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# HAITI

## and the myth of Canadian Peacekeeping

by Roger Annis



*A Socialist Voice Pamphlet*

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## Haiti: A Social and Economic Calamity

*(Green Left Weekly, February 28, 2008)*

*The following is abridged from an interview with Haiti solidarity activist Roger Annis for the Norwegian left daily newspaper Klassenkampens.*

*On February 29, 2004, Haiti's president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was overthrown by a military intervention from the US, Canada, France and Chile allied with small numbers of foreign-armed and financed Haitian paramilitaries. Aristide was forcibly removed from the country and lives today in exile in South Africa.*

*Roger Annis is a coordinator of the Canada Haiti Action Network, a solidarity movement that arose in the months following the coup. He travelled to Haiti last August. Annis lives in Vancouver and works as an aircraft assembler. He is a member of the International Association of Machinists.*

**On August 5, 2007, you began a two-week visit to Haiti as a part of a human rights fact-finding delegation sponsored by the US-based Fondasyon Mapou and Haiti Priorities Project. Did you meet any trade unionists, and what did you learn from these meetings?**

Yes, we had extensive meetings with unions in Haiti. These included the CTH, which is the Haitian union affiliated to the International Confederation of Trade Unions; the APCH (union of bus, truck and taxi drivers); and a small union of health-care providers, the Association des professionnels(elles) de santé d'Haiti.

We learned that unions in Haiti are very engaged in struggling for social, economic and political solutions to the country's calamitous situation. They don't limit their activity to the narrow economic interests of their immediate members; their consciousness and historical experience leads them to fight for broader societal concerns.

Because of the conditions of political repression that prevail in Haiti, unions must be careful. There is a legal and political space allowing for trade union activity, but it has limits. There is a ferocious hostility from Haiti's elite and foreign investors to any improvements in wages or conditions of work. This and the disastrous economic situation make the task of organising unions extremely difficult.

**Give me your description of the living conditions of the average Haitian.**

I can only describe the situation in Haiti today as a social and economic calamity. Half of the children do not attend school. Hunger and disease is widespread. There is no safe drinking water available from a public distribution system. Most Haitian dwellings are in terrible condition. The minimum wage for workers is \$2US per day. But most people do not have that luxury of earning such a salary — unemployment is 70-80%.

If the conditions in the cities are bad, they are much worse in the countryside. That is where the majority of Haitians live. The policies of forced importation of subsidised food exports from Europe and North America have all but destroyed Haiti's capacity to feed itself. Deforestation of the country is near-total. The country's road network is in terrible disrepair, making road travel in rural areas very difficult.

Haiti has long been the poorest country in the Americas. It is rapidly joining the ranks of the poorest countries in the world. Life expectancy is 55 years of age. Child mortality is 150 deaths per 1,000 children of five years or younger. These figures rank Haiti alongside the poorest countries of Africa, yet its capital city is only a one-hour flight from Miami.

**Please tell me about your meetings with Lovinsky Pierre Antoine.**

Lovinsky Pierre Antoine is one of the leading activists and spokespeople in Haiti for human rights. He is an activist in the Lavalas political movement of Jean-Bertrand Aristide and a founder of the September 30 Foundation, an important human and social rights organisation. [September 30 is the anniversary of the first military coup against Aristide in 1991.] Lovinsky was forced into exile following the coup in 2004. He returned following the February 2006 presidential election.

Lovinsky was acting as a guide and director for our delegation. One week into our visit, shortly after returning from visiting the north of Haiti to the capital city, Port au Prince, he disappeared. He has not been seen nor heard from since.

We travelled across Haiti with Lovinsky. We saw firsthand how widely known and respected he is. He is one of the sharpest critics of the foreign occupation presence in Haiti. His outspokenness has obviously rattled Haiti's elite and their foreign backers.

More recently, the interim coordinator of Lovinsky's September 30 Foundation, Wilson Mesilien, has been receiving death threats and has gone into hiding.

**Could you tell me more about the two organisations that sponsored your trip?**

Fondasyon Mapou and Haiti Priorities Project are two small foundations based in the US that operate development projects in Haiti and organise delegations to the country. They are active in pressuring the US government for a sharp change in its policies towards Haiti, including respecting Haiti's sovereignty and providing better terms of trade and aid.

**Could you comment on the role of foreign aid in Haiti?**

The Haitian people have many important things to teach other people in the world who are fighting for a society of justice. One of those is the utter failure of the "aid" model from the wealthy countries in delivering any mean-

ingful economic, social or political progress. And I include in this record of failure the so-called “non-governmental” organisation (NGO) model.

Haiti is awash in charities, NGOs and aid agencies. There are an estimated 4000 of them. Yet, the country’s poverty and environmental degradation is deepening at a frightening rate. The US, France, Canada and the UN Security Council have had four years to prove that their overthrow of Haiti’s elected government would bring improvements, and they have nothing to show for their efforts. Only more misery and repression.

Some NGOs are doing very good and important work in Haiti. An example is Médecins Sans Frontières. But most aid agencies and NGOs have been complicit in the subversion of Haitian society and democracy. The Haitian government only delivers 20% of the country’s social services. The rest is in the hands of foreign interests or their local agencies.

Haiti’s needs are overwhelming. The road network needs rebuilding. Reforestation and development of agriculture and fishing must be a top priority. The country could build a thriving tourism industry. Schools, hospitals and other social development programs are urgently needed.

None of this is technically difficult to do. Two things are needed. One, the country needs massive financial and material resources. And two, its sovereignty must be respected. Every time that Haitians vote, they choose a political movement and program dedicated to social justice and equality. There must be an end to the long, sad history of foreign intervention and coups d’état.

