latortue explained this three year absence: he had lived in Miami, studied in Montreal for two years, and then returned to Haiti. Upon returning after the coup, he was offered various jobs in the interim government: "they tried to choose me as the Chief of Police when Aristide went," he said. "I said I didn't want to because I want to choose a political career, I don't want to be chief of police." Instead, Youri Latortue took the position as head of security for his uncle, Gerard Latortue.

In September 2004, as Haiti was responding to the devastating flooding caused by Tropical Storm Jeanne in Gonaives, which killed 3,000 and left hundreds of thousands homeless, Youri Latortue appeared in that city to dictate the dispensation of aid. In Australia's Daily Telegraph, he was the spokesperson describing how "only part of a government aid shipment was handed out because the crowd grew too unruly." Two months later, he was "blacklisted" by Le Figaro, a left-leaning French newspaper, who called him "Mister 30 per cent," and, according to Radio Metropole "portrayed Youri Latortue as the interim government's strongman." The Le Figaro article, dated December 21, 2004, was titled, "Drug traffickers help themselves to Haiti."

French journalist Thierry Oberle made the obvious connection between uncle and nephew: "at a lower level, the virtuous Gerard Latortue must, for his part, face his critics. He is blamed for retaining in his entourage his nephew, Youri Latortue, a person nicknamed 'Mister 30 Per Cent' because of the percentage he demands in return for favours. Worried, not without reason, about his own security, the prime minister pays 20,000 euros a month to this former police officer implicated in various scandals for 'organizing an intelligence service'."

Youri Latortue contested Oberle's claims of his corruption and theft of international aid, calling them false and suggesting that he had hired a lawyer to "pursue justice" . He later admitted that he would not "pursue justice" because he did not want to pay the expensive legal fees.

Youri Latortue suggested the real motivation behind Oberle's accusations was the French government's resentment towards him for shutting them out of the PM's security detail: "The French are not very happy with me because I said that Haitian police can do the security; we don't need French now for the security. They were very angry and then they said something about me."

A source close to Haitian government circles said "Many people...have seen ["rebel" turned

politician] Guy Philippe going in and out of Youri Latortue's office..." Others, such as Joel Deeb, a Haitian-American arms dealer who has reportedly brokered deals with Youri Latortue since the February 29, 2004 ouster of President Jean Bertrand Aristide, call Youri Latortue drug smuggling "Kingpin," with "close ties" to paramilitary leader Guy Philippe. Deeb also said that "everybody knows" about Youri Latortue's involvement in kidnappings.

It is also widely known that Youri Latortue and his deputy, Jean-Wener Jacquitte, who refused (on June 24) to comment on this role, are at the least, funneling money associated with kidnappings. This has been confirmed by sources both in diplomatic circles, as well as sources inside and outside the de facto Haitian government.

Youri Latortue, like Guy Philippe, has political aspirations. One Haitian human rights activist said that Youri Latortue is in the middle of a scandal that finds "two political parties are buying electoral cards in Gonaives for large sums of money." The electoral cards are an initiative of the interim government. Ostensibly designed to regularize the electoral system in advance of November elections, the cards in fact open the door to corruption and vote-buying. Gonaives happens to be where Youri Latortue himself says he plans to run for office. Another Haitian human rights activist said that Youri Latortue's "name is around all the streets of Port-Au-Prince as a drug dealer, kidnapper and other crimes...he wants to be a senator just to have a certain immunity to avoid being judged after the departure of the current government."

Over the course of several interviews between April and June 2005, Joel Deeb stated that Youri Latortue presently has four sealed DEA indictments pending against him, and that the DEA have issued an extradition letter for Youri Latortue to the interim government. Youri Latortue himself evaded questions about the DEA indictments, denying that he and Deeb, as Deeb claims, were in regular contact. Deeb speculated that U.S. authorities might soon pick up Youri Latortue, and that the interim government has already been presented a letter requesting Youri Latortue's extradition. Efforts to this end have been foiled thanks to the interventions of his uncle, who either relies on Youri Latortue or fears him too much to let him go. The ICG report might lead us to conclude that if the DEA has not picked up Youri Latortue yet, his uncle aside, there is a political reason behind this. The U.S. Embassy would not comment on DEA activities, nor on the PM's nephew's reputation. Gerard Latortue also declined to speak about his nephew's role in kidnapping rackets.

