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Damming the Flood: Haiti, Aristide, and the Politics of Containment

Review of Peter Hallward's book

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Part I

Peter Hallward is a UK Middlesex University Professor of Modern European Philosophy. He's written many articles; authored several books; edited, contributed to and translated others; and has research interests in a broad range of areas, including recent and contemporary French Philosophy; contemporary critical theory; political philosophy and contemporary politics; and globalization and postcolonial theory. He also edits the Radical Philosophy journal of critical and continental philosophy.

Hallward's newest book, "Damming the Flood: Haiti, Aristide, and the Politics of Containment," is the subject of this review, and here's what critics are saying. Physician and Haiti expert Paul Farmer calls it "the best study of its kind (offering) the first accurate analysis of recent Haitian history." Noam Chomsky says it's a "riveting and deeply-informed account (of) Haiti's tragic history." Others have also praised Hallward's book as well-sourced, thorough, accurate and invaluable. This reviewer agrees and covers this superb book in-depth.

Introduction

First, a brief snapshot of Haiti. The country shares the western third of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic. It lies east of Cuba, west of Puerto Rico, and is about midway between south Florida and Venezuela. Haiti is small, around the size of Maryland in square miles, and has a population of about 8.8 million according to World Bank figures. It's two-thirds mountainous, with the remainder consisting of great valleys, extensive plateaus and small plains. Port-au-Prince is the capital and largest city. The country has some oil, natural gas and other mineral wealth, but it's main value is its human resource that corporate giants covet in an offshore cheap labor paradise for Wal-Mart's "Always Low Prices." The nation's official name is the Republique d'Haiti.

Few people in all history have suffered as much as Haitians, and it began when Columbus arrived. From then to now, they've endured enslavement, genocidal slaughter as well as brutal exploitation and predation. Hope for change arose with Jean-Bertrand Aristide's 1990 election, but it wasn't to be. On February 29, 2004, a US-led coup d'etat shattered the dream for the second time. In the middle of the night, US Marines abducted Haiti's President and flew him against his will to the Central African Republic. Today, Aristide remains in exile in South Africa, vows to return, and in an interview with the author says he'll serve his people "from outside the structure of the state." Haitians still overwhelmingly support him

and want him back in any capacity.

Hallward recounts his story and the rise of his Lavalas movement. The book's title is derived from its meaning – "avalanche" or "flood" as well as "the mass of the people" or "everyone together." Aristide remains larger than life as its symbol and leader, but consider what he was up against – Haiti's "rigid and highly polarized social structure (separating) a small and very concentrated elite from the rest of the population" and a good deal more. No independent Haitian government has a chance against it when allied with "neo-imperial intervention (power), elite and foreign manipulation of the media, the judiciary, (co-opted) non-governmental organizations," and traditional Haitian politics in this impoverished land that's totally dependent on outside aid for support.

Yet, a "remarkable political movement" arose in the mid-1980s to challenge the Duvalierist dictatorship. It drove its leader into exile, returned the country to military rule, and inspired a broad progressive coalition to challenge it for democratic reform. It made Jean-Bertrand Aristide Haiti's President in February 1991, but only briefly. Seven months later, an army-led coup deposed him. It was widely condemned, and in 1994, he returned as President. He was then overwhelmingly reelected in 2000, removed again in 2004 but with a difference. Beyond his popular support, there was "widespread resignation or indifference, if not approval."

What changed? Little more than perceptions and extreme manipulation to achieve them. Once again, Haiti's elite and its Franco-American sponsors scored a major victory, while the vast majority of Haitians lost out. Hallward's book recounts the story. He explains how Lavalas created a coalition of urban poor and peasants along with influential liberal elites: "cosmopolitan political dissidents, journalists, academics," and even some business leaders seeking stability.

What happened between 1991 and 2004? Hallward portrays it as class conflict, as the age old struggle between concentrated wealth and the vast majority of Haiti's poor. It "crystallized around control of the army and police," because that's where power lies. Aristide challenged the status quo and posed an intolerable threat to wealth and privilege – but not because he sought radical or quick reform. His ideas were "modest" and "practical" for "popular political empowerment" that made sense to most Haitians. He governed within the existing constitutional structure. He organized a dominant, united and effective political party for all Haitians. Most importantly, he did it after abolishing the nation's main repressive instrument – the army.