### **Please give me your assessment of MINUSTAH’s role.**

MINUSTAH is the acronym for the United Nations Security Council-sponsored occupation force in Haiti. It numbers 7100 soldiers; 1800 police; and an administrative apparatus of 900 people. Brazil is assigned the lead role of the military force, and Brazilian troops make up the largest number of soldiers.

The creation of MINUSTAH followed the foreign invasion of Haiti in February, 2004, [which] was sanctioned by the Security Council. Four years later, MINUSTAH has nothing to show for its presence. It spends more than \$600 million per year. But our delegation saw very few development or aid projects taking place, and certainly none on the scale of what Haiti requires.

The only meaningful international assistance to Haiti is coming from Venezuela and Cuba. [Venezuelan] President Hugo Chavez and Cuba’s vice-president visited in March 2007, and extensive agreements between the three countries were signed. Venezuela will build Haiti’s first two oil refineries, and Haiti has signed onto the “PetroCaribe” agreement that provides oil at discounted rates. Cuba and Venezuela will provide resources for road repair and health and education services. Cuba will continue its medical mission in Haiti, which numbers 500 personnel and provides vital

health services as well as training, in Cuba, of Haitian doctors.

**Please compare the human rights situation in Haiti during 2004-06 with today's situation.**

Haiti lost its elected government institutions in February, 2004. A regime of human rights violations was imposed on the Haitian people. According to a study published in the September 2006 issue of the British medical journal *The Lancet*, there were 4000 deaths at the hands of the Haitian National Police and the United Nations occupation forces in Port-au-Prince alone in the 22 months following the coup. This gives you some idea of the bloodletting that occurred.

During the same time, Haiti's prison population doubled. It now stands at some 6200.

The political repression eased considerably after the election of René Préval as president in February 2006. That election was deeply flawed, but Préval was the popular choice and his election sent a message to the Haitian elite to back off.

The human rights situation is once again worsening. The prisons are very overcrowded and unhealthy, and the judicial system remains seriously flawed. One example — more than 80% of the people in prison have not been tried, let alone sentenced.

Préval's government has embarked on an ambitious program to privatise what little remains of Haiti's public institutions, including the state telephone and electricity companies, the customs service, and the state employee pension fund.

**What message would you like to leave with readers of this interview?**

I would like to leave with a call for solidarity. Haiti is suffering under a foreign-imposed occupation regime. Its constitution and elected institutions were destroyed following an unprecedented international campaign of slander and vilification against Aristide. Ever since a popular uprising in 1986 succeeded in overthrowing the Duvalier family dynasty, the Haitian people have voted for progressive government. But their choice is continually subverted by the big imperialist powers.

Here in Canada, we have just launched an exciting fund appeal in support of several of Haiti's largest trade unions. Initial support for the appeal has been strong, including from the Canadian Labour Congress.

**Canada Haiti Action**

United to raise awareness of what is actually happening in Haiti and the real effects of the Canada's support for the coup d'etat that overthrew Haiti's democratically-elected government.

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# Blood on the Hands of Canadian Imperialists in Haiti

*(Socialist Voice, August 1, 2004)*

**By Roger Annis**

Five hundred Canadian soldiers are returning from Haiti this month. Together with the armed forces of France and the United States, they took part in the violent overthrow of the elected government of Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February/March of this year. Since then, occupying troops have provided backing for rightist gangs who will form the core of the police and government authority the occupying forces are cobbling together to replace the Aristide government.

Troops from the three countries began occupying Haiti in late February. The United Nations Security Council gave its blessing to this intervention on February 29. Early that morning, President Aristide was kidnapped by U.S. forces and flown out of the country. He now lives in asylum.

The capitalist media in Canada presented the coup as a popular uprising against an unpopular regime. Since then, they have kept a discreet silence about conditions in Haiti under imperialist occupation. New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton spoke not a word about the ongoing tragedy in Haiti during the federal election campaign in May and June. Trade union leaders have been silent.

The truth urgently needs to be told about Ottawa's crime against the Haitian people.

## **A disaster for the Haitian people**

Constitutional government in Haiti, won through many years of tenacious struggle, has been overthrown. Killings by rightist gangs were widespread leading up to this latest coup and they have continued during the occupation regime. Several thousand have died. The rightists target supporters of the Aristide government and anyone striving to improve social conditions in the country. Rightists convicted of crimes and human rights violations during previous regimes have been released from prison and are involved in the killings.

U.S. troops have taken part in the attacks on the Haitian people. An Associated Press reporter witnessed U.S. Marines joining police in firing on a demonstration of tens of thousands of Haitians on May 18 in Port au Prince. A dozen people were killed and many more injured. Demonstrators were demanding the return of Aristide on the occasion of a holiday marking Haitian independence.

Following the coup, living conditions in Haiti have gone from bad to worse. Prices for basic foodstuffs have risen sharply, the minimum wage has been cut by the new governing authority, and civic services have declined.

Flooding this past May in the eastern part of the island devastated many villages and killed several thousand. In the countryside, drought conditions are hitting the livelihood of farmers and threatening the vital food harvest. Precious little international aid is being delivered to meet emergency needs.

In a letter to the *Toronto Star* on July 30, a reader described her dismay with the head of the Canadian military in Haiti when he described the occupation as a “success.” The letter recounted a recent telephone conversation with a Canadian aid worker living in Cap Haitien, the second largest city in Haiti. “Things are so much worse than they were last October, prior to the revolt in February,” reported the worker. “Supporters of Jean-Bertrand Aristide are still being hunted down by those who support a new regime.... Food supplies are low, electricity is only on for one to three hours daily, garbage is piled up along the roads, as there has been no collection for many months now, and people everywhere are sick.”

