

The Canadian Corporate Nexus in Haiti

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Haiti's de facto government will soon announce the appointment of Robert Tippenhauer as its new ambassador to Canada. Previously, Tippenhauer was the President of the first-ever Haitian-Canadian Chamber of Commerce. He says he will be arriving in Canada shortly after the early June visit to Haiti of Quebec Premier Jean Charest. Should the Canadian government accept Tippenhauer's credentials, it will mark Canada's clearest official alignment with Haiti's right-wing elites.

Prior to the Feb. 29, 2004 ouster of democratically elected President Jean Bertrand Aristide, Tippenhauer was Jamaica's honorary consul in Haiti. His ideological leanings were apparent on Mar. 15, 2004, when he "resigned in protest against the decision by the Jamaican government to host former President Jean Bertrand Aristide, which he reportedly described as a 'slap in the face' to the Haitian people." (Radio Galaxie, Mar. 17, 2004)

During a recent telephone interview, Tippenhauer affirmed that he is the uncle of sweatshop magnate Hans Tippenhauer, who played the role of a Group of 184 "opposition leader" for the corporate media in the lead up to Aristide's removal. On Feb. 24, as the U.S. funded and trained paramilitaries were escalating the destabilization against Haiti's elected government, the Washington Post offered up nephew Tippenhauer's rationalization for the coming coup: "The Haitian people's voice today is very clear; they want Aristide to leave." Hans Tippenhauer, a former member of the Washington establishment's Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), also described the rebels as "freedom fighters," a phrase that would be echoed one month later by Haiti's de facto Prime Minister in GonaVves in front of then Canadian Ambassador to the OAS, David Lee.

Needing employment after resigning his consulate post, Robert Tippenhauer was soon given the prestigious role of directing the newly created Haitian-Canadian Chamber of Commerce, which he described as "the link between Canadian investors and Haiti." This link was officially developed in late October 2004, when a delegation of twelve Canadian companies, including procurement giant SNC-Lavalin, joined the Francophonie Business Forum for a trip to Haiti. Tippenhauer said that the meetings, in which Canadian Ambassador Claude Boucher and Latortue took part, "like [Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister] Pettigrew said, were a very important place to meet, to encourage Canadian investors to come down here."

Of the many reconstruction projects that are being created, Tippenhauer feels that "considering the active role that Canada is playing with their lead role in the transition, Canadian firms should have a first look at these projects." On Canada's leadership role, Tippenhauer made the point that Canada had "one the most active ambassadors here." Tippenhauer further lauded Canada's "constant interest in Haiti," stating "the mere presence of these officials is good for us."

Some of the incentives offered to companies like SNC, and Gildan Activewear, who Tippenhauer estimates employ 5,000 people between their independent factory (which is next to Tippenhauer's Dollar Rent-a-Car) and Andy Apaid's factories; Apaid has been Gildan's primary subcontractor in Haiti for many years, according to a Gildan spokesperson.

Asked about specific contracts, Tippenhauer simply affirmed that there are "several discussions, negotiations" going on.

For its part, Ottawa remains mum on the particulars of reconstruction projects. The recent OAS document on the French-led "reconstruction" meeting in Cayenne, Guyana (Mar. 18, 2005) finds frequent references to Canada and notes that Canada has proposed to organize the next ministerial "reconstruction" meeting in a few months.

It's logical that SNC-Lavalin is involved in reconstruction. A maxim of their business objective in the 2004 annual report finds "the ability to win contracts around the world is a good indicator of a successful business strategy." As a sign of the immensity of SNC's global operations in realms of defense, oil, infrastructure, engineering, mining, pharmaceuticals and agribusiness, SNC states that "we won significant contracts in all our sectors of activity and are working on projects of all sizes worldwide. In fact, our backlog increased by 52% from year end 2003, to reach \$6.3 billion at year end 2004."

With Haiti as "the latest procurement hot spot" and post-war rebuilding contracts representing a US\$200 billion a year business, the Toronto Star (Mar. 23, 2004) cited SNC-Lavalin as a darling on the UN's approved list of vendors. The UN doled out some \$813 million in contracts in 2002. The Star cited estimates of some \$100 million in potential military contracts annually for operations in Haiti.

Asked about activities in Haiti, an SNC spokesperson would only say that they are involved in "highly confidential negotiations" with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), to whom she deferred. CIDA media relations officer Regine Beauplan would only state that "CIDA has entered into negotiations with SNC-Lavalin and because those negotiations are on-going, CIDA is unable to provide information."

Fortunately, SNC-Haiti's General Manager, Bernard Chancy, was not so reticent. Contradicting CIDA's statement, Chancy confirmed that CIDA and SNC are well past negotiations on some projects. "In fact there is already one project in activity and another one which is a study project," he said. The project already underway is the Carrefour Railroad, one of two major road-building projects that are listed in the OAS "reconstruction" document.

According to Chancy, CIDA has already contributed \$500,000 to the "labor intensive" initial phase of the Carrefour project. "The Haitian government has decided to construct a new road that gets out of Port-au-Prince by the South," said Chancy. This aspect of the project involves constructing one of the streets that will connect the Carrefour road with the new one. The new road, a major undertaking that Chancy says they hope to have completed "before the new government takes over" will not be built without the assistance of SNC-Montreal's team of engineers, who are conducting studies that will "permit the main part of the road to be constructed." For this work, SNC will get a big slice of the additional \$8 million that Canada is contributing to the project.

There is scant mention of Haiti in their latest annual report, and yet this recent information

reveals that SNC-Lavalin is playing a major role in the pro-coup policies of Canada and the “international community,” a community which implicitly excludes the African Union, CARICOM, Venezuela and Cuba for their persistent refusal to recognize Haiti’s de facto regime. Fittingly, it was SNC-Lavalin who procured the \$20 million contract to build the new Canadian embassy in Port-au-Prince, perhaps the most auspicious harbinger of Canada’s “long term presence” in Haiti. When Pettigrew inaugurated the new Embassy in September 2004, there was no mention of SNC-Lavalin, which would rather have their penchant for profiting from war, occupation and colonial policies kept off of the radar.

Protestors in Toronto recently denounced SNC-Lavalin for their role in providing bullets for the U.S. military in Iraq, among other things. SNC-Lavalin also provides 70% of Canada’s military ammunition, which has been used in UN and NATO occupations worldwide.

Like the infamous Halliburton in Iraq, SNC is profiting from and encouraging the imperialist project in Haiti and the continued repression of Haiti’s masses.

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