

Media Disinformation on Haiti

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The analysis that follows is an attempt to demonstrate the utter unreliability of the mainstream media in Canada which moreover functions primarily to buttress the propaganda campaign against Aristide and the severe campaign of repression of his supporters, while simultaneously functioning to cloud and obscure the overall picture of reality in Haiti. This is necessarily lengthy but, beyond the particular article in question, this can be applied more generally to monopoly media coverage and 'analysis' of events as they unfold in Haiti generally.

It's not often that you see an establishment/right-wing news column quoting stories from the Revolutionary Worker.[1] But there it was in this past weekend's edition, a half-page commentary by Foreign Affairs editor and arch-reactionary Kelly McParland, "Haiti: anarchy reasserts itself: UN contingent well over its head." Within the first two paragraphs, however, McParland shows his disdain toward Haitians who he clearly perceives as inferior, while proudly displaying his ignorance and confusion about the current political situation there. He opens the article by offering a skewed look at the Worker article:

"Wandering the rooftops of Haiti's capital one day recently, a correspondent for the Revolutionary Worker happened across a boy named Gerald, who proved to be one of the most erudite 13-year-old Third World slum-dwellers you could ever hope to meet."

Where McParland states that Gerald is "gathering rocks to chuck at tin rooftops the minute he spotted a cop or UN worker approaching his neighbourhood," he obscures what the Worker actually states, "Gerald stood guard with two plastic buckets full of rocks." Gerald, who is actually 14 according to the Worker article, was aiding the resistance fighters by alerting them when the "police, heavily armed with U.S.-supplied equipment, entered his street" [RW]. After warning the neighbourhood, many people "surrounded the police cars and, in a hail of rocks and trash, forced the Haitian National Police-now a major instrument in the government's campaign of terror against the people-out of the area."

Amongst a litany of important and glaring omissions McParland does not mention that the UN and PNH have been conducting regular and arbitrary 'sweeps' of poor neighbourhoods,[2] making mass arrests in a vain search for weapons. These repressive tactics have seen a marked increase since September 30th after Haitian police fired on unarmed demonstrators killing or wounding several civilians.[3] These demonstrators, at least 10,000 of which had reportedly poured out of the slums by mid-morning, were calling for the return of democratically elected Jean Bertrand Aristide.[4]

Gerald, the youth interviewed by the Revolutionary Worker, represents a part of the growing

resistance to the illegal occupation and the imposition of an illegitimate puppet regime on them. The Revolutionary Worker article is one of many alternative or independent resources that have given voice to the Haitian masses in this state-terror imposed period. Usually, the corporate media is content to merely ignore and silence through omission or censorship those who represent realistic viewpoints. McParland chose instead to appear to give voice to both Gerald and the Revolutionary Worker. Rather than do so ingenuously, as a responsible reporter might, McParland attempts to slyly discredit the Worker, by implying that they put thoughts in the head of the young resistance fighter, Gerald. For example:

“Notwithstanding his remarkable vocabulary, the Worker noted Gerald is just one of “tens of thousands of ordinary Haitians” who have joined forces “to resist the continued occupation of their country by imperialist UN troops and the repressive policies of the Latortue regime.””

Earlier, McParland had quoted Gerald as, among other things, saying, “We see now that there is no way the bourgeoisie will let us have a fair chance to make a decent life for ourselves,” When he refers to Gerald’s “erudite” or “remarkable vocabulary,” especially for a “Third World slum-dweller,” McParland is of course implying that such an inferior and uneducated savage could not possibly articulate such thoughts without the aid of an ultra-left wing ideologue or ‘anarchist.’[5] Later on, McParland rearticulates his conception of Haitian slum-dwellers as savages as he puts the resistance into Eurocentric context, “That resistance has made itself clear in disturbingly graphic displays of butchery...” Later, he adds to this, as he further puts “Haiti’s anarchy” into perspective, “More than 50 people have been killed in the past four weeks, hacked or beaten or shot or even beheaded.” In both instances, McParland is clear that this violence is to be attributed to the resistance. He claims that this “anarchy” represents “ a bizarre attribute to the barbarism of the hate-filled “insurgents” of Iraq.”

For clarification purposes, we should look at the actual statistics made public, rather than focusing exclusively on those bandied about by the revisionist AP/Reuters news monopoly. On October 15, it was reported that the State Morgue in Port au Prince had issued an emergency call to the Ministry of Health to remove the more than 600 bodies that had been piling up in the previous two weeks.[6] Two days later, another 35 bodies were reported found in a “familiar dumping ground” near the neighbourhood of Cite Soleil. Human rights observers have noted a marked increase in repression to a level above that of the immediate post-February 29th period.[7]

This raises the issue of perhaps the most glaring omission in McParland’s piece, and that of the corporate media generally. Within three weeks of February 29th, the director of the State Morgue in Port au Prince stated to a National Lawyers Guild delegation in April, that approximately 800 bodies were dumped in mass graves.[8] This context has not found its way into today’s reporting, especially in regards to the resistance, whose existence is all the more important given the actual context of a continual ebb and flow of repression and political persecution since February 29th. This ebb and flow has been vociferously denied by all of the implicated parties in Haiti despite extensive documentation.[9]