### **Why imperialism opposed Aristide**

Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas. Average annual income is a few hundred dollars. Average life expectancy is 49 years for men and 50 for women. An AIDS epidemic is ravaging the country. Forty seven percent of the adult population is illiterate and unemployment is 60% to 70%. The country is burdened by a crushing debt to imperialist governments and lending agencies. Gross domestic product in Haiti has declined from US\$4 billion in 1999 to \$2.9 billion in 2003.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide rose to prominence in the 1980s during the revolutionary movement that overthrew the Duvalier dictatorship in 1986. He was first elected president in 1990 with the overwhelming support of Haiti’s working people on a platform of radical social reform. Nine months later he was overthrown by a military coup. He was elected again in November of 2000.

The masses in Haiti had big expectations in the governments headed by Aristide, and despite many disappointments with his performance, they continued to place enormous pressure on his government to stand up to the imperialists and improve their lot. Aristide established diplomatic relations with Cuba in 1996, and he welcomed hundreds of Cuban doctors and health workers to provide health care in remote parts of the country. The post-2000 government built new schools and refused imperialist demands to privatize state-owned services such as electricity, telephones, and ports.

Aristide angered the French government in April 2003 when he demanded that it pay \$21 billion in reparation to Haiti. France, the former colonial power, had extorted payments from Haitian governments during the 19th and 20th centuries as punishment and “compensation” for the successful anti-slave revolt that led to Haiti’s independence from France in 1804.

The imperialist drive against post-Duvalier governments in Haiti, especially those headed by Aristide, played on the frustration and impatience of the masses with the limited improvements that the governments were able



to deliver. Among the sources of frustration were the measures that Aristide was obliged to accept as a condition of his U.S.-sponsored return to power in 1994 that put an end to three years of tyranny under military rule. These included lowering of tariffs that protected local food production, emptying of the national treasury in order to pay off international lending institutions, and privatizing some state-owned industries.

### **Canadian imperialists in Haiti**

The imperialist intervention in Haiti was a joint venture with rightist forces that launched an armed rebellion in early February. The rightists were armed and financed by wealthy Haitians and their backers in the U.S., France, Canada, and neighbouring Dominican Republic. They were few in number and weak in the capital city Port au Prince. But pro-government defense forces were poorly organized and armed.

In January 2003, Canada's foreign affairs department was one of the sponsors of an international conference in Ottawa that discussed and laid plans for the overthrow of Aristide's government. Thirteen months later, according to a report on the French-language television news network of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the elite service of the Canadian armed forces was among the imperialist troops that helped capture and secure the airport in Port au Prince in the early hours of February 29.

On July 6, Prime Minister Paul Martin announced that Canada would send 100 RCMP to replace the returning soldiers. Police and soldiers from the U.S., France, Chile, Brazil, and other countries will remain in Haiti, under UN Security Council approval. A press release from the Canadian government described the role of the occupation as, "to assist the transitional Haitian government in establishing a secure and stable environment, restoring law and order, and reforming the Haitian National Police."

Canada's troops provide security for the post-coup regime, and the killings continue. One of the tasks the occupation forces have set for themselves is to disarm the civilian population.

The Canadian government has convinced many at home and abroad that it is a friend of peace and democracy and that its armed forces abroad are "peacekeepers." Haiti is proving this to be a lie. Indignation against the crimes of Washington in Iraq and elsewhere will ring hollow if not accompanied by equal indignation at Ottawa's participation in the pillage and oppression of the semi-colonial world.

Those concerned with human rights, poverty and the oppression of the Third World peoples have a responsibility to speak out about the situation in Haiti. We should demand of the Canadian government that it withdraw police and military forces from that country and halt any form of assistance to the post-coup authority. Working-class and progressive organizations in Canada need to support the people of Haiti in opposing the coup-imposed regime and fighting for the return of the democratically elected government.

## Imperialists Wield Deadly Force in Haiti; International Opposition Grows

*(Socialist Voice, September 7, 2005)*

**By Roger Annis**

Eighteen months after an imperialist invasion that overthrew the elected government of Haiti, a ferocious repression continues to rain down on the people of that country. The three invading countries—the United States, France, and Canada—appointed an illegal coup regime and have armed and trained rightist gangs and police agencies to enforce its rule.

The coup regime and its armed gangs now rule the streets and countryside of Haiti, together with a United Nations-sponsored occupation force. They are carrying out a bloody campaign to cripple the vast movement of Haitian people opposed to the coup.

The repression is targeting, above all, the Lavalas movement of the overthrown president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Aristide was elected president in 2000 by a vote of 92 percent. Two of the latest killing sprees took place in the capital city, Port au Prince, on August 10 and August 21.

On August 10, the Haitian National Police entered the Bel Air district accompanied by plain-clothed thugs armed with machetes. As many as 10 people died from police bullets and machetes.

On August 21, police entered a soccer stadium filled with 5,000 people and halted a match in progress sponsored by the U.S. government aid agency U.S. Aid. The crowd was ordered to lay on the ground, and then police and plain-clothed thugs went through the crowd shooting or hacking with machetes those deemed to be supporters of Lavalas. People who tried to run from the stadium were shot or hacked to death.

The death count of this attack is as high as 50 people.

An international outcry followed an operation by United Nations troops in the Cite Soleil district of Port au Prince on July 6. At 3 a.m. on that morning, UN troops sealed off two neighborhoods with tanks and troops. Two helicopters flew overhead. At 4:30 a.m., troops went on the offensive, shooting into houses, shacks, a church, and a school with machine guns, tank fire, and tear gas. Leadership of the UN military forces in Haiti is assigned to Brazil.

Eyewitnesses reported that when people fled to escape the tear gas, UN troops gunned them down from the back. Journalists and human rights workers who entered Cite Soleil in the hours and days after the attacks also reported bullet holes in the roofs of buildings, confirming eyewitness accounts that the helicopters had fired.