Key to understanding 2004 is that real progressive change was possible after Aristide's 2000 reelection with no "extra-political mechanism" (the army) to stop it. For Haiti's ruling class (a tiny fraction of the population), that was intolerable. Aristide had to be removed, Lavalas crushed, and it set off a chain of events that culminated in 2004 in "one of the most violent and disastrous periods in recent Haitian history." Ever since, repression has been intense in the face of persistent resilience against it.

Hallward recounts how Lavalas became weakened through "division and disintegration" – marked by "the multiplication of disjointed NGOs, evangelical churches, political parties, media outlets, private security forces" and relentless vilification of Haiti's central figure, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. No one else had the charisma or ability to mobilize popular sentiment and by so doing "antagonize the rich." Aristide wasn't perfect. He wasn't a saint, but he was sincerely dedicated to helping the poor and representing all Haitians fairly and equitably. It's

why his support remains strong and why powerful internal and external forces brought him down and are determined never to allow him back. As a symbol of Lavalas, he remains an ever-present threat.

1791 – 1991: From the First Independence to the Second

According to Aristide, Haiti is the hemisphere's poorest country "because of the rich (and its) 200 year plot." Consider these facts:

— throughout its colonial and post-colonial history, Haiti's tiny ruling class has had dominant social and economic control;

— the country's distribution of wealth is "the most unequal in a region (that's) the most unequal in the world;"

— 1% of Haitians control half the country's wealth;

— in contrast, the vast majority (over 80%) "endure harrowing" poverty;

— three-fourths of the population live on less than $2 a day and over half (56%) less than $1 a day;

— 5% of the population owns 75% of the arable land; and

— a tiny 5% of elites control the economy, media, universities, professions and what passes for Haiti's polity; six powerful families dominate the nation's industrial production and international trade; they split along two lines: deeply conservative rural landowners (the grandons) and their military allies and the more differentiated "importers, exporters, merchants, industrialists, professionals, intellectuals, academics, jounalists" and others like them; in solidarity, they have contempt for the masses and hold onto privilege through exploitation and violence in a country where class exerts the most powerful influence and workers have no rights.

Under this type dominance and America's iron grip, Haiti has been strip-mined for profits and its people neoliberally crushed. For decades, and especially since the mid-1980s, the country has undergone successive IMF-imposed structural adjustments. They cut wages and the size of the public sector workforce, eliminated tariffs to facilitate imports, directed agriculture to cash crops for exports, privatized public utilities and other state assets, and made Haiti "one of the most liberal trade regimes in the world," according to Oxfam.

These "reforms" slashed Haiti's per capita GDP from $750 in the 1960s to $617 in 1990, $470 in 1994, $468 in 2000, and down to $425 in 2004 – not counting the effects of inflation. In addition, agricultural production was halved by the late 1990s, and wages (even after inflation) dropped from $ 3 – 4 a day in the early 1980s to $1 – 2 a day by 2000. Haiti's official minimum wage at most is $1.80 a day, but even people getting it "survive on the brink of destitution." According to the IMF, that's most of them with 55% of Haitians receiving a daily income of only 44 cents, an impossible amount to survive on.

Other country statistics are just as challenging and show how, without outside aid, the government can't meet its peoples' basic needs:

— unemployment and underemployment are rampant, and two-thirds or more of workers

are without reliable jobs;

— structural adjustments decimated the rural economy and forced displaced peasants to cities for non-existent jobs;

— public sector employment is the lowest in the region at less than .7%;

— life expectancy is only 53 years; the death rate the highest in the hemisphere; and the infant mortality rate double the regional average at 76 per 1000;

— the World Bank places Haiti in its bottom rankings based on deficient sanitation, poor nutrition, high malnutrition, and inadequate health services;

— the country is the poorest in the hemisphere with 80% or more of the population below the poverty line; it's also the least developed and plagued by a lack of infrastructure, severe deforestation and heavy soil erosion; a 2006 IMF report estimates Haiti's GDP at 70% of its meager 1980 level;

— the country's national debt quadrupled since 1980 to about $1.2 billion; half or more of it is odious; and debt service consumes about 20% of the country's inadequate budget;

