

France and the History of Haiti

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On January 13th the Haiti earthquake the French radio station France Culture aired a special report on the Caribbean nation with a commentary by Alexandre Adler, the director of the chair in geopolitics at the University of Paris-Dauphine.

In his commentary Mr. Adler callously stated that he had refrained from speaking about Haiti as it was not an immediate concern for French foreign policy.

“I think that a catastrophe of this magnitude does not merit immediate commentary as it is of no concern to our foreign policy but I also think that there is often a tendency to indulge in superstitious thinking whereby one looks for scapegoats.” It was clear what Adler meant by this. The simple illiterate peasants of Haiti must not react to this catastrophe by blaming their misery on the UN forces, who occupied their country after the CIA and French intelligence kidnapped their democratically elected president in 2004.

Adler praised certain ‘grands intellectuels’ in Haiti who sought the support of the French intelligentsia in the overthrow of President Jean Bertrand Aristide. Mr. Adler condescendingly admitted being won over to ‘solidarity’ with these ‘tiermondialistes’, third worlders.

Mr Adler went on to deplore the chaos of a ‘weak’ state incapable of governing itself; the dissolution of the old slave-owning estates which he claims has led to ‘rough and ready’ farming due to the unproductive culture of the maroons, (former slave escapees) and widespread environmental damage.

Having praised various Haitian elites exiled by the domestic chaos in the United States and Canada, Adler concluded that it was necessary for France, the United States and Brazil to take a leading role in creating a proper civil society in Haiti, in order to prevent a further descent into chaos and anarchy.

“What is the big danger now? The regression into populism and the idea that any Macoutes it produces represent the will of the people. Nothing could be further from the truth. The will of the people will be re-established when the state is reconstructed” he said. <http://sites.radiofrance.fr/chaines/france-culture/programmes/index.php?time=1263510000>.

The ‘Macoutes’ referred to by Adler were a fascist militia created to terrorise the local population of Haiti into accepting the military rule of Francois Duvalier ‘Papa Doc’, and his son Jean-Claude, ‘Baby Doc’, both of whom were supported by the United States throughout their nefarious reign until ousted from power in 1986.

The Haitians do not need to search for scapegoats nor are the troublemakers Adler fears, motivated by dangerous superstitions. They know that their real enemies are MINUSTAH, the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti which is led by the US and France and

encompasses troops from the following countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Ecuador, France, Guatemala, Jordan, Nepal, Paraguay, Peru, Phillipines, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, United States and Uruguay. By the 30th of November 2009, there was a total of 9,065 UN uniformed personnel, 7,031 troops and 2,034 police from over 41 different countries throughout the world participating in the UN occupation of Haiti.

<http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minustah/facts.shtml>

To explain the hidden agenda of the United Nations operation in Haiti, it is necessary first to sketch the historical background of the country.

Haiti is perhaps one of the most important nations in world history. It was in this remote Caribbean nation that the real principles of the French revolution were tested. It is therefore of particular importance for the current debate on national identity in France, as the principles universalized by the French Revolution of 1789, are, according to recent studies, central to most French citizens' perception of what France should stand for.

Since its discovery in 1492 by Christopher Columbus who named the island Hispaniola, Haiti's history has been one of mass murder perpetrated in the commercial interests of foreign powers, endowed with the mission to impose civilisation. The native Taino population were entirely exterminated by the Spanish. But Spanish interest in the island waned by the 1520s with the discovery of gold in Mexico and other parts of the Americas.

The French West Indies Company had established control over much of the island by 1664. The treaty of Ryswick with Spain in 1697 enabled the French to gain control over the entire island and it was renamed Saint-Dominique. Thousands of slaves were imported from Africa to work on the tobacco, cocoa, cotton and indigo farms. By the mid eighteenth century Saint-Dominique had become the most lucrative colony in the Caribbean. Over 40 percent of all European sugar and 75 percent of all European coffee as well as much of France's eighteenth century wealth and glory came from the slave labour in the plantations of 'la perle des Antilles', Saint-Dominique.