Youri Latortue himself responded directly to questions about his involvement in kidnappings:

"I don't know anything about kidnappings. I am not in- I am responsible only for the security of the Prime Minister; I know that there a lot of kidnappings in Port au Prince, I was very surprised when...[I was told] that you were talking about kidnapping. "

Deflecting further accusations, Youri Latortue responded:

"If they hear we have kidnappings, and this is very bad for the government, and I work with the Prime Minister; we try to find a way to fight against kidnapping, we try, but it's for that we try to find weapons, we try to find equipment for the police, we try to find information, training. We try to find everything for the police to fight. "

He then directly accused Lavalas partisans of involvement:

“Everybody knows that Lavalas gangs organize kidnappings and went to Bel Air and Cite Soleil, these are two zones, areas that Lavalas armed gangs took the persons, this is very impossible for the police to go in this area. It’s for that they are kidnapping, because the United Nations try to do something but until now it’s been difficult for the United Nations to put order in this area...”

Youri Latortue claims that reports of U.S. Marines already being in Port au Prince are “just rumours,” and claims not to have known that 150 Chilean Marines had just arrived, or that these Marines had been trained in close-quarter battle techniques in Chile by U.S. Marines before departing. The press release announcing these joint U.S. and Chilean Marine exercises was issued in [late March](#). Xinhua News reported on their arrival on [June 11th](#), delivered in the midst of the ‘kidnapping scourge’. Less than forthcoming on the issue of arming Haiti’s police or supporting the return of U.S. soldiers, Youri Latortue would only say that “he’s supporting every tool that can help the HNP secure the streets.”

Youri Latortue’s credibility on the question of kidnapping rackets is tenuous at best, given his involvement in illicit weapons transfers and drug trafficking. His name was mentioned on the US [Flashpoints Radio program](#) in connection with an alleged arms deal that involved him, arms broker Joel Deeb, and Lucy Orlando, a close friend of both President George W. and Florida Governor Jeb Bush, and head of the Haitian-American Republican Caucus in Florida.

A series of interviews with Orlando, Deeb, Latortue and others have revealed a complex series of events that indicate at the least, incredibly shady deals taking place outside the scrutiny of public opinion. What is clear is that the interim Haitian government, with the probable knowledge and complicity of the U.S. government, has attempted to circumvent the 14-year U.S. arms embargo on Haiti. On May 25th, 2004, Orlando hosted a fundraiser in her home for President Bush’s reelection campaign. Orlando estimates up to 300 mostly Haitian-Americans attended her party, to which Haiti Democracy Project (HDP) board member Alice Blanchet came to help organize.

At the initiative of Youri Latortue, Orlando invited Joel Deeb to the party, who she says was accompanied by Lionel Desgranges, a former aide to Leslie Manigat, former President of Haiti (1988) and a long time ally of Washington with ties to the International Republican Institute. Desgranges had also attended the November 2002 opening of the Haiti Democracy Project, which was one of the key international backers of the 2004 coup. Also joining the party were Robert “Bobby” Wawa, former vice-president of the Haitian Chamber of Commerce, and ex Haitian Army General Herard Abraham, another long time U.S. asset. At the time, Abraham was Haiti’s interior minister, but has since been moved to Foreign Affairs.

With the exception of Blanchet, the rest of this group met in Lucy’s bedroom and discussed how to get weapons.

Orlando claims that on December 31st, 2004, Youri Latortue was present in Gerardm Latortue’s office when Deeb was given a check for \$1 million. Deeb denies receiving a check, though he acknowledges that there was a check made out to his company, Omega. Deeb maintains that the only money he received for weapons was the \$533,333.33 deposited in the form of a letter of credit into a Panamanian account. He says that this

money is frozen, but that Finance minister Henri Bazin has been hassling him lately to write a check in the amount that is frozen to Youri Latortue.

