

Imperialists Bring Horror to Haiti

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"Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be the disintegration of the political and social institutions of culture, language, national feelings, religion and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of individuals belonging to such groups."
(Quoted in Robert Davis and Mark Zannis, *The Genocide Machine in Canada*, p. 9)

Many apologists for the February 29, 2004 coup in Haiti claim that Aristide was a "dictator," an "authoritarian," or, that "he armed gangs," and "he was corrupt." Many also claim that he was subsumed by a "popular uprising" that was going to sweep him out of power. According to this narrative – which is echoed and maintained by the corporate media, Western governments, and the Haitian client regime among others – the U.S. Marines showed up at just the right time in the midst of widespread civil unrest that would surely have resulted in a "bloodbath" or worse, civil war.

Accordingly, the Marines and the U.S. embassy provided sage and timely wisdom to the embattled Aristide, convincing him to "resign" and agree to be flown to the Central African Republic (another former French colony), without first having the chance to address the Haitian citizenry. We are told that this was not a coup d'état, but that Aristide willfully resigned, end of story. We make the reality, you abide by it.

New reality

The question was (and remains): who is willing to accept this reality?

The Canadians certainly are. They signed on to it immediately, as did the French, the EU, Brazil, Chile, Russia, China, and others. Within the societies of these countries, there was no great opposition to this new reality. Everyone who signed on to the new reality was handed a script from which to practice and read her or his new lines. Of course, we now have the benefit of a year of intensive research, independent investigations, and regular on the ground reporting, which demonstrate that this new reality was merely the logical consequence of years of preparation for the ultimate fall of Aristide and the popular Lavalas movement.

There are also those who did not initially accept this reality, and continue not to. Outside of Aristide, who immediately claimed that he was overthrown in a "modern-day" coup d'état, and lives as the exiled President of Haiti in South Africa, many others oppose the new circumstances. Those who continue to defy the new imperial reality are, not surprisingly,

those countries who would have the most at stake were this sort of intervention to become the international norm. 'If they get away with this in Haiti, who's to say that we're not next?' asks the 14-nation Caribbean Community, the 53-member African Union (representing approximately 1 billion people), Cuba, and most vocally perhaps, Venezuela's Hugo Chavez.

At the recent World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre, Chavez was vocal about his position on Haiti. According to a Workers' World report, he said "...that Jean-Bertrand Aristide is the legitimate president, kidnapped by the U.S. in the same way he was during the April 2002 coup in Venezuela. He mentioned that in the last meeting of the region presidents, he stated that any solution to the crisis in Haiti will have to incorporate Aristide, that the solution could not be in the hands of the United Nations or any group of presidents - who should not interfere in other nations' problems - but in the hands of the Haitian people."

Haitian people

The most important group of people not to accept this newly imposed reality, of course, is the Haitian people. There have been numerous attempts at mass mobilizations calling for Aristide's return since he was removed. Haitian police or members of the former military have broken up most of these demonstrations with indiscriminate firing into large crowds of unarmed demonstrators. Several demonstrations have been dispersed by the mere presence of UN forces, who most Haitians see as an occupying force, not a peacekeeping one. One notable exception to this was on December 16th in Cap Haitien, when the Chilean forces there provided security for the more than 10,000 demonstrators calling for the return of Aristide and constitutional order. Photos and video of this demonstration and details of previous ones are available at www.haitiaction.net.

One of the primary purposes of the initial military occupation was to snuff out as many supporters of the constitution as possible under the guise of bringing "stability" through "disarmament." It only took a month or so to learn about massacres that had been carried out in poor neighborhoods, with many rumors and eyewitness reports implicating foreign soldiers in the targeted killings, creating the very bloodbath that Colin Powell insists that Aristide was avoiding by resigning.

There was a definite sense of urgency informing the efforts geared toward terrorizing the population. Only three weeks before Aristide was overthrown (February 7, 2004), over 100,000 Haitians took to the streets and gathered at the National Palace in support of his 5-year constitutional mandate. Here is where the real popular uprising took place. But there weren't any mainstream cameras there to report it, as they were virtually all in Gonaives covering the invasion of U.S. trained paramilitaries who had entered from the Dominican Republic.

The lone mainstream report in which the demonstrations merited a mention, was on NPR's February 9th edition of "All Things considered." When host Michele Norris asked reporter Gerry Hadden about what kind of support Aristide has, Hadden said, "It appears, you know, to be still quite strong in the capital. On February 7th, the third anniversary of his inauguration, there were tens of thousands of people who came out into the streets of Port-au-Prince to listen to his speech. He still seems to be able to muster large crowds at least here in the capital."