But the French revolution of 1789 and the ideas promoted by real 'grands intellectuels' such as Diderot and Montesquieu opened up the space for revolution in Haiti. Initially, the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity only applied to France. Although philosophers like Diderot abhorred slavery, many of the emergent French bourgeoisie were content to limit the idea to themselves. They had done well out of the cheap products of the colonial slaves and were not inclined to risk their financial investments.

Nevertheless, a delegation of the Black Jacobins was invited to Paris to discuss the issue in the National Assembly. But it was only when the conservative white ruling class in Saint-Dominique refused to recognise the new revolutionary regime in Paris that the space for revolution was opened up in Saint-Dominique. The White landowners of island were not prepared to accept the new civic rights bestowed by Paris on the mullatos.

Mullatos had always functioned as a kind of middle-class on the island, as the French and British empires often used people of lighter skin colour as proxy-rulers in their Caribbean and African colonies. Mullatos had the power to own slaves but were not entitled to vote or participate in government. When French commissioner Léger Félicité Sonthonx arrived on the island in 1791, he faced a full scale rebellion by the white aristocracy and had to use an army of local slaves to put them down. The leader of this army would become one of the greatest generals in history. This self-educated Haitian General's name was Toussaint

Louverture.

After putting down the landowners, Louverture liberated the entire slave population. Louverture and the Black Jacobins successfully defeated the French occupiers and Haiti became the first free black nation in the world. On the 4th of February 1794 under the leadership of Maximilien Robespierre, the French Convention voted for the abolition of slavery. The Jacobins had established the idea of liberty, but it was a conception which favoured the emergent bourgeoisie, and it was this idea of liberty signifying the freedom to trade which took precedence over the ideas of equality and fraternity. It was this corruption of the French revolution by a rapacious cabal of the French bourgeoisie that Robespierre fought so fanatically against. In fact, during the Reign of Terror, Robespierre had huge support among the poor of Paris and he is still revered by the poor of Haiti today.

So it was in Haiti that the principles of equality and fraternity were first tested. Haiti, then, and not France is where one must look if one wants to assess the significance of the French revolution for today's world and for the concepts and realities that underpin both Haitian and French national identities.

Under Napoleon Bonaparte, the French attempted to re-enslave the island in 1802. Thomas Jefferson, slave owner, and one of America's revered 'founding fathers', initially supported the re-enslavement of Haiti. In a letter to Napoleon he said that "nothing will be easier than to furnish your army and fleet with everything and reduce Toussaint [L'Ouverture] to starvation." He changed his mind, however, when he realised that Napoleon's desire to reincorporate Louisiana and Nouvelle Orléans (New Orleans) into the French Empire conflicted with American interests. Nevertheless, the prospect of freed slaves was more intolerable to Jefferson than the risk of losing American territory to the French. He therefore remained neutral. But it was the eventual Haitian victory over the French that enabled America to expand beyond the Appalachian Mountains. (see, Robert Parry: <http://www.consortiumnews.com/2010/011310.html>.)

After Toussaint Louverture's arrest and deportation to France where he would die in 1803, the Haitian resistance continued under the armies led by General Jacques Dessalines. In spite of military assistance to the French from Britain and Spain, the Haitian rebels would achieve one of the most triumphant and inspiring victories in military history, with more than 50,000 foreign soldiers lying dead on the battlefields. The French were forced to withdraw in 1803. A slave nation had defeated a great imperial power. It was from Haiti that the fire of the French revolution would spread throughout the colonies of the tyrannical empires. Haiti would go on to provide assistance to similar liberation movements in Cuba, America and Latin America.