The beheadings to which McParland refers were the source of the since proven fictitious “Operation Baghdad,” a phrase which emerged from the original misinformation concerning the September 30th events. According to this story, it was ‘barbarous’ pro-Aristide militants

who had for no reason savagely killed and beheaded three Haitian police officers. The AP, followed by Canada's CBC, have not since retracted this misinformation, which undoubtedly led many readers and viewers to believe that any ensuing repression of such 'barbarism' was to be justified.[10]

The trouble was, the interim government did not permit human rights observers to see the police officers who were allegedly beheaded. They were promptly buried thereby securing the political usage of these supposed beheadings in order to vilify the growing Haitian resistance in a similar manner to that of Iraq's. Whether these policemen were beheaded or not is impertinent to the fact that this was a classic case of what Chomsky and Herman referred to as "Worthy and Unworthy Victims," one part of their Propaganda Model in their seminal "Manufacturing Consent":

"A propaganda system will consistently portray people abused in enemy states as worthy victims, whereas those treated with equal or greater severity by its own government or clients [see: Latortue, puppet] will be unworthy. The evidence of worth may be read from the extent and character of attention and indignation." [p. 37]

Three supposedly beheaded police officers, presumably a part of the contingent that fired on unarmed demonstrators and killed several civilians on September 30th, are most definitely worthy victims for mainstream propaganda purposes. The 600 Haitians that died violently in the subsequent two weeks, and the several thousand in the months prior, are, accordingly, unworthy victims.

Interestingly, McParland does not deny that Aristide may have been overthrown, when he writes, "After bundling Aristide out of the country in February, with the help of France, it has left policing to a UN contingent headed by Brazil." This comment is consistent with the rest of MacParland's article; nowhere does he mention his own government, Canada. This is especially interesting given that the paper for which he writes is one of Canada's only two nationally circulated newspapers. Mounting evidence shows that Canada was instrumental in the events leading to Aristide's overthrow; Paul Martin himself has taken credit for this several times in his own underhanded way. Accordingly, Canada and the Canadian press [who rely heavily on AP reporting] have also been instrumental in the cover-up of realities. McParland also disinforms when he fails to mention that Canada's RCMP is heading the policing aspect of the UN mission.[11]

Further disinformation occurs when McParland states "The International Monetary Fund has offered the country US\$1-billion to get it back on its feet." The amount in question was pledged by several separate "donor countries," not the IMF specifically. The IMF did host the donor's conference and do link through to the Haiti Interim Cooperation Framework [ICF], where extensive documentation details what these monies are earmarked for, at least 10% of which has been pledged by Canada's Liberal government. The interim government has also pledged to adhere to certain structural reforms including the 'potential' privatization of five major industries that Aristide had refused to privatize. It also appears that through the ICF plan, attempts are being made to circumvent the reformation of the Haitian army by broadening the scope of the PNH to include up to 20,000 officers.[12]

McParland joins Latortue in blaming the victim, in this case Aristide, noting, "Latortue insists the mess is all Aristide's fault." Surprisingly, McParland chooses not to repeat the ridiculous

charge offered by the Brazilian UN commander, General Heleno, who accused John Kerry of being responsible for the latest violence. Heleno based this on comments made by Kerry on March 7th, implying that this has “given hope” to Aristide supporters that if Kerry is elected he might return Aristide.[13]

McParland does provide Aristide’s retort to Latortue that Aristide, speaking from South Africa, “accused interim Prime Minister Gérard Latortue of having unleashed a new torrent of repression in Haiti, and of searching for a scapegoat at the same time on whom to pin the violence that is rocking the country.”[14] Judging by the one-sided context provided by McParland in the rest of the article, Aristide’s comments are blurred by this distortion, which allows the reader no real understanding of either Aristide’s circumstances or those of the interim client regime of Latortue.

Nowhere in McParland’s article is it mentioned that Aristide continues to have the support of Haiti’s poor majority. Canada’s former ambassador Kenneth Cook went on record in March stating that ‘if elections were held today, Lavalas would win [paraphrase].’ These sentiments have been echoed by representatives at the US embassy as well, and this has been clear in the many large demonstrations that have taken place despite severe repression since February 29th. The standard misinformation upon which mainstream coverage such as McParland’s relies contends that Aristide no longer enjoyed popular support and that it was a ‘popular insurgency’ that led to his departure. Heavily suppressed have been the reports of independent election observers going back to November 2000 when Aristide was elected in a landslide with at least 60% voter turnout according to credible independent estimates. These figures were reiterated repeatedly by official USAID commissioned Gallup polls in 2001, and again in 2002, showing Aristide to enjoy the overwhelming support of a majority of Haitian voters. Significantly, the “political opposition” never enjoyed more than 10% of popular support during this period, and certainly still doesn’t.[15]

Measured against actually occurring realities in Haiti as according to credible and verifiable sources, all told, Kelly McParland serves to contribute to the propagandistic obfuscation of reality in Haiti, which effectively disempowers readers from utilizing the incredibly narrow and distorted context he provides to hold the actual responsible parties for the catastrophe in Haiti to account. Rather than honestly assess the situation, McParland shamefully deflects responsibility through his characterization that is much in line with typically racist media folk models of Haiti.[16] Far from providing a reasonable analysis of the Revolutionary Worker’s article, McParland demonstrates that he is no sound position to refute a socialist analysis of events in Haiti short of relying on misinformation and disinformation to do so. Kelly McParland therefore lacks any credibility as a reporter or commentator on matters pertaining to Haiti.

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