[Extensive footage of the February 7, 2004 demonstration can be found in Kevin Pina's

documentary “Haiti: Betrayal of Democracy”, and photos are available at www.haitiaction.net]

It was this massive support, which had also elected Aristide in a November 2000 landslide, that had to be quickly “pacified” by a collective effort of violent forces in Haiti. Not yet complete, this pacification continues while the world looks on.

Overwhelming evidence

The National Lawyers Guild (NLG, see www.nlg.org) released two reports based on investigations that took place March 29-April 12, 2004. In short, “the delegation found overwhelming evidence that the victims of the threats and violence have been supporters of the elected government of President Aristide and the Fanmi Lavalas party” and that “[T]he threats have been carried out by former militaries and FRAPH members as well as other supporters of the opposition.”

Based on interviews conducted at the state morgue in Port au Prince, NLG states: “[The morgue] Director admitted that ‘many’ bodies have come into the morgue since March 1, 2004, that are young men with their hands tied behind their backs, plastic bags over their heads, that have been shot.” And further, “The Director admitted that 800 bodies were ‘dumped and buried’ by morgue on Sunday, March 7, 2004, and another 200 bodies dumped on Sunday, March 28, 2004. The ‘usual’ amount dumped is less than 100 per month.” (See Griffin on Democracy Now!, April 12, 2004)

These reports were dismissed by authorities and consequently suppressed by the corporate media. The witch-hunt against known or suspected supporters of Aristide was not deemed newsworthy. Right-wing supporters of the coup, such as the Washington-based Haiti Democracy Project, even censored the NLG reports after having originally posted them on their website, claiming that the comprehensive investigations had a predetermined outcome and were therefore biased and tainted.

The censoring of these independent investigations (the NLG reports were the most extensive and graphic among several others, such as the Quixote Center, EPICA, and IA Center reports) is particularly revealing now that certain internal World Bank documents have been leaked. These reports corroborate the high body counts estimated by independent human rights organizations such as the NLG’s. One such report, Semi-Annual Monitoring Report on Conflict-Affected Countries dated May 17, 2004, covering the period of September 2003-March 2004, states the cold facts inside the scripted narrative:

“Growing civil unrest followed by an armed rebellion...in February 2004 culminated with President Aristide resigning and fleeing the country. The social and economic impact of the upheaval over the past several months is still being assessed. Preliminary figures indicate that some 1,000 lives were directly and indirectly claimed by the violence.”

A later report, dated July 2, 2004, in preparation for a meeting of the World Bank’s board on July 8th, “Haiti Briefing Note,” indicates a deepened crisis and acknowledges that things have deteriorated since Aristide was ousted: “The political conflict and armed uprising in early 2004 worsened Haiti’s already difficult social and economic situation. Thousands of lives were lost and large segments of the population were affected by lawlessness and violence.”

Aid and debt

On the basis of this analysis, the donors' conference that the World Bank was providing these briefings for yielded a lengthy document which details the "reconstruction" of Haiti, and gathered pledges of over \$1 billion from many Western countries; primarily Canada, the U.S. and the EU. In December, Canada, who are overseeing the facilitation of the resulting "Haiti Interim Cooperation Framework," gave the puppet regime \$43 million dollars so that they could pay off an existing World Bank debt, in order to incur a new one totaling some \$70 million.

Several governments, including the U.S., Canada, and the EU, deliberately withheld hundreds of millions of dollars in aid from the Haitian government from the late 1990s until February 2004, working instead with favored NGOs. Now, despite the nightmarish human rights situation, every Western country and organization have determined that they will reengage the interim Haitian government with direct aid.

IFES

It has been concretely established by a more recent human rights investigation by Thomas Griffin, on behalf of the University of Miami School of Law, titled Haiti Human Rights Investigation: November 11-21, 2004 (download at www.haitiaction.net) that the United States used Haitian organizations to manufacture a perception of Aristide as a human rights abuser who was overseeing a corrupt justice system. A USAID-funded organization, the International Federation of Electoral Systems (IFES), operated under the guise of "strengthening transitional democracies.": "The premise of IFES' justice program was that President Aristide 'controlled everything' and, therefore, controlled the judges in Haiti...Because the judicial system was corrupt, so went the premise, Aristide must be the most corrupt."

IFES successfully co-opted human rights groups, lawyers, and journalists, and "set the groundwork" for the creation of the Group of 184 business-led political opposition to Aristide. The chairman of IFES, William Hybl, also sits on the Board of directors of the International Republican Institute (IRI), who were also providing financial and technical support to Aristide's political opposition, with National Endowment for Democracy (NED) funding. Two of IFES' administrators in Haiti stated, "that IFES/USAID workers in Haiti want to take credit for the ouster of Aristide, but cannot out of respect for the wishes of the U.S. government."