The Republic of Haiti was declared in 1804 and in 1805 saw the drafting of the country's first constitution. According to Professor Peter Hallward:

"The achievement of this independence must stand as one of the most categorical blows against racism that has ever been struck. Rarely has race been so clearly understood for what it is - in no sense a source of conflict or difference, but merely an empty signifier harnessed to an economy of plunder and exploitation. Early Haitian writers understood perfectly well the point made more recently by Wallerstein and Balibar, among others, that theories of racial inequality were concocted by white colonists so as to legitimate slavery and the pursuit of European interests. The first constitution of Haiti (1805) broke abruptly with the whole question of race by identifying all Haitians, regardless

of the colour of their skin, as black - a characterization that included, among others, a substantial number of German and Polish troops who had joined in the fight against Napoleon”.

http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/default.asp?channel_id=2187&editorial_id=14344.

The Haitians had transcended the racist paradigm. Henceforth, black would designate anti-imperialism rather than skin colour. In the new constitution, the clause known as Dessaline’s Law forbade any foreign ownership of Haitian land.

A trade embargo was imposed by the French government on Haiti shortly after independence preventing economic recovery. In order to lift the trade embargo, the Haitians were compelled in 1825 to pay the French 125 million francs for the loss of its slaves. This astronomical figure was the equivalent of the French national budget for one year or ten years worth of Haiti’s national revenue. The Haitians had to borrow more money at extortionate interest rates from foreign banks to service this debt embroiling the Haitian nation in a downward spiral of economic strangulation. This repayment for the privilege of having being enslaved amounted to over 80 percent of Haitian GDP and continued until 1947. The French bourgeoisie continued to enrich themselves throughout the nineteenth century on the backs of Haitian labour. Slavery had changed its name to capitalism.

In 1915 Haiti was invaded and occupied by US marines. The National City Bank of New York was closely tied to the US State Department and was the principal US investor in Haiti at the time. The US and France were concerned about German influence on the island. The small German community of over 200 people had fully integrated into Haiti society 80 percent of the Haitian economy, marrying into land-owning mullato families. This enabled them to buy land as Dessaline’s law forbade foreign ownership of Haitian property.

The United States and France had crippled the Haitian economy with loans at exorbitant rates. The US plan was to take control of the Haitian central bank and use the customs duties to pay back the US and French banks. Haiti had borrowed money from the United States in order to pay off its slave debt to France. The US and France feared the rise of the nationalist Dr. Rosalvo Bobo in the upcoming elections. Dr Bobo was popular among the country’s poor. He was, unsurprisingly, deemed to be unfavourable to US and French interests on the island. Roger Gaillard, *Les cent-jours de Rosalvo Bobo, ou, Une mise à mort politique*, Éditions Presses Nationales, Port-au-Prince : 1973, réédition 1997.

After the invasion, the US Marine Corps took full control of the island but faced massive resistance from the Haitian ‘cacos’, peasant armies led by Charlemagne Péralte. Péralte waged an effective guerrilla war against the US occupiers and succeeded in establishing a provisional government in the north of the country in 1917. But he was betrayed and murdered by one of his generals. The US marines wished to make an example of Péralte by taking a photograph of his body tied to a door for distribution throughout the country.

This method of humiliation would be repeated following the CIA’s murder of Che Guevara in Bolivia in 1967. The US administration introduced *Corvée* labour for Haiti’s poor majority, a feudal system of forced labour akin to slavery, while the US administrators and business men lived in the capital city Port-au-Prince in what the locals called ‘millionaire’s row’ The brutal US occupation of Haiti lasted until 1934 but retained control of the country’s finances until the final instalment of their slave debt to France had been paid in 1947. Schmidt, Hans

(1995). United States occupation of Haiti (1915-1934). Rutgers University Press. ISBN 0-8135-2203-X.

The 1915 US invasion of Haiti was the beginning of a century of imposed dictatorships, death squads (the sadistic Tontons Macoutes), torture and virtual enslavement of the population. US supported dictatorship continued throughout the twentieth century, culminating in the sadistic regimes of Francois Duvalier and his son Jean-Claude, who was by a popular revolt in 1986.

The CIA responded to the loss of the US puppet dictator by setting up the National Intelligence Service (SIN), which was staffed by drug trafficking generals from the Duvalier dictatorship. Their job was to clamp down on Aristide supporters. They carried out assassinations, beatings, torture and rape throughout Haiti's poor neighbourhoods.