— half its population is "food insecure" and half its children undersized from malnutrition;

— more than half the population has no access to clean drinking water;

— Hatii ranks last in the hemisphere in health care spending with only 25 doctors and 11 nurses per 100,000 population and most rural areas have no health care access;

— it has the highest HIV-AIDS incidence outside sub-Sararan Africa;

— sweatshop wages are around 11 – 12 cents an hour for Haitians lucky enough to have work;

— UNICEF estimates between 250,000 to 300,000 Haitian children are victims of the country's forced bondage or "restavec" system; it means they're "slaves;"

— post-February 2004, repression is severe under a UN paramilitary (Blue Helmet) MINUSTAH occupation masquerading as peacekeepers; they were illegally sent for the first time ever to support a coup d'etat against a democratically elected president (with 92% of the vote); political killings, kidnappings, disappearances, torture and unlawful arrests and incarcerations are common forms of repression with more on that below; four years after the 2004 coup, the extent of human misery is overwhelming by all measures, yet the dominant media is silent and international community dismissive.

Nonetheless, while he remained in office, Aristide had remarkable accomplishments in spite of facing overwhelming obstacles. More on that below as well.

A free and independent Haiti is as threatening to the dominant social order now as on January 1, 1804 when French colonialism was defeated. It explains why crushing it is essential to preserve the country's exploitive "legacy" with its "spectacularly unjust distribution of labor, wealth and power (characteristic of) the whole of the island's post-Columbian history."

Revolution provoked counter-revolution, and Hallward recounts it:

— economic isolation from which Haiti never recovered;

— French-imposed compensation (in 1825) of 150 million francs for loss of its slaves; it shackled the new nation and ended any hope for the country's autonomy even though France later reduced the amount;

— debt repayment dependent on borrowing at extortionate rates; by 1900, payments took 80% of the nation's budget until it was paid in full in 1947 – after nearly 125 years of debt slavery; a new form has now replaced it;

— after Haiti's colonial race war ended, its post-colonial class conflict began; its 19th century ruling class became what it is today: "a parasitic clique of medium-sized and authoritarian landowners….importers, merchants and professionals;"

— imperialism victimized Haiti and continued into the new century; most consequential was Woodrow Wilson's 1915 occupation that lasted until Franklin Roosevelt ended it in 1934; during the period, atrocities and war crimes were routine; the most infamous was the 1929 Les Cayes slaughter of 264 protesting peasants; US Marines killed them mercilessly, and when the occupation ended as many as 30,000 Haitians had died;

— at its end, a repressive Haitian army took over; generals ran the country, and "coup followed upon coup;"

— Francois (Papa Doc) Duvalier then took power from a rigged 1957 election and during his tenure murdered 50,000 or more Haitians and terrorized the population;

— when he died in 1971, his son, Jean-Claude (Baby Doc) took over, maintained the family tradition, and did his father one better – he improved the country's investment climate for its foreign patrons with punishing effects on the people;

— by the mid-1980s, even the international community no longer could tolerate his "undiluted brutality and venality;" protests began, he became a liability, was sent to a comfortable exile and (in 1986) replaced by the military;

— then came five repressive years under rule of the generals – Namphy (1986 – 88), Avril (1988 – 90) plus a few months under Leslie Manigat in 1988; later it was Cedras after the first Aristide coup; Haiti's only female (provisional) president served for 11 months immediately preceding Aristide's election; Ertha Pascal-Trouillot was the country's chief justice and a wealthy member of its ruling class;

— the 1986 – 1990 period was so tumultuous that, temporarily, Haitian elites aligned themselves with charismatic priests like Jean-Bertrand Aristide; they didn't crave reform; they wanted stability for a good business climate;

— Aristide, above others, embodied Haitians' demands for social transformation; he combined "a concrete strategy for acquiring practical political power with the uncompromising inspiration of liberation theology" and was dedicated to the "active self-liberation of the oppressed;" yet he's not a politician; he's a dedicated to the poor organizer, activist and parish priest;

— in point of fact, liberation theology terrifies the ruling class even more than Marxist-Leninism or organized labor; under Lavalas, it's the greatest threat to Haitian elites and US dominance;