The first time Orlando was asked about her relationship with Joel Deeb, she responded, "Joel Deeb? I've never heard of that; I know Youri Latortue, and the government in Haiti, they are the ones involved with Joel Deeb, with the arms...They want to call my name, they should ask Youri Latortue the nephew or the cousin of Gerard Latortue..." Orlando also claims that "[Gerard] Latortue put Youri to be the head of Haiti."

Orlando takes credit for having helped install the Latortue regime, but thinks that they have come to resent her due to her close relations with the Republican Party: "They don't like me because I'm a Republican. Who put them there? I was the one talking to the Governor, to the President, to promote them. the first person they hate is you because they don't want you to know their business...What I got for thank-you was 'drop-dead Lucy.'

Orlando considers herself a key activist in helping to facilitate the downfall of President Jean Bertrand Aristide. Several individuals offered different versions of circumstances, which found Orlando meeting with President Bush in the weeks leading up to Aristide's overthrow in February 2004. All agree that Orlando demanded that Bush personally intervene to "take Aristide out." Interestingly, Orlando would not deny that this meeting took place and abruptly ended the interview when this question was raised.

Orlando's connection to the Latortues was evidenced by her appearance at a December 2002 conference sponsored by USAID and IFES in conjunction with the anti-Aristide Haitian Resource Development Foundation. Gerard Latortue and Bernard Gousse, as an employee of IFES, were also in attendance. The University of Miami human rights report goes into great detail about how IFES, under the guise of "judicial reform" and "civil society strengthening" helped to destabilize and foster the conditions for the overthrow of Jean Bertrand Aristide. In 1999-2000 alone, IFES received close to \$7 million for such efforts from USAID.

Orlando has devoted a lot of her life to the Republican Party. She says she went to Haiti and registered Haitian-Americans in Haiti who had never registered to vote, "with the Chairman of the Republican Party as my witness." She says her allegiance to the Bush family goes back to the Reagan years. She takes pride in her work mobilizing Haitian-Americans to vote Republican, "I mobilized all the Haitian people, told them about the Republican Party, got them to vote..." In this capacity she says she worked in Haiti with U.S. backed interim Minister for the Haitian Diaspora, Alix Baptiste. Baptiste refused to discuss his work with Lucy Orlando.

Orlando was also upset because Gerard Latortue had fired a close friend of hers, Rene Meroney who had been appointed head of Haiti's state-run but slated-for-privatization telephone company, TELECO. She had brought this friend with her to President Bush's January 2005 inauguration. "If they get mad if you have a friend in the position for whatever, they fire them and destroy the name for people to know that they are thieves, they are this, they are that, because of me, because anybody who is my friend, they try to destroy them...They put them responsible for what I said in the newspaper."

Asked if she thinks today's violence is as bad as the previous (1991-94) coup period, Orlando replied, "I believe that Latortue has been doing the same thing and have been blaming it on the Aristide people...Everybody's after one thing, fill their pockets and then blame the poor ones."

“Youri Latortue has his own guns...why do you think Latortue need all the munitions right now? To give to all his guns, this way when they want to go and do something, they can go and do it for him, that’s why the country’s not going anywhere.”

“But Latortue will pay one day”, Orlando prophesied. “One day the whole world will know the truth about the Latortues.”

This seems less likely no that Haiti’s de facto President Boniface Alexandre has recently characterized Lavalas supporters as “terrorists” and Roger Noriega, echoing his friend Andy Apaid, [has openly blamed the violence and kidnappings on Aristide](#): “As a longtime observer of Haiti and a longtime consumer of information about Haiti, it is abundantly clear to me . . . that Aristide and his camp are singularly responsible for most of the violence and for the concerted nature of the violence”

Until the world does know about what the evidence suggests is a government-run kidnap ring, Haiti will be condemned to ongoing, seemingly inexplicable ‘scourges’. Alternatively, the gangsters could be punished, the political prisoners freed, and democracy restored. But between there and here, there is, to use a word familiar to Coderre and Pettigrew, a lot of ‘propaganda’ to be cleared away.

**Anthony Fenton is an investigative journalist , and co-author with Yves Engler of the forthcoming “Canada in Haiti: Waging War Against the Poor Majority,” Fernwood/Red Press. Feedback is welcome: afenton@riseup.net*

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