After 4 more years of terror and hardship by the oligarch's militias backed by the US government, Jean Bertrand Aristide was elected president in 1990. Aristide promised to combat corruption and improve the lives of the country's poor. He had been a vociferous critic of the Duvalier dictatorships. Unsurprisingly, his desire to improve the lives of the poor through radical political change provoked the ire of the Catholic Church who had him expelled.

Aristide was also deeply critical of the role of the USA in funding and supporting the military oppression of the island's poor, and of the role of 'aide' in sustaining this, declaring "Since 1980, this amounted to two hundred million dollars a year, and these were the same ten years during which the per capita wealth of the country was reduced by 40 percent!" http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Blum/Haiti_KH.html.

In 1991, the CIA ousted Aristide from power replacing him with the right-wing dictatorship of Raoul Cédras. The US Defence Intelligence Agency and the CIA, in an effort to wipe out pro-democracy groups, created the terrorist group Front pour l'Avancement et le Progrès Haitien, Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti (FRAPH). The CIA's man in charge was gangster serial killer Immanuel Toto Constant. The Font's job was to terrorise pro-democracy supporters. They were a particularly effective group. On April 22, 1994 the Front for Advancement and Progress massacred up to 50 citizens in the slum neighbourhood of Raboteau in North-West Haiti.

(See: William Blum http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Blum/Haiti_KH.html and <http://asiapacific.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR360041999?open&of=ENG-HTI>).

Exiled in the USA, Aristide would subsequently manage to persuade President Clinton to help his return to power in Haiti. But this 'help' would come at an enormous price. Clinton forced Aristide to open up the Haiti economy to free trade with the United States and a brutal IMF restructuring programme, which would reduce the minimum wage from 1.50 dollars a day to 63 cents. The US government was satisfied that Aristide would be a compliant leader and helped him back into power in 1994.

Meanwhile, the IMF also forced Haiti to cut its rice tariff from 35 % to 3 %, resulting in the destruction of local rice farming. The policy was highly favourable to US agri-business, as US rice was feeding 1 out of every 3 Haitians by 1995. This destruction of local agriculture

forced peasants to seek work in the sweetshops of the local cities, where many would have to work over 12 hours a day in abysmal conditions for a few cents. <http://www.jubileeusa.org/haiti/food/statement.html>.

In an attempt to prevent further military dictatorships, Aristide disbanded the Haitian military in 1995, creating in its place a civilian army. In spite of the oppressive IMF restructuration which forced Haiti to pay more money in loan repayments than on its education system, Aristide managed to build more hospitals and schools and social housing than all previous Haitian administrations combined, greatly improving the educational and health standards of the country's poor.

Through domestic and international media agents with the mindset of the aforementioned Alexandre Adler, the Haitian oligarchs waged a vicious destabilisation campaign against Aristide and his Fanmi Lavalas party.

The 'Democratic Convergence' was set up with US funding in 1999 to challenge Famni Lavalas. It included members of CREDO, the personal political organisation of the former dictator General Prosper Avril. But the party had no popular support and decided to boycott the upcoming elections.

Jean Bertrand Aristide was re-elected in 2000, however, with an overwhelming majority of 92percent. <http://www.margueritelaurent.com/pressclips/newsessaysreflections.html>.

With generous help from the International Republican Institute, Haiti's oligarchs responded again with the formation of the notorious Groupe des 184 in 2002, in an attempt to an end Aristide's 'dictatorship'.

The Group of 184 was lead by Andre Apaid, a US citizen and former Duvalier supporter who runs sweatshops in Haiti that pay less than a dollar a day. The European Commission, USAID and other NGOs pumped millions into the funding of these elitist opposition groups, who had no popular among the island's poor majority. The Groupe des 184 was made up of the traditional landowning class of whites and mullatos, ruling families of enormous wealth, responsible for the attraction of multinational sweatshops into the country, with devastating consequence for poor Haitian farmers and workers.