— for Aristide, the "deadly economic infection called capitalism" represents profound social harm if not "mortal sin;" only social revolution can expunge it, yet Aristide renounces violence and only condones self-defense;

— repression under military rule was even harsher than earlier; after one year in office, Namphy and the generals "gunned down more civilians than Jean-Claude Duvalier's government had done in 15 years;"

— by mid-1990, a new strategy was needed, something "less abrasive;" the year became "the single most important date in modern Haitian history;" preserving the status quo was key; Washington chose former World Bank official Marc Bazin to run in the December election; Lavalas candidate Aristide opposed him after intense pressure from fellow priests and supporters convinced him to run;

— with no organized party or campaign, Aristide won overwhelmingly with 67% of the vote in a heavy turnout of 80%; for the first time in Haiti's history, the people chose the President, not the army or imperial powers; Washington was shocked by the result;

— Aristide took office in February, 1991 and proceeded cautiously; international lenders promised him aid; he enforced import fee collections and raised taxes on the rich; he minimized conflict with the military but purged its top commanders; political violence and state-sanctioned repression abruptly halted; and he went further but in small steps;

— he appointed a presidential commission to investigate extra-judicial killings; redistributed some fallow land; began a literacy program; cracked down on drugs trafficking; lowered food prices; and modestly increased the minimum wage;

— even moderation antagonized vested interests, including the church; it made Aristide "an intolerable challenge to the status quo;" more importantly, what he represented (not so much himself) was threatening;

— by fall, a coup was inevitable, and by late September his enemies were ready to act; they represented domestic and imperial opposition; on the night of September 30, 1991, Aristide was deposed.

1991 – 1999: The First Coup and its Consequences

By September 1991, the military understood that to contain Lavalas it had to terrorize its base in the slums. Late in the month as trouble was brewing, crowds gathered to defend the government, the army attacked them, and "shot everything in sight." On the night of the coup, general Cedras took power, and at least 300 people were killed. It was the beginning of a three year reign of terror that would take about 5000 Lavalas lives.

The real power in Haiti at the time was Michel Francois, a longtime CIA asset, as well as the notorious "Anti-Gang" attache, Marcel Morissaint. A new "Haitian Resistance League" emerged as well to "balance the Aristide movement" and conduct "intelligence work against it." Emmanuel "Toto" Constant was part of it, the notorious founder of FRAPH (in 1993) that terrorized Lavalas supporters.

The repression was so intense, the movement never fully recovered after the 1991 coup. Thousands were killed and many thousands more forced into exile or hiding for their safety, including the most visible Lavalas leaders.

Yet, post-coup conditions enabled Aristide to return to power in October 1994, but his critics say he compromised too much to do it. The evidence, however, shows otherwise even though, on return, Aristide was more diplomatic than confrontational.

Key to understanding his position was his dependence on America for help. Only Washington could end the military dictatorship, restore a democratically elected leader, and provide the kind of aid Haiti needed and/or allow international lending agencies to supply it. It meant sacrificing plenty in preference to getting nothing at all.

Here's what Aristide agreed to:

— accepting the coup regime as co-equal and a "legitimate party" to negotiations,

— according its leaders an unconditional amnesty,

— and replacing (Prime Minister) Preval with an (elitist) acceptable alternative.

On July 3, 1993, Aristide signed the so-called Governors Island Accord that gave Cedras nearly everything he wanted. Nonetheless, he ignored the deal, conditions through mid-1994 worsened, and Washington proposed a new arrangement.

Lavalas was in tatters, Haiti's military wasn't needed, and the Clinton administration agreed to bring Aristide back but keep a tight grip on him. Why do it? As long as he needed US aid, he offered hope for a more stable business climate. He also agreed to US demands to share power, grant amnesty to coup-plotters, and let Washington develop, train and control a new police force. Most important, he agreed to structural adjustment terms and to be no deterrent to the country's elite and international investors.

Aristide returned on October 12, 1994, took over as President, and served out his term until February 7, 1996. About 20,000 Marines came with him, cooperated closely with pro-coup families, protected FRAPH paramilitaries, and contained Haiti's popular movement. The occupation's damage was considerable, yet Aristide had no choice. Accomplishing anything was preferable to nothing in exile.