At least 25 people were counted dead in the hours and days after the attack. Witnesses also saw UN forces carting away bodies that could not be found and counted.

Film footage and eyewitness accounts of the assault were shared with a

labor and human rights delegation from the United States that entered Cite Soleil the following day. The delegation was sponsored by the San Francisco Labor Council and had been in Haiti to attend the Congress of the Confederation of Haitian Workers (CTH) and to interview Haitian workers, farmers, and professionals about the current labor and human rights situation in Haiti.

Seth Donnelly, a member of the delegation, spoke to “Democracy Now” radio network on July 11: “We went to the local hospital that serves people from Cite Soleil. It’s run by Doctors Without Borders. It doesn’t charge a fee, so very poor people can go to that hospital. . . . Their records show an influx of civilian casualties. Starting at 11 a.m. on July 6, there were 26 people alone from Cite Soleil that came in, suffering mostly from gunshot wounds. Out of that 26, 20 were women and children.”

The target of the July 6 UN operation was Lavalas supporter Dread Wilme. He was assassinated by UN troops during the operation.

Thousands of political prisoners languish in Haiti’s jails or are in internal exile. Among those in prison since last year are the prime minister under Aristide and longtime politician, Yvon Neptune; former interior minister Jocelerme Privert; and well-known singer/songwriter Annette Auguste.

Catholic priest Gerard Jean-Juste was apprehended and imprisoned last month, on July 21. He is one of the most well-known figures to oppose the post-coup regime and has traveled and spoken frequently in the United States on the human rights violations in Haiti.

### **Sham election: next stage of occupation**

The foreign occupation forces in Haiti are preparing to stage three rounds of elections this autumn—municipal, national legislature, and presidential. They hope this will give legitimacy to their neocolonial rule. They are working intensely, and spending millions of dollars, to create a rightist political party with credibility, if not in Haiti, then at least abroad.

But so far, these elections fall short of the appearance of legitimacy. Thousands and tens of thousands of Haitians have demonstrated for the return of their constitution and their elected government. They have shown they will not accept a sham election. Only twenty percent of the population, 840,000 out of four million people of voting age, has submitted to the occupiers’ voter registration. Municipal elections that were planned for Oct. 9 have been postponed to a later, unspecified, date.

Most importantly, the Lavalas movement has said it will boycott the elections unless a series of minimal conditions are met. These would include the release of political prisoners, an end to the repression, disarming of rightist gangs, and a commitment for the withdrawal of foreign troops and police. One thousand people demonstrated for these demands on August 21 in Cap-Haitien, Haiti’s second largest city. Their demands also included the resignation of the coup regime and the right of return of all exiles, including Aristide.

## **Failure of the occupation**

As in Iraq, the occupation authorities have failed to bring improvement to the lives of ordinary Haitians. In fact, life has become much harder. Poverty and unemployment is nearly universal. Violence is endemic, coming directly from the actions of police, rightist thugs, and UN forces, or indirectly from desperate social conditions and the breakdown of the judicial system. Many social services have been dismantled.

The imperialist powers invaded Haiti in order to crush the popular movement that backed Aristide and brought him to power. The Haitian people used Aristide's election in 1990 and again in 2000 to try and improve their lot. That spirit animates the continued protests against the coup regime and the demands for the return of the ousted government and constitution.

Aristide's first government bent to the pressures and threats by imperialism. It accepted important concessions in economic and social policy as a condition of his restoration to power in 1994, following the first coup against him in 1991. But these concessions were not good enough for Haiti's neo-colonial lords in Washington, Paris, and Ottawa. They refused to accept the results of the election in 2000 and embarked on a course to undo the results and overthrow his government. Aid money was sharply cut or eliminated.

## **Solidarity with Haiti is growing**

There is a growing movement of awareness and solidarity with Haiti. On July 21, protests against the July 6 massacre were mounted in 13 U.S. cities, five Canadian cities, in Paris, and in Brazil. Many of the protests targeted embassies or consulates of Brazil because of that country's role as leader of the military component of the UN occupation force. Solidarity committees across the United States and Canada are gaining support and awareness as they campaign in support of the basic demands of the Haitian people.

A focus of this work is demanding the release of political prisoners. Twenty-nine members of the U.S. Congress have signed an appeal to the U.S. government calling for Father Gerard Jean-Juste's release. The appeal states, in part, "We write to express our profound concerns about the unjust imprisonment of Father Gerard Jean-Juste in Haiti. We urge you to take action at once to seek his immediate and unconditional release from prison."

In an August 31 statement from exile in South Africa, President Aristide called the release of Jean-Juste and all other political prisoners a pre-condition to the holding of any elections in Haiti.

# Canada And The New World Order: The Case of Haiti

(*Socialist Voice*, October 22, 2005)

Yves Engler and Anthony Fenton. *Canada in Haiti: Waging War on the Poor Majority*. Fernwood Publishing, 2005

## Reviewed by Roger Annis

Two leading activists for the right of the Haitian people to sovereignty have just published an account of the Canadian government's sordid role in the overthrow of democracy in that island country. *Canada in Haiti: Waging War on the Poor Majority* tells the story of the foreign invasion and violent coup that overthrew the constitution and elected government of Haiti in February 2004. It places the Canadian government squarely at the center of the coup plot and its aftermath.

Haiti's elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was kidnapped and forcibly removed from the country by U.S. military forces on February 29, 2004. He now lives in exile in South Africa. Members of his government, including Prime Minister Yvon Neptune and Interior Minister Jocelerme Privert, have been in jail for more than one year. Much of the infrastructure of national and local government, social services, and local economy has been disbanded or left in disarray.