By 2001 the plot to destroy Aristide and the Lavalas party was well underway. On February 8th, Stanley Lucas of the International Republican Institute spoke on the Haitian radio station Haiti Tropicale, where he warned that if Aristide did not step down, he might be removed by force. He posed the chilling question to his audience: "did you see what happened to Kabila?". Laurent Kabila was the most popular Congolese leader since Patrice Lumumba. Like Lumumba he was assassinated with the backing of the CIA and Western intelligence. Lucas comes from a rich Haitian landowning family. In 1987, Lucas' cousins organised a death squad who massacred peasants protesting for land redistribution outside their ranch. 250 unarmed protesters were slaughtered to death with machetes. <http://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/155/25980.html>.

By 2004, tensions increased in the country as the opposition aided by the US, Canada and France, launched a mendacious international media campaign against the President Aristide and the Fanmi Lavalas party. Aristide's plans to double the minimum wage had sparked severe opposition from the island's ruling elite. Matters came to a head, however, when

President Aristide demanded the repayment to the tune of 21 billion dollars by the French government for the unjust policy of having forced the Haitian people to pay France for the loss of their slave-property until 1947. The Haitians had been forced to take out further loans from foreign banks to service their 'debt' to France.

French President Jacques Chirac responded to Aristide in a press conference saying "before bringing up claims of this nature, I cannot stress enough to the authorities of Haiti the need to be very vigilant about, how should I say, the nature of their actions and their regime."

<http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/haiti/haiti-restitution.htm>

The French promptly set up a Committee on Reflection of Haiti,' headed up by Régis Debray, a soi-disant communist.

It didn't take long before French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villipin, a fervent admirer of Napoleon, decided to take swift and immediate action against the Haitian president. In an interview with Claude Ribb on February 25th 2005 Jean Betrand Aristide claimed that Régis Debray and Madame Véronique Albanel, the sister of Dominique de Villipin, asked him to resign, threatening more unrest if he refused. <http://www.voltairenet.org/article16329.html>.

Having fallen out with the Americans over the invasion of Iraq, relations between France and the United States were covertly mended when the CIA, with help from French intelligence, kidnapped President Aristide, removing him to Central Africa. The United States and France were able to use their influence in the United Nations to call for a UN 'peacekeeping' force to restore 'security' on the island. The US, French and Canadian led UN occupation force has seen the return of the sadistic Tonton Macoute paramilitaries in Haiti, who have launched a brutal extermination campaign of Aristide's supporters. These thugs were trained by the CIA for the purpose of overthrowing the Aristide government. See: Michel Chossudovsky <http://globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=12487>

The United States and France installed former World Bank official Gérard Latortue as prime minister after the 2004 military coup. To add insult to misery, Latortue demanded that the Haitian people pay 10 years back pay to the re-installed Haitian military. Terror was once again unleashed on Haiti's poor. Jep Sprague writes:

'Throughout 2004 and 2005, reports from the non-profit alternative news service Haiti Information Project (HIP) uncovered killings of Lavalas supporters carried out by members of the interim government's Haitian National Police (HNP). HIP (7/05) also documented murderous operations, with victims often shot in the head, committed by the Brazilian and Jordanian contingents of MINUSTAH. The University of Miami Human Rights Investigation, conducted by Boston immigration lawyer Thomas Griffin in mid-November 2004, documented mass murder by the HNP, mass graves, cramped prisons, no-medicine hospitals, corpse-strewn streets and maggot-infested morgues—the interim regime's means of dealing with the supporters of the ousted Aristide government.' <http://globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=3119>.

Since the 2004 military coup food prices have skyrocketed plunging Haiti's poor into further malnutrition, and conditions approaching starvation. But public discontent has been met by the continuous murder and rape of Fanmi Lavalas supporters. On July 6th 2006 the UN forces stormed the slums of Cité Soleil, killing dozens of unarmed men, women and children. Footage by reporters show gun show disturbing pictures of dead families with gunshot wounds to the head. Many babies were also murdered at point-blank range by UN death

squads.