Nonetheless, on April 28, 1995, he took a major step. He dissolved the hated army altogether. Its significance was considerable and was done despite determined US and elite opposition. In all other respects, Aristide's position was weaker than in 1991. Haiti's administrative structures were in ruins and would take at least months to repair. In addition, his enemies "were neither marginalized nor disarmed….divisions had emerged among some of his supporters," US troops had total control of the country's security, and he had to administer neoliberal measures forced on him that were sure to provoke popular resentment.

Aristide's only choice was to unconditionally agree to harsh economic measures or "insist on a combination of compliance and compensation." He and Fanmi Lavalas (FL) chose the second option. His prime minister and others around him took the first. It showed Aristide acted as independently as possible, stood up for his people, yet, nonetheless, made painful concessions forced on him.

In exchange for $770 million in promised aid, he agreed to drastic tariff cuts, freeze wages, lay off about half (22,000) the civil service, and privatize all nine remaining public utilities. At the same time, he got concessions:

— new “rice sector support package” investment to improve water management, drainage, provision of fertilizers, pesticides, tools, financial services, and more;

— laid off civil employees would get a generous severance package, and in the end only 7000 layoffs occurred;

— utilities were to be sold but under a “democratization” of public assets plan stipulating their sale “must be implemented in a way (to) prevent increased concentration of wealth within the country;”

— part of the $770 million in donor aid would be for “social safety net” priorities: education for the poor, an adult literacy program, and special attention to young women’s schooling;

— provisions also empowered labor unions, grassroots organizations, cooperatives, community groups and they “demilitarize(d) public life;”

In short, Aristide agreed to painful concessions, but not unconditional surrender. He stumbled, however, by being too trusting. Although he negotiated in good faith, the other side didn’t. Washington and IFIs (international financial institutions) pressured him to abandon social provisions and threatened to halt aid entirely unless privatizations were done unconditionally.

Aristide resisted, threatened his officials with jail if they agreed to these terms, and all outside aid was suspended with devastating consequences. He was committed to his people, refused to privatize any state enterprise, and his successor Preval privatized only a couple in his first term.

By the June 1995 parliamentary elections and after the second-round September run-offs, conditions became complicated. A group associated with Lavalas won (the Plateforme Politique Lavalas – PPL), but its largest faction (Organisation Politique Lavalas – OPL) no longer supported Aristide. With Washington turning hostile, neither did the IFIs, USAID, the National Endowment of Democracy (NED), the International Republican Institute (IRI), liberally funded technocrats, compliant NGOs, and it amounted to a combustive mixture. All these agencies were authorized to bypass the government, direct aid to elite interests, and undermine all Aristide initiatives.

Still, he pursued parts of his social program, including a compromise minimum wage increase that was still far below a livable amount. And even with it, the Campaign for Labor Rights noted that in 1998 “more than half (Haiti’s) 50 assembly plants (paid) less than the legal minimum” amount.

Aristide’s term expired in February 1996, his former prime minister Rene Preval was elected to succeed him, and he tried to steer a middle course between Aristide loyalists and the increasingly anti-Aristide OPL. It proved impossible with his pro-privatization prime minister, Rosny Smarth. Tensions between the two developed and headed for a split between committed and opportunistic Lavalassians. It came to a head later in the year when Aristide and his loyalists created an alternative political organization – Fanmi Lavalas (FL). Its purpose was to reestablish links between local Lavalas branches and its parliamentary

representatives.

When 1997 legislative elections were held, several Aristide-allied candidates won decisively, the OPL rejected the outcome, Preval's prime minister resigned, further privatizations were halted, but his government was left in limbo. The OPL obstructed his efforts and effectively paralyzed Preval for 18 months – until their terms expired in January 1999. New elections were then delayed until May 2000, and Preval was forced to govern by decree until Aristide was reelected to a second term in February 2001.

Until he abolished it in 1995, the army was the dominant apparatus for protecting elite privilege from open rebellion against it. Thereafter, a new Haitian National Police (PNH) force replaced it with Aristide battling elite and former army members for control. The latter prevailed since funding depended on US aid, and American troops, on arriving in Haiti, took great pains to preserve key FAdH (Haitian army) and FRAPH assets. The State Department and CIA also oversaw initial PNH recruitment and trained many police units at Fort Leonard Wood, MO. More than half of top police commissioners were recycled FAdH personal running a 6500-strength security force. In addition, its most powerful units (the 500-strong Presidential Guard and two 60 – 80 member SWAT-type units) were largely staffed by former army members.