The government's overthrow was carried out by troops from the United States, Canada and France, and a small but well-armed and financed paramilitary force drawn from the disbanded army and police forces of the dictatorships that ruled Haiti prior to its first election in modern times, in 1990. "Since the toppling of Haiti's democratically-elected government," write Engler and Fenton, "a human rights disaster has unfolded."

A terrible repression has reigned for the past 20 months at the hands of the national police of the coup regime and a UN-sanctioned foreign military/political occupation force. (The latter numbers 7,500 troops from more than a dozen countries.) Several thousand Haitians have died, hundreds sit in prison—most without charges—and untold numbers have taken refuge in internal exile or fled the country. The repression has targeted, above all, the popular base of Aristide's Lavalas party.

The book sketches the history of Haiti and the events since the coup. It zeros in on Canada's role, and much of the information contained is a result of extensive travel, research, and interviews.

One of the strengths of the book is the detailed information it provides on the destabilization campaign that was waged against democracy in Haiti by the governments and pro-imperialist think tanks in Washington and Ottawa. When Aristide was elected president for a second time in 2000, this time by 92 percent of voters, the would-be colonizers of Haiti threw up their hands

at the prospect of using the electoral process to create a viable and pliant alternative to Aristide and his movement. Plans were set in motion to undo the results of the election and rid the country of Aristide.

Many readers of the book will be surprised to learn of the central and decisive role played by the Canadian government and its agencies in the destabilization effort. Aid and loans to the Haitian government were sharply curtailed after 2000. Funding of so-called non-governmental organizations in Haiti was directed exclusively at those opposing the government and the Lavalas movement. A propaganda war was unleashed, portraying Aristide's government as violent and repressive.

Another important revelation in this book concerns the role of Canadian non-governmental organizations in the destabilization campaign and subsequent justification of the coup. It cites, among others, the role of the Centre international de solidarité ouvrière, an organization based among the major trade unions in Quebec; the Ottawa-based Rights and Democracy, originally founded by, among others, Ed Broadbent; and the Quebec umbrella organization l'Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale. These and other NGOs present in Haiti are funded by the Canadian International Development Agency.

The book takes a searing look at the mainstream media in Canada, slamming it for its silence or misrepresentation on Haiti. "Canadian media may be willing to criticize U.S. foreign policy, but if Haiti is any indication, they are much less interested in criticizing their own state's adventures abroad."

The three countries that invaded Haiti continue to play the decisive role in the running of the country. They appointed a puppet governing council. Canadian government officials, including from Elections Canada, are playing the key role in organizing a fraudulent and unconstitutional round of national elections this fall or winter. (Election dates have twice been postponed, the latest postponement being a projected November 20 "election" for a new president). Canadian police agencies, including the RCMP, are training the Haitian National Police (HNP), a repressive force responsible for countless deaths in the poor neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince.

The Lavalas party is, for all intents and purposes, banned from running in the election. A party suffering immense violence and pressure, sections of it are fracturing and joining the electoral process. The popular choice of the party, Catholic priest Father Gerard Jean-Juste, has been in prison since July 21 of this year and is therefore disqualified from running.

Massive violations of human rights in Haiti by the HNP, the judicial system, and the United Nations occupation force have been documented by a series of reputable institutions and studies, including Amnesty International. Indeed, the latest report decrying human rights violations comes from the UN itself—on October 14, the UN official responsible for human rights in Haiti described the situation there as "catastrophic"!

Yet Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pierre Pettigrew, has dismissed

the earlier human rights reports as “propaganda.” Meanwhile, Prime Minister Paul Martin and Quebec Premier Jean Charest made the first visits ever to Haiti by their offices, in November 2004 and June 2005 respectively, in efforts to bolster the coup regime. While there, Martin declared there are no political prisoners in Haiti.

Other governments beg to differ. The coup regime in Haiti is not recognized by Venezuela, Cuba, South Africa, and most Caribbean island governments. The 15-country Caribbean association CARICOM suspended Haiti’s membership following the coup and has rebuffed recent pressure and threats from Canada to lift the suspension.

Canada justifies its action in Haiti by a new doctrine called “Responsibility to Protect.” It is pressing the United Nations to legitimize the doctrine. According to the doctrine, the great powers of the world may be free to invade or otherwise violate the sovereignty of countries as they choose. In Paul Martin’s words to the United Nations General Assembly on September 16, “Clearly, we need expanded guidelines for Security Council action to make clear our responsibility to act decisively to prevent humanity’s attack on humanity. The ‘Responsibility to Protect’ is one such guideline.”

The facts presented in *Canada in Haiti* are very compelling. The Canadian government stands accused of the forcible overthrow of the constitution and elected government in Haiti. It backs a post-coup regime accused of violations of human rights of massive proportion.

Despite the disaster that has since unfolded, the people of Haiti, miraculously it would seem, have found the means to protest in their thousands and tens of thousands for the return of their constitution and duly-elected government. The authors of *Canada in Haiti* argue that we have a duty to speak out and organize in that people’s defense.

## **Haitian Masses Move Forward Against Foreign Occupation**

*(Socialist Voice, August 6, 2006)*

**By Roger Annis**

Sometimes even the best-laid plans of the powerful go astray. Such was the case in Haiti in February of this year when Haitians turned out in overwhelming numbers to elect René Préval as president. Préval, who first served as president from 1996 to 2001, is an ally of the deposed President Jean Bertrand Aristide, and thus his election was a powerful rebuke to the foreign powers, including Canada, that conspired to overthrow Aristide’s government in February 2004.

The US, France, and Canada drove Aristide from office because his government sought to protect Haiti’s poor majority from the worst ravages of



the world economic order. Aristide's foreign policy measures, including the forging of diplomatic and economic ties with Cuba, were deemed equally unacceptable. This placed Aristide and his popular, mass-based movement, Lavalas, at odds with the economic powers in the Caribbean region, for whom he and his government served as a dangerous example.