<http://globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=710>. See also San Francisco Labour Council <http://globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=693>.

There has still not been an official investigation of these events, and the international corporate media remain, as usual, silent. The restoration of 'security' and the 'reconstruction' now being proposed by the US/France led 'international community' is likely to intensify the repression and exploitation of Haiti's poor majority. It has also been reported that the US is integrating narco-terrorists from the former Kosovo Liberation Army into the Haiti police force. The KLA narco-terrorists were responsible for thousands of heinous atrocities on Serbian civilians during the Yugoslavian war of the 1990s. See Anthony Fenton: <http://globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=255>.

We are now seeing a massive US militarisation and privatisation of the island. The French media have made much of this without mentioning the French role in the destruction of Haitian democracy. The US response to the humanitarian disaster wrought by last week's earthquake has involved the deployment of 10,000 US troops. The US State Department, the Department of Defence and Homeland Security are heavily involved and US Southern Command appears to be overseeing the entire operation. The objective is to place the island under permanent US control and use it as a strategic base for future destabilisation operations against Cuba and Venezuela.

The US Heritage Foundation was quick to suggest that the humanitarian disaster presents a useful opportunity for the United States to effect pro-American political reforms in the island and improve America's image in the world. They suggested on their website that former presidents George W Bush and Bill Clinton should appear on a platform of solidarity with president Barack Obama in support of Haiti. Washington promptly followed their advice, and within hours Barack Obama appeared before the press accompanied by the two former presidents to show 'solidarity' with the suffering of Haiti. <http://blog.heritage.org/2010/01/13/things-to-remember-while-helping-haiti/> The French government has also pledged to increase its military presence in the country. http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/pays-zones-geo_833/haiti_513/index.html.

The French 'left-wing' daily L'Humanité reported on Monday January 18th that the US had taken over the airport in Port-au-Prince, preventing a French plane loaded with medical supplies from landing. L'Humanité journalist Bruno Odent expressed concern about the 'imperial' ambitions of the US response to Haiti and the French Government's attempts to deny that the US were taking over the relief project. One reads nothing in the two page report on the US/French/Canadian military coup of 2004. Nothing about the atrocities that have been committed against Lavalas supporters by the UN occupations forces since 2004.

L'Humanité and the French Communist Party they support have shown where their true sympathies lie. What bothers L'Humanité is that the United States is leading the show and not France. It is symptomatic of the puerile bourgeois anti-Americanism that pervades French society, when it simply points the finger at America, ignoring the fact that the French ruling elite is a member of the same international club, promoting the same imperial interests, albeit more surreptitiously than their American counterparts.

Haiti does need the assistance of the international community to help with the aftermath of the earthquake but the greatest help the NGOs, and the human rights activists can provide

for Haiti is to militate for a return of the president elected by the people, Jean Bertrand Aristide. Haiti is a proud nation and deserves the respect of the international community. It is astonishing that after one decade of the 21st century, the French nation, in spite of its grandes écoles, has still not understood the principles of the revolution it claims to defend.

On the website of Radio France Culture January 13th one can read the programme of coverage on Haiti's woes. The headings abound in obfuscations with headings such as 'fatalité' 'l'horreur' etc a maudlin morass of clichés about Haiti's unrelenting misfortunes. Other guests on the show included Eric Sauray and Jean-Marie Theodat, two Haitian anti-Aristide intellectuals, who indulged in academic abstractions about democracy, adroitly side-stepping the real issues. Another commentary on the website talks about pedagogical reform in France. It bears the caption 'la gauche absente a toujours tort- the absent left is always wrong. One would have to ask, where is the left in France today and what do they have to say about Haiti?

A regular guest on Radio France Culture, Alexandre Adler's background is a good indication of everything that is wrong in French intellectual debate today. A former communist renegade who subsequently fled to the radical right, Adler supported the 2001 NATO invasions of Afghanistan, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Israeli bombardment of Gaza last year. A fan of George Bush, he counts Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle and Henry Kissinger among his friends. He has written the introduction to the French edition of the CIA's report 'The World in 2020'. He attended a meeting of the secretive and elitist Bilderberg group in Versailles in 2003.