For his part, Aristide had no control of the process. Nor could he prevent US efforts from keeping paramilitaries armed and dangerous, and it showed up in random street crime and violence that became very socially disruptive. Post-1994, these developments aided the elite and led to the second 2004 coup.

Before his 2000 reelection, however, the country was deeply polarized. Most members of the political class were aligned against FL, including ex-Duvalierists, ex-putchists and OPL members. They formed a pro-US, pro-army coalition of 200 political organizations called the Democratic Convergence (CD). Headed by former Port-au-Prince major Evans Paul, their ranks were from Haiti's civil society – industrialists, bankers, importers, the media, intellectuals and co-opted NGOs. They, in turn, became part of another US-funded group – the Group of 184 (G-184), headed by industrialist Andy Apaid.

For its part, Fanmi Lavalas (FL) was relatively disciplined, had mass public support, and was very able to win and retain political power at all government levels. Its first test came in December 2000.

2000 – 2001: Aristide and the Crisis of Democracy

Aristide was twice elected Haiti's President decisively – in 1990 with 67% of the vote and in 2000 with an overwhelming 92%. However, the circumstances around each one were quite different. In 1990, he won with an informal and eclectic coalition of peasant organizations, an urban poor-liberal elite alliance, and progressive church members. In 2000, FL was disciplined, united and won an overwhelming mandate with a (first time ever) working parliamentary majority.

For the elite, it was calamitous, and it let Aristide launch a significant social change initiative. His opponents, in contrast, needed a new destabilization and counter-mobilization strategy. It followed along familiar lines:

— paramilitary intervention much like the Nicaraguan Contras;

— intense economic pressure to bankrupt the government and halt its social programs;

— a legitimately-looking opposition, drawn from Haiti's business and civil society; and

— a media disinformation campaign to portray the government as corrupt, authoritarian and undemocratic – much the way Hugo Chavez is now vilified.

All of it was designed to provoke government responses that could plausibly be called brutal and dictatorial, hope things might spin out of control, and give the opposition a chance to "step in and save the day." FL didn't oblige and kept them waiting four years.

Hallward calls the May 2000 legislative elections "arguably the most remarkable exercise in representative democracy in Haiti to date." Unprecedented numbers registered and turned out to vote, and a comprehensive post-election assessment concluded "free, fair and peaceful elections (were held after) months of struggle and intimidation." Turnout matched 1990 at around 65%. Fanmi Lavalas won overwhelmingly (locally and nationally) and swamped the anti-Aristide opposition. FL won:

— 89 of 115 mayoral positions;

— 72 of 83 (lower house) Chamber of Deputy seats; and

— 16 of 17 Senate seats and control of all but one of the Senate's 27 positions.

It was no surprise why and a signal that no opposition could stand against Aristide in free, fair and open elections. FL had the only "coherent political program" offering improvements in health, education, infrastructure, peasant cooperatives, micro-financing, and a dedication to lift impoverished Haitians' lives. Equally clear was a CD spokesman's comment: "We will never, ever accept the results of these elections." Neither would the US or France or the dominant echo-chamber media trumpeting how Haiti "failed to hold credible elections" – because the wrong party won. With truth nowhere in sight, the world heard a consistent theme – that "massive electoral fraud" tainted Haiti's elections.

The presidential contest in November followed the same pattern, and "the dictator in question" won overwhelmingly with 92% of the vote. Fraud and violence were minimal, turnout was around 60%, FL now had three consecutive landslide (presidential) victories, and a defeated opposition determined they'd be no fourth one. They failed. More on that below.

Aristide's victory was glorious but costly. Washington greeted it with "a crippling embargo on all further foreign aid." Promised Inter-American Development Bank loans were also blocked – $145 million already agreed on plus another $470 million in succeeding years. The effect was so devastating that the UN Development Programme said the severity of mass destitution would take Haiti "two generations" to recover from "if the process….start(ed) now." Other NGOs called year end 2003 conditions in the country "without precedent."