With Aristide shipped out of the country and Haiti's foreign-appointed "interim government" brutally suppressing dissent, and in the face of a growing international outcry over systematic human rights violations by the coup regime and occupying force, the local and foreign elites needed the legitimacy of an election to justify the coup. But the Haitian masses refused to be intimidated on election day, and soundly rejected the elite's chosen candidates.

### **The plan, and its unraveling**

In spite of significant barriers to participation, Haiti's poor majority mobilized in massive numbers on election day. Leading up to the election, a complex electronic voter registration system had been put in place that effectively disenfranchised many. Less than one-tenth the number of polling booths were made available compared to the last election six years ago. Many poorer, heavily populated districts in the capital, Port au Prince, had few or no polling booths, while many rural voters had to travel long distances in order to cast a ballot. Lineups were long on voting day and required lengthy waits. And on the day of the vote, many polling stations opened late or required protest action by voters in lineups before doors were opened at all.

The election was organized and administered by a "Provisional Electoral Council," an extra-constitutional (and therefore illegal) authority that was established by the post-coup regime. Funding and many staff were provided by the foreign occupation powers. Canada was a key contributor. Officials of Elections Canada, including its director, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, were central figures in the planning and administration of the election.

Préval called on his supporters to stay in the streets and block the apparent attempt by the election authorities to steal the vote.

Initially it seemed as if Haiti's election was to be stolen and handed to the elite's favoured candidate. Haiti's constitution requires that a presidential candidate receive fifty-percent-plus-one of the vote, or a run-off vote is required. As the "official" count for Préval dropped further and further below fifty percent in the days following February 7, widespread protests broke out in Port au Prince. Préval called on his supporters to stay in the streets and block the apparent attempt by the election authorities to steal the vote.

Then, on February 14, news images hit television screens in Haiti and around the world of piles of ballots marked for Préval burning or otherwise left scattered in a Port au Prince garbage dump. This clear evidence of vote tampering did much to undermine the legitimacy of the Provisional



Electoral Council and United Nations agencies, who were responsible for the security of the ballots and their proper counting. Anger in the streets exploded, and rallies of tens of thousands of people paralyzed the capital. The elites were finally forced to bow to the reality that Préval had won an overwhelming first-round victory. His closest rival received a scant twelve percent of the vote.

### **A reassertion of Haitian sovereignty**

The new Préval government has set a priority on ending the foreign occupation. Newly appointed Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis declared in early June that his government will work to create the conditions for Haiti to recover its sovereignty. “No true Haitian can accept the presence of foreign troops on the national territory,” he told the newly elected Haitian Senate.

Alexis acknowledged, however, that a foreign presence was necessary in the short run because the country does not have the necessary police and military power to defend the new government and to assure safety in daily life for ordinary citizens.

Préval has repeatedly spoken of the need for fundamental social reform for Haiti’s poor majority. In a statement issued in late March entitled “Less poverty, more hope,” he declared, “Though ravaged, Haiti is not the wretched land as so often described in the media. It is a land of hope for more than eight million people. I cannot achieve miracles, nor have I been promising any. But I feel I have the responsibility to the Haitian people to open doorways on a brighter future: less poverty, less inequality, more wealth, more hope.

### **‘This is why I ran again for president’**

The new government has put forward an economic program that will focus on promoting tourism and agriculture. The government will also encourage foreign investment in light manufacturing, and seek foreign funding to repair Haiti’s devastated natural environment and its social infrastructure. So far, Préval has received important commitments of aid from Venezuela and Cuba, and Haiti has been welcomed into the Petrocaribe program initiated by Venezuela, which offers cheap oil to the poor countries of the Caribbean. Cuba has promised to extend and expand its medical mission in Haiti and its free medical training of young Haitians.

Many problems persist, however. Six months after the presidential elections, there are still several hundred political prisoners languishing in Haiti’s jails. They include Yvon Neptune, who was Prime Minister in Aristide’s government, and Haiti’s most beloved folk singer, So-Anne Auguste. The total prison population numbers some 4,000, most of whom have never been charged with a crime. Haiti’s Ministry of Justice is still largely staffed by officials appointed after the coup or who are otherwise beholden to anti-popular forces.

While some prisoners have begun to be released, it's not fast enough for most Haitians. Many believe the new government could and should be moving more decisively to gain their release. An open letter to Haitian authorities calling for the rapid release of prisoners has been signed by more than one thousand people, and the number of signatures is growing. The letter and signatures were printed in the June 30 edition of the weekly newspaper *Le Nouvelliste*. Activists are planning protest actions to highlight their concerns.

### **Canada's role in the occupation of Haiti**

Along with France and the United States, Canada is one of the three main pillars of the illegal coup and foreign occupation in Haiti. Troops from these three countries and Chile invaded in February 2004 and "secured" the country in the months that followed, before passing Haiti to the current 9,000 member UN-sponsored occupation force. The UN force is drawn mainly from Brazil and Chile, but also includes troops and police from such disparate countries as Jordan, China, and Sri Lanka.

Canadians continue to hold key advisory positions in government ministries. They head up the UN police force, and the RCMP has spent the past two years training the notoriously repressive Haitian National Police. Several Canadian military officials hold high-ranking positions in the UN occupation authority, known by its French acronym, MINUSTAH.

To this day, not a single member of the Canadian Parliament has denounced the coup, nor the human rights disaster that followed. After much prompting by solidarity activists, some New Democratic Party MPs began to voice concern about human rights violations in Haiti, and foreign affairs critic Alexa McDonough began to refer to the coup as the "removal" of Aristide from office (the occupiers describe the coup as a "voluntary departure" by Aristide).