Perhaps one of the reasons for the silence of the French public's acceptance of their government's role in the destruction of Haitian democracy can be explained by the fact that the left-wing media comprised predominantly of the communist daily L'Humanité and the left-liberal Liberation have gravitated to the 'liberal consensus'. Both papers unanimously supported the French US/French/Canadian military coup and the occupation of Haiti by the UN in 2004, with Patrick Sabatier of Liberation calling President Aristide 'defrocked priest turned tyrant millionaire', 'the Père Ubu of the Caribbean' (See Patrick Sabatier, Libération, 31 December 2003 and 24 February 2004). A glance at the puppet masters of these media outlets will unmask their left-wing pretensions.

Libération is now partly controlled by none other than Édouard de Rothschild, of the international Rothschild dynasty. He is a close friend of French president Nicolas Sarkozy and a prominent member of the French ruling class represented by MEDEF, (Le Mouvement des Entreprises de France)- Liberation had ceased to be left-wing paper of any consequence after the departure of Jean-Paul Sartre in 1980. L'Humanité is now partly owned by the telecommunications company Bouygues Group and Hachette (Lagardère Group). Left-wing print media is now officially dead in France.

Former communists such as Régis Debray and radical proselytisers such as Alexandre Adler have put themselves in the service of French and US capitalist interests in Haiti. The silence and distortions of the French philosophers on the socio-political situation in Haiti brings to mind the title of a famous book by Karl Marx 'The Poverty of Philosophy'.

Régis Debray was a radical back in the sixties fighting alongside Che Guevara in Bolivia. But he worked for the reactionary Mitterrand government as an advisor during the eighties, a government widely suspected in Africa of complicity in the murder of the communist leader of Burkina Faso, Thomas Sankara. Though he writes poetically about Haiti and its

significance for France, Debray is now a member of the establishment. President of the prestigious 'École nationale supérieure des sciences de l'information et des bibliothèques, Debray is specialist in what he calls 'mediology', the technology for the transmission of ideas.

Régis Debray is one of the most respected intellectuals of the French left and his opinions and ideas carry significant weight. But how can one explain his complicity in the overthrow of Jean-Bertrand Aristide? In an interview with the online journal Mouvement Démocrate Chrétien on January 17th Debray was asked about the 90 million francs paid by the Haitian poor to France until 1947. Debray replied that it was the fault of the Haitian leaders Boyer and Petion, who proposed to pay the sum in order to lift the French blockade. This is the talk of a prevaricating reactionary; the right-wing lie that Haiti's debt enslavement was their own fault. <http://mouvdc.canalblog.com/archives/2010/01/17/16549904.html>.

When Che Guevara was captured in Bolivia in 1967, he wrote in his diary '[Debray] and [Bustos] fell victim to their own haste, their near desperation to leave, and to my own lack of energy to stop them.' Guevara was referring to Debray's desire to leave Bolivia. Debray was hoping to return to France in order to popularise Guevara's revolutionary struggle in Bolivia among French students and intellectuals. Guevara became impatient with the French man's eagerness to return, writing in his diary

"The Frenchman dwells too vehemently on the usefulness of his foreign mission".

Debray's 'haste' landed him in the hands of the CIA and many suspect him of being indirectly responsible for Che's capture and death. Debray has been eloquent in his writings on Haiti. His postulation that Haiti is a pariah today because it was a precursor of liberty in the past is interesting food for thought, but given his complicity in the removal of Aristide, one would have to pose the question: what was the 'usefulness' Debray perceived in his 'foreign mission' on behalf of the French government before Jean Bertrand Aristide's illegal removal from power in 2004? Why has Debray not spoken out about the ongoing murders of unarmed men, women and children by the UN occupation forces and the Haitian National Police? All true revolutionaries have an instinct for traitors and fraudsters. Che again: " The Frenchman dwells too vehemently on the usefulness of his foreign mission" Che's words are chilling. Debray's silence on Haiti deafening.