Aristide had a choice, but it didn't help. He agreed to negotiate, made concessions, yet the embargo was never lifted. Complicit with Washington, the CD extracted all they could but remained firm on their "essential" goal – ousting the Aristide government "by any means necessary." Throughout his second term and its lead-up months, the CD rejected "every FL offer of new elections and of new forms of power-sharing." One of its leading members summed up the mood – CD would only negotiate "the door through which Aristide (would)

leave the palace, the front door or the back door." Its post-January 2001 strategy was "option zero," and these were its terms:

— be able to choose its own prime minister;

— authorize him to govern by decree; and

— neutralize Aristide, effectively force him to stand down, and have a three-member presidential council act as head of state in his place.

To highlight its position, the day Aristide was sworn in, the CD inaugurated its own parallel government. The world community barely blinked nor did the dominant media, as always blaming Aristide for Haiti's problems.

2000 – 2003: Investing in Pluralism

From the time he gained prominence in the late 1980s, Aristide was roughly treated. The Clinton administration was "profoundly hostile" to him, but George Bush neocons felt "genuine hatred" and showed it. One initiative was the "Democracy and Governance Program" to counter the "failure of democratic governance in Haiti." Its strategy – "developing political parties, helping non-governmental organizations resist Haiti's growing trend toward authoritarian rule, and strengthening the independent media." In other words – back all efforts to crush Aristide and FL.

The extremist hard right International Republican Institute (IRI) was part of the scheme with its own special viciousness – "backing the most regressive, elitist, pro-military" Haitian factions plus allying with the CD and G-184 against Aristide and FL.

One of IRI's strategic partners was the so-called 2002-formed, Washington-based Haiti Democracy Project (HDP). Its members represent a who's who of American and Haitian elites, united with a singular aim – crushing Haiti's "popular democracy" and returning the country to its pre-Aristide condition.

Haiti's anti-goverment or "independent" media also had its role, especially radio because of the country's high illiteracy rate. Throughout the 1990s and ahead of Aristide's 2000 reelection, anti-Lavalas propaganda was sustained and vicious. It was so hostile that in late 2003, the National Association of Haitian Media (ANMH) banned Aristide from its member stations' airwaves to prevent him from answering his critics.

The campaign against him was also helped when one of Haiti's few independent journalists, Jean Dominique, was mysteriously murdered in April 2000, just weeks before the decisive May legislative elections. Dominique rankled the opposition for years, was the country's most widely respected and influential radio voice, and strongly supported Lavalas and the poor. It's no surprise he was silenced or any doubt who did it.

Without a countervailing voice, the dominant media's specialty was unchallenged – round-the-clock anti-Lavalas propaganda all the time. So when small anti-Aristide demonstrations are held, like the one on May 28, 1999, they're reported as a "tide of dissent." In contrast, huge pro-Lavalas gatherings are downplayed or ignored.

At the same time, Haiti Progres (the country's largest weekly publication) reported "a media campaign was also launched in the United States to split the Haitian community and

undermine the support of the Congressional Black Caucus" and other pro-Lavalas advocacy groups. Its themes were familiar and consistent – FL government corruption, autocracy and complicity in human rights abuses. Earlier in the 1990s, the US media called Aristide "flaky, volatile, confrontational, demagogic, unpredictable, radical, tyrannical, a psychopath, Anti-American, anti-democratic," and more. Then it got worse in his second term.

2001 – 2003: The Return of the Army

Economic pressure paralyzed Aristide's government, yet it took brute force to unseat him, and the scheme advanced along familiar lines. While USAID, NED, IRI and others funded the CD and G-184, covert training and equipping a rebel army (called the FLRN) went on in neighboring Dominican Republic (DR). This, of course, is a CIA specialty, although no smoking-gun evidence reveals what, in fact, went on – so far.

However, it's known that "contingency plans for an insurgency" were likely well advanced by the late 1990s. CIA operatives accompanied US occupation troops in 1994, and recruited and preserved FRAPH leaders, army personnel, and others to be used as an anti-Aristide paramilitary force. They went on the Agency's payroll for the time their services would be needed. It arrived in late 2000, and consider who led it.