The current minister of justice Bernard Gousse, worked closely with IFES during the two years prior to Aristide's overthrow, and for USAID for many years before that. Gousse's cabinet minister, Philippe Vixamar, also consulted for IFES. Interviewed by Thomas Griffin in Haiti, Vixamar stated that he is presently on the payroll of the Canadian government. A representative of CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) later confirmed this, stating that Vixamar is working in an "advisory" capacity within the Haitian ministry of justice, on behalf of the Canadian government. Interim Haitian PM Gerard Latortue, as well as interim President Boniface Alexandre "both participated in IFES justice programs."

Canada's role

With a wink and a nod, Canadian officials proclaim that they are committed to reforming Haiti's justice system. Canada's lead role in the administration of Haiti's occupation is not to

be overstated. Canadian military personnel oversee UN military logistics, and a Canadian police officer commands the 1,400 strong Civilian Police contingent. 100 Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) work closely with the Haitian police – who have been committing summary executions in the open streets.

One month after the coup, on April 1st, 2004, it was revealed in parliamentary hearings that the U.S. had asked Canada to take a lead role in Haiti, because:

“Washington has its hands more than full with Afghanistan, Iraq...There is simply not the ability to concentrate...This is a chance for Canada to step up and provide that sort of focused attention and leadership, and the [Bush] administration would welcome this...[I]t’s a sign of the interest and the openness in the United States to have Canada take a lead on this.”

Alluding to the fact that Canada’s leadership would also provide a veneer of legitimacy to the occupation, Carlo Dade of FOCAL, a government-funded hemispheric policy think tank (see www.focal.ca), states: “Canada also enjoys a perception in the region as a counterweight to what is viewed as heavy U.S. involvement in the region, a voice of moderation...”.

Canada has extensive economic interests in Haiti as well, which are connected to incredibly lucrative projects ongoing in the Dominican Republic (DR). Canadian mining company Placer Dome, for example, holds a 25-year concession on the Pueblo Gold Mine Project, “one of the world’s largest gold reserves.” On the Haitian side, St. Genevieve Resources and KWG Resources have exclusive rights to exploit Haiti’s copper and gold reserves, valued at several hundred million dollars. Another of many examples finds t-shirt empire Gildan Activewear overlapping their operations across the Haiti-DR border, with new investments expected to shortly reach \$160 million. Gildan’s primary subcontractor in Haiti is Andy Apaid, Jr., who not only led the Group of 184 political opposition to Aristide, but is now funding anti-Lavalas gangs in Port au Prince slums.

Debt and dependency

While the reality being imposed on Haitians today is, in practical terms, new, the nature of it is consistent with Western policy toward Haiti since she gained her independence as the world’s first free black republic in 1804. Earning the distinction as the hemisphere’s first “threat of a good example,” Haiti was automatically labeled a failed state, as slavery-practicing countries struggled to maintain the conditions of subjugation for profit in the hemisphere. They did not wish to see another Haiti, and went to great extremes in order to prevent this.

In 1825 the French government, on behalf of former slave owners, imposed an indemnity on Haiti in return for official recognition. In today’s dollars, this debt equals approximately \$21.7 billion. On April 7, 2003, on the anniversary of the death of Toussaint L’Ouverture, father of the Haitian revolution, Aristide called on France to pay Haiti reparations for imposing this indemnity. According to Aristide’s attorney, Ira Kurzban, France took this very seriously, knowing also that Aristide was by no means bluffing and in fact had developed a strong legal case. Faced with another “threat of a good example,” which could conceivably spread to other former colonies, France redoubled its efforts to bring Aristide down.

The U.S. did not recognize Haitian independence until 1863, just as the westward expanding

American settlers were waging a genocidal war against indigenous populations. Backed by the principles of the Monroe Doctrine, the bloodthirsty Americans invaded Haiti in 1915, occupying the country for 19 years. Historically, this was the longest foreign military occupation of Haiti, but the present one, similarly premised on the notion that black Haitians are unable to govern themselves and therefore need to be taught how, figures to be a long one as well.

Numerous world leaders have wrung their hands lamenting that as a “failed state” Haiti is in need of a long-term presence to get it on the right track once and for all. The belief is that this long-term presence might somehow ‘break the cycle’ of violence, corruption, and coup d’etats.

Numerous foreign policy think tanks have ruminated over the ‘possibility’ of establishing a ‘protectorate’ in Haiti, like the old days. The irony therein, of course, is that this has been the plan all along, and the real reality finds that Haiti is not being governed by Haitians.

New solidarity

A new type of solidarity movement is emerging out of a growing awareness of the policies that are being carried out in Haiti, policies that can only be described as genocidal. All of the Western powers share a history of genocidal conquest. Ironically, this process began on the very island that Haitians occupy, in 1492. It should enrage but not surprise us that governments such as Canada and the United States, who have perfected the means of internal colonization through the subjugation and dehumanization of indigenous people, should export these methods to Haiti. Our role is to understand these realities and devise ways to dismantle them.

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