The mainstream media bombards us with gory stories of Aristide's so-called Chimères and says nothing about the century of terror the United States and France supported. No one can deny that there were some excesses and atrocities committed by Lavalas supporters and that Aristide refused to condemn them, but what can one expect when the poor of Haiti are ignored by the international community or even worse, when the 'international community' is funding and defending the tyranny of the oligarchs that control them? Moreover, the violence of Aristide's Chimères was miniscule in comparison with that of the Ton Ton Macoutes of previous regimes, who now have free rein once again to terrorise Lavalas supporters. And once again the moralists of the mainstream media are silent.

Class struggle is a brutal process. But the violence of the oppressed against the oppressor is often the violence of self-defence. Who would condemn the violence of the American revolutionaries against the British Empire in 1776? Who would condemn the violence of the French revolution that established the basis for the rights and liberties the French nation

claims to uphold? Who today would condemn the violence of the Warsaw Jews against their Nazi oppressors in 1943? For Haiti's poor, life under the country's oligarchy has always been a permanent death camp.

Popular democracy during the Lavalas era was, in Marxist terminology, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the heroic attempt to lift a heroic though impoverished nation up from the gutter through grass-roots democracy. How cruel and despotic the myrmidons of international order are to deny the people of Haiti their democratic rights. The people of Haiti now receive food and medicine from their oppressors, who are clamouring for the international kudos of humanitarianism. The US/ France and their international allies are making every effort to use the trauma of the Haiti earthquake as an opportunity to break the will of the people. The genocidal state of Israel seems to feel left out in all this feel-good self-agrandissement. A headline in Arutz Sheva for the 18th of January reads 'Huckabee praises US Aid to Haiti, World Ignores Israel's'. The Israelis shouldn't feel too worried about their image. The Haitian people are grateful for Israel's effective courier service of US weapons to the murderous Duvalier dictatorships during the 70s and 80s. Furthermore, the world has seen their humanitarian bombing of Gaza and their generous blockade of its hungry citizens.

The philosopher Alain Badiou has pointed out that the French national identity debate is a symptom of a cynical country that has lost its revolutionary fervour. The French revolution of 1789 and the Paris Commune of 1871 are, according to Badiou, the two most important historical events in French history, when France formulated and implemented universal conceptions of what it means to be human. Badiou sees France's current epoch as a return to restorationism and has compared it to the lugubrious period following the failure of the uprisings of 1848. He has criticised the Sarkozy regime for what he calls its 'transcendental Petainism'. On global terms, what we are now facing is a form of transcendental fascism.

The question for Badiou is not what it means to be French today, but what it means to be human. We are living in a new era of reactionary politics that transcends national boundaries, where low-intensity wars are waged secretly to serve the interests of interlocking global elites. As such, it is the magnitude of this anti-democratic politics coupled with the paucity of people directing and legitimising it that transcends the capacity of ordinary people to see it for what it is. But the missing link in Badiou's analysis is of course the 1794 revolution in Haiti, as it was this event more than any other in history which posed the problem of how *liberté*, *égalité* and *fraternité* could be combined in a new social order.

The humanitarian assistance now being doled out to Haiti will serve as a pretext for a final US annexation of the country. Though the US and their allies hope that the trauma and dependency of the Haitian people will render them helpless and submissive to the New World Order, Haitian people will not forget who their real enemies are. Haiti is not a failed nation; its suffering is a direct result of the failure of the United States and France to honour the ideals and values they claim to represent. In Freudian terminology, one could say that Haiti is the repressed unconscious of modern liberal democracies. This is the reality Radio France Culture and the French media apparatchiks do not have to courage to face. The Haiti question, then, is the litmus test for the credentials of any would-be leftist, human rights activist or supporter of human dignity.

Haiti's semi-literate poor are not professors of philosophy but they understand the significance of the principles promulgated by the French revolution and if there if it is still reasonable to hope, they may yet implement them.

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