The NDP's only call to action has been to ask the Canadian government to investigate conditions in Haiti. But a government investigation is meaningless without a recognition of Canada's own role in creating those conditions. This was amply demonstrated in late May and early June, when the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development held extensive hearings on Haiti. Questioning by MPs and testimony by government and "democracy-promotion" witnesses were entirely self-congratulatory and uncritical of Canada's policy.

Following a trip she made in May of this year, McDonough spoke very favorably of Canada's ongoing role.

The occupying powers have yet to declare that they will respect the new government's request for an end to the foreign occupation, and the precise division of powers and chain of command between the newly elected government and the UN mission has yet to be clarified. This sets the stage for more political confrontation between the Haitian masses and the occupying

powers if the occupation is perceived to be dictating or unduly interfering in government policy.

### **NGOs and the 'strategic use of aid'**

The coup in Haiti revealed a new and nasty side of Canadian foreign policy: a concerted effort to draw non-governmental organizations (NGOs) into the operations of the imperial ambitions that now drive Canadian foreign policy.

Writing in reference to Afghanistan in the March 2006 issue of *Walrus* magazine, Sean Maloney and Tom Fennell explained:

“One unique aspect of the new [Canadian military] strategy is the way that development and humanitarian aid are being used specifically for the purpose of building loyalty toward coalition forces and democratic reforms. The American, British, and Canadian governments all have representatives from their international development and relief agencies stationed in Afghanistan; the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) alone plans to spend \$616 million there by 2009. [...]

“The strategic use of aid may offend some, but this approach is gaining credibility and has been adopted by CIDA and Foreign Affairs.”

In Haiti, some of Canada's best-known NGOs were either supportive of the 2004 coup or silent on the massive human rights violations that followed. Development and Peace, the international aid organization of the Catholic Church, for instance, responded to critics of its Haiti policy in a Background Paper in March 2006 in which it wrote, “The international media has shrouded the departure of Aristide on 29 February 2004 with conspiracy theories, going so far in some cases as to claim that the CIA deposed the president in a coup d'état... In fact, Aristide himself was largely responsible for the circumstances that led to his forced departure.”

The Haitian Platform to Advocate for an Alternative Development (PAPDA) is a Haitian NGO closely partnered with the Quebec-based Alternatives NGO. In January 2004, PAPDA issued a statement in which it “praises the courage and foresight of the Haitian people who are mobilizing in greater numbers every day to demand the resignation of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. PAPDA is happy to associate itself with this demand and reiterates its conviction that President Aristide's departure constitutes an essential element of any real way out of the crisis facing the country today.”

The director of PAPDA, Camille Chalmers, is a member of the board of directors of Alternatives. Most of the latter's funding is provided by the Canadian International Development Agency.

Development and Peace and its partners in Haiti were among those who applauded Aristide's “departure” from office. On March 25, 2004, its Que-

bec director, Marthe Lapierre, told the Canadian Parliament Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, “I’d like to begin by saying that what characterized President Aristide’s government was its inability to govern, which is not necessarily the case now. It seems to me the transitional government that has been appointed does have some ability to do that. . .it is creating hope among the Haitian population, based on what we’ve observed.”

Common to all the Canadian and Haitian NGOs who supported Aristide’s “departure” was a scandalous failure to protest the human rights violations that followed the coup. Extensive human rights investigations were sponsored or issued in 2004 and 2005 by such reputable organizations as the National Lawyers Guild in the United States, the Harvard University Faculty of Law, the School of Law at the University of Miami, and Amnesty International. They all painted a grim picture of killings and jailings of Aristide supporters by UN forces and the Canadian-trained Haitian National Police, as well as destruction of the Haitian economy and social infrastructure.

Yet the following commentary is typical of the organizations that either called for or applauded Aristide’s removal. In February 2006, François L’Ecuyer of *Alternatives* wrote, “Put in place in the days following the departure of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the interim government set to work on the heavy job of rebuilding the country. Initially, an important part of the population was prepared to support this government. . . .” The article then goes on to report the utter failure of this same government to govern effectively, without any explanation as to why, nor of the massive rights violations over which it presided.

An article by the same author in May 2006 reviews the challenges facing the new, elected government in Haiti without any reference whatsoever to the severe damage done during the coup years.

OXFAM Quebec maintained a similar silence on the suppression of democracy in Haiti in its annual report for 2004-2005.

The democracy-promotion agency of the Canadian government, Rights and Democracy, has also been a strong supporter of Aristide’s “departure.”

### **Challenging ‘responsibility to protect’**

The foreign intervention in Haiti is the first fruit of the new “Responsibility to Protect” doctrine, authored by prominent liberals in Canada and increasingly accepted as policy by the United Nations. Under its terms, the great powers of the world grant themselves the authority to declare a people or country “failed” and then intervene militarily to install compliant governments. This doctrine was analyzed by Anthony Fenton in the December 2005 issue of *Briarpatch*.

Haiti represents a considerable challenge to progressive forces in Canada. The Canadian government has emerged unscathed from its complicity in the overthrow of Haiti’s elected government and its direct hand in training that country’s notoriously brutal police force. If such practices, and the

doctrine underlying them, are not challenged, then we will see more foreign policy adventures similar to Haiti and Afghanistan. This bodes very badly for the future of political and social rights, not only abroad, but increasingly at home as well.

Solidarity committees sprang up across Canada in 2004 in response to the terrible news coming out of Haiti. That year, these committees formed the Canada Haiti Action Network to coordinate solidarity across the country. Members of the network held a meeting in Montreal in May of this year and pledged to continue their work. Priorities in the coming months will be:

- To continue exposing Canada's complicity in the detention of political prisoners in Haiti and the flagrant violation of Haiti's constitution pertaining to the rights of arrested and detained persons.
- To demand that Canada withdraw its police and military forces from Haiti, under terms set by the new Haitian government.
- To end the use of aid money and NGO projects as weapons that undermine the institutions of the sovereign government of Haiti. Instead, Haiti needs massive amounts of aid with no strings attached for rebuilding the shattered economy and social infrastructure.

