

# The Politics of Money: Haiti and the Left

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Since the U.S.-backed overthrow of progressive Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the severe level of political repression launched by the new government has left tens of thousands of Lavalas (Aristide's political party) supporters the victims of rapes, incarcerations, firings and murders. One tragic aspect of this story is the extent to which Canadian federal government money has been able to buy the support of supposedly progressive organizations and individuals. Today they continue to align themselves with Canada's brutal pro-coup policy.

## The Politics of NGO Funding

In September, 2003, for example, Rights and Democracy, a Montreal-based NGO whose money comes from the federal government and which was formerly headed by the NDP's Ed Broadbent, released a report on Haiti. The report described Haiti's pro-coup Group of 184 as "grassroots" and a "promising civil society movement." The group says this even though the Group of 184 is funded by the International Republican Institute and is headed by the country's leading sweatshop owner, Andy Apaid. Apaid has been active in right-wing Haitian politics for many years, and, like G-184 spokesperson Charles Henry Baker himself, is white.

Moreover, several Quebec unions that received hundreds of thousands of CIDA dollars for work in Haiti through the Centre International de Solidarité Ouvrière (CISO) passed resolutions condemning Aristide's alleged anti-union activities. The FTQ and CSQ union federations and a half dozen NGOs are part of an informal group known as the Concertation Pour Haiti (CPH). Prior to the coup, they branded Aristide a "tyrant" and his government a "dictatorship" and a "regime of terror." In mid-February, 2004, CPH representatives told the Canadian Press, "We think there will not be a solution without Aristide leaving." This demand was made at the same time CIA-trained thugs swept across the country to depose Aristide.



Yves Engler being taken into custody by Montreal city police after setting up an information table about the FTAA inside Concordia University during a ban on "political activity" on campus. No charges were laid.

Since Aristide's overthrow, these same Quebec unions have failed to criticize the installed government for its far more severe harassment of unionists. Last October, for example, Lulu Cherie, head of Haiti's CTH union, had his life threatened by the Haitian Police. No unions in Quebec have said anything about this or about numerous other post-coup affronts to union activity. In addition, Quebec unions also worked to dilute an anti-coup resolution proposed

by a number of English-Canadian unions to the Canadian Labour Congress convention held in Montreal in June.

The CPH's antagonism towards Lavalas isn't merely a by-product of the political upheaval of February. In October, 2004 — after months of widespread political repression directed at Lavalas sympathizers — the CPH released a statement blaming the victims. The CPH repeated the claim first made by Haiti's ruling elite and ultra-right that Lavalas launched an "Operation Baghdad," which included beheading police officers. Numerous observers have noted that "Operation Baghdad" is simply pro-coup propaganda designed to divert attention from the de facto government's misdeeds, particularly the murder of at least five peaceful, pro-constitution demonstrators on September 30, 2004.

### **Imperialism and the Rhetoric of Human Rights**

In April, 2005, the CPH organized a delegation from Haiti to Montreal and Ottawa. Yolène Gilles, one of the speakers invited by the CPH, is the coordinator of the "human rights" monitoring program at the National Network for the Defense of Human Rights (RNDDH), formerly known as NCHR-Haiti, which is funded by CIDA. This organization changed its name in mid-March, 2005, after its parent group in the U.S., itself pro-coup, condemned the blatantly partisan work of NCHR-Haiti regarding the imprisonment of constitutional Prime Minister Yvon Neptune. Immediately after the coup, Gilles, a "human rights" worker, went on elite-owned radio to name wanted Lavalas "bandits," contributing to a climate of anti-Lavalas terror.

The other delegate, Danielle Magloire, is a member of the "Council of Wise People" that appointed Gerard Latortue as interim prime minister. Latortue's appointment was a blatant violation of Haiti's constitution, since the U.S., France and Canada created the council after overthrowing the elected government.

### **The Funding of Anti-Class Struggle Feminism**

Magloire's status as a "wise" person, moreover, arose largely out of her positions at Enfofanm (Women's info) and the National Coordination for Advocacy on Women's Rights (CONAP). Both of these organizations are CIDA-funded feminist organizations that would not have grown to prominence without international funding. In particular, CONAP is a virulently anti-Lavalas feminist organization that has shunned the language of class struggle in a country where a tiny percentage of the population owns nearly everything. It is also an organization that has expressed little concern about the dramatic rise in rapes targeting Lavalas sympathizers since the coup.

In mid-July, 2005, Magloire issued a statement on behalf of the seven-member "Council of Wise People" saying any media that gives voice to "bandits" (code for Lavalas supporters) should be shut down. She also asserted that Lavalas should be banned from upcoming elections.

### **Alternatives: The Politics of Money**

Even the Montreal-based Alternatives, usually on the left of the NGO world, has helped to justify the coup. Alternatives is now working with 15 groups in Haiti, all of which are anti-Lavalas. They also support virulently anti-Lavalas AlterPresse, the most prominent on-line Haitian media outlet and newswire. In April, 2005, Alternatives received a share of a \$2-

million CIDA media project to train Haitian journalists about covering elections — the very elections Canada hopes will legitimize its role in the February 29, 2004 coup. (A proper political parallel would be an organization receiving money from the U.S. government to cover elections in Iraq.) In late June an Alternatives supplement in Le Devoir featured a prominent report that parroted the neoconservative narrative about Haiti. Alternatives' reporting has omitted any mention of political prisoners, violent repression of Lavalas activists and the basic facts about the coup.

Canada's recent actions in Haiti may be Canada's greatest-ever foreign-policy crime. Among other things, Canada helped organize a meeting to plan the coup, sent troops to overthrow the elected government, commanded the occupying UN police force, employed high-level officials in the installed government and trained the murderous Haitian police.

Nevertheless, Canadian Haiti solidarity activism is growing in response to the Liberal government's role in suppressing that country's democratic will. Solidarity Groups have sprouted up in half a dozen cities and the Canada Haiti Action Network listserve now has 200 members in 18 cities across the country.

Five cities held actions — from banner drops to marches — to commemorate Haiti's Flag Day on May 18. Six Canadian cities also joined worldwide protests on July 21, which prompted the United Nations to investigate a massacre committed two weeks earlier that left as many as 80 slum dwellers dead.

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