Three names were prominent:

— former Cap-Haitien police chief, dispassionate killer, member of Haiti's army, and Augusto Pinochet admirer, Guy Philippe;

— former Macoute, FRAPH assassin and leader of the infamous "Raboteau massacre," Emmanuel "Toto" Constant; and

— the similarly credentialed Louis Jodel Chamblain, described by a US intelligence official as a "cold-bloded, cutthroat, psychopathic killer" and perfect for what CIA had in mind.

In early 2001, they enlisted a group of disgruntled former FAdH personnel and began preparing an anti-Lavalas rebel force in the DR, long a loyal US client state. CIA and US Special Forces ran the operation in what's been pretty standard US practice throughout the world for decades.

The insurgency began early in small steps:

— in July 2001 against the Haitian National Police Academy in Port-au-Prince and three police stations near the DR border in the Central Plateau; five police officers were killed and 14 others wounded;

— in December 2001 in a full-scale assault against the presidential palace; the Haitian National Police (PNH) were involved, armed commandos seized the palace for several hours, announced on radio that Aristide was no longer President, and five or six people were killed; popular response was quick; thousands of Lavalas supporters stormed out to protest, and the insurgency was quelled;

— other FLRN assaults were staged in 2002 – against police stations, FL activists, jails that were emptied, and more;

— in May 2003, 20 insurgents attacked Haiti's largest power station in the Central Plateau

killing two security guards; in June, an FL supporter was executed; in July, rebels killed four Interior Ministry members; other attacks continued through the summer and fall.

By early 2004, things were coming to a boil with "one and only one objective: the unconditional surrender of Lavalas."

2001 – 2004: Aristide's Second Administration

Aristide's second term was even more challenging than his first. Haiti was nearly bankrupt, its social and economic programs severely compromised by extorted concessions, media propaganda was intense, and from his inauguration to ouster paramilitary pressure was building.

In spite of it and his damaging mistakes, Aristide's accomplishments were remarkable:

— his government built and renovated health clinics, hospitals, dispensaries and improved medical services; Haitian medical students were trained in Cuba; a new Haitian medical school was established in Tabarre and provided free medical education for hundreds of Haitians; Cuba also sent Haiti about 800 doctors and nurses to supplement its meager 1000 or so total;

— education was targeted in addition to medical training in Tabarre; FL implemented a Universal Schooling Program; new primary and high schools were built, including in rural areas; thousands of scholarships were provided for private and church-run schools; schoolbooks, uniforms and school lunches were subsidized; a national literacy campaign was undertaken and from 1990 – 2003, illiteracy dropped from 65% to 45%;

— there were human rights and conflict resolution achievements, including criminal justice reforms; special children's courts were established and the nation's youths got real legal protection; measures were also adopted to reduce exploitation of children;

— for the first time, women got posts as prime minister, finance and foreign minister, chief of police and unprecedented numbers won parliamentary seats;

— the hated military was abolished as already mentioned;

— unprecedented free speech, assembly and personal safety were achieved;

— the minimum wage was doubled;

— land reform was initiated;

— thousands of jobs were created;

— new irrigation systems supplied farmers with water; rice yields (Haiti's main staple crop) increased sharply;

— many thousands of Caribbean pigs were distributed to farmers;

— efforts were made to collect unpaid taxes from the rich and business elites;

— hundreds of community stores sold food at discount prices;

— for the first time ever, a Haitian government participated in discussions with Venezuela, Cuba and other Caribbean states to discuss US-limiting regional economic strategies, including cooperative trade; and

— low cost housing was built, and more in spite of enormous constraints, bare bones resources, the country nearly bankrupt, and an administration targeted for removal by overwhelming internal and external force.

In spite of overwhelming obstacles, the 1994 – 2003 decade was remarkable by any standard. "For the first time in its history, Haiti's people were ruled by a government of their choosing, one that adopted their priorities as its own." It made popular support for Aristide active, strong, and channeled through a network of "organisations populaire" (OPs) that played a central collective mobilizing role in the country. They provided an instrument for all kinds of social programs – education, construction, youth and cultural projects, sports, street cleaning, waste management, and more. It made FL "the single most important organized political force in the country" and also the main obstacle to elitist dominance. It made the movement and what it represents, far more than Aristide, the real 2004 putschist target.

Part II will continue the story. Watch for its posting on www.globalresearch.ca .

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1PM Central time plus two prerecorded archived programs.