In the recent election in Haiti, the Haitian people mobilized massively to impose their desire for a democracy and social progress and for an end to foreign occupation. Canadians should respond by stepping up solidarity with their struggle.

## From Revolution to the Kidnapping of a President

*(Socialist Voice, October 24, 2007)*

Randall Robinson. *An Unbroken Agony: Haiti, From Revolution to the Kidnapping of a President*, Basic Civitas. 280 pages.

### Reviewed by Roger Annis

Randall Robinson has written the story of a great tragedy of recent times—the violent overthrow of Haiti's elected president and government on February 29, 2004. *An Unbroken Agony: Haiti, From Revolution to the Kidnapping of a President* gives a blow-by-blow account of the events surrounding that tragedy.

The author brings impressive credentials to the task. He helped to found the Trans Africa Forum, one of the most established human rights and social justice advocacy organizations in the U.S., dedicated to improving the lot of people of African descent. The Forum has long fought for a fair and respectful U.S. economic and political relationship with Haiti. His work gave him an enduring respect for the ousted president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and his

wife Mildred.

Robinson writes with an unapologetic passion for the Haitian people's historic fight against slavery and colonialism. He situates the tragic events of 2004 on the broader canvas of the racism and imperial arrogance that has dominated the policies of the world's big powers towards Haiti, particularly those of the U.S. and France.

Why is Haiti so poor, the uninformed observer will ask. Surely, after 200 years of nominal independence the country could do better?

“As punishment for creating the first free republic in the Americas (when 13 percent of the people living in the United States were slaves),” Robinson replies, “The new Republic of Haiti was met with a global economic embargo imposed by the United States and Europe.”

“The Haitian economy has never recovered from the havoc France (and America) wreaked upon it, during and after slavery.”

Robinson is not trying to write a comprehensive history of Haiti. (Paul Farmer's *The Uses of Haiti* fits that bill admirably.) He does, however, provide enough historical background to explain the present-day.

The author rushes the reader back and forth in time and place in an effort to recreate the drama and tragedy of February 2004. “It was Friday, February 27, 2004,” he opens one chapter, “the evening before the last day of Haitian democracy.”

The stage for the overthrow of February 29, 2004, was set in the national election in the year 2000. Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected president for a second time. The U.S., France and Canada, the three contemporary overseers of Haiti, threw up their hands in exasperation over the electorate's choice of a man and a political movement dedicated to lifting the burden of their crushing poverty.

Aristide promised improvements to the lot of the desperately poor Haitian majority, and he was a man of his word. The big powers would have none of it. They began an embargo of aid funds to the government, directing funds instead to parallel services operated by “non-governmental” or charitable organizations. Soon they would also block the government's requests to international financial institutions for loans to finance ambitious education and health care projects

More ominously, money and arms flowed to paramilitary forces sponsored by the venal Haitian elite and drawn from the disbanded Haitian army or purged Haitian National Police. The paramilitaries were safely lodged in the neighbouring Dominican Republic. Robinson captures the gravity and drama of the periodic assaults they launched against the institutions of the Haitian government following the 2000 election.

When the paramilitaries launched what became a final incursion in early 2004, they were a small force, no more than 200. They were feared and

hated by the majority of the Haitian people. By virtue of an overwhelming superiority of arms, they were able to wreck government rule in cities in the north of the country. But they didn't have a chance of taking the capital city. That task fell to their international sponsors, and this was done on February 28-29. The U.S., France, Canada and Chile landed troops at strategic locations in the country.

The Aristides were taken by U.S military forces to one of the most isolated countries in the world, the Central African Republic. *An Unbroken Agony* kicks into high gear as the author tells the story of the delegation he led on a harrowing flight to the Central African Republic on March 14 to rescue them from a quasi-imprisonment. The delegation included U.S. congresswoman Maxine Walters. It had no idea of the reception it would receive from the country's ruler, François Bozize, a client of French imperialism. After many tense hours, Bozize gave permission to the delegation to leave, its mission accomplished. The Aristides were granted political exile in South Africa, where they remain to this day.

One of the myths perpetrated by supporters of the foreign intervention in Haiti is that Jean-Bertrand Aristide was prepared to leave the presidency and the country in the face of the mounting political pressure against him. The Aristides accepted a U.S. offer to whisk them out of the country, so the story goes. Robinson presents extensive documentation to dispel the myth.

*An Unbroken Agony* prompted many questions in the mind of this reader. How did the paramilitaries achieve such a devastating impact? The Haitians who overthrew Haitian democracy in February 2004 were a tiny force—their principal leader, Guy Philippe, received less than two percent of the vote in the 2006 presidential election. Were there more decisive steps that the Aristide government could have taken to defend the country and minimize the havoc they caused following the 200 election?

And what has become of Latin American solidarity? Robinson describes the selfless measures of the early 19th century Haitian revolutionaries to aid the independence struggle of the South American peoples led by Simón Bolívar. Today, the majority of the 7,100 foot soldiers of the post-2004 UN-sponsored occupation force in Haiti are drawn from the countries of Latin America, with Brazil — whose president is the leader of the governing “Workers Party” — in the lead. The UN force is responsible for innumerable killings and jailings of pro-democracy fighters following February 2004. Thankfully, substantial aid and solidarity to Haiti from Venezuela and Cuba keeps the banner of Simón Bolívar flying high in Haiti.

Haiti is living an unprecedented economic and social calamity as a consequence of the coup d'état of 2004. The violent overthrow of its government received little attention or concern from democratic opinion in the world. A shameful silence still reigns.



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