

Targeting Aristide in Exile

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Global Research, November 05, 2008

5 November 2008

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Elected Haiti's president in 1990. Its first ever democratically chosen one. By a sweeping two-thirds majority. Took office in February 1991. Deposed by an army-led coup in September with all the earmarks of being made-in-Washington. Returned to office in October 1994. Served until February 1996. According to Haitian law, he couldn't succeed himself. Reelected in November 2000 with 90% of the vote. Took office in February 2001. Served until February 29, 2004 when, in the middle of the night, US marines deposed him and forced him into exile.

He's now in South Africa where he remains larger than life. Haiti's symbolic leader. A man of the people. Dedicated to their welfare. Steadfast in his principles. Beloved and wanted back. Yet he's vilified in the press because of the good example he represents. Accused while in office and still now of all sorts of things. The way developing country democrats are always treated. Human rights abuses. Using armed gangs to crush dissent. Retain power. Political killings. Tolerating corruption. Connections to drugs trafficking. Profiting from it. Not a shred of it true. Not a word in the mainstream to expose it, denounce it, and set the record straight.

Now four years later a resurrected charge. As unfounded as the others. On the Wall Street Journal's op-ed page by Americas writer, Mary O'Grady. Known for attacking democrats. Supporting repression. Right wing extremism. American imperialism and corporate power. She excels in journalistic venom mirror opposite of the truth.

Her latest on October 27, in an article titled: "Democrats for Despotism." About publicly-owned Haiti Telecommunications International called Teleco. The once state monopoly now compromised by de facto privatization. What's plagued Haiti before and since Aristide by opening its markets to private investors. Predators. Profiting at the expense of the people. Buying assets at well below fair value. Part of Washington's imposed neoliberalism in telecommunications and other areas. So that companies like Rectel, Haitel, Digicel and Comtel combined exceed Teleco in size and can take full advantage at the expense of poor Haitians.

Even so, it hasn't contained O'Grady's brand of diatribe. Again targeting Aristide, but not for the first time. She called him a "dictator." Accused him while in office of "inciting violence against his political opponents." Being "renown for eliminating his enemies," she blamed Democrats for returning him to office. Claimed on return he "resumed his despotic ways." Enough so that "Haitians begged for US help" to remove him. Up to February 2004 when he "was finally run out of the country." Indeed so courtesy of dispatched US marines. And now a resurrected old canard.

That "Aristide installed his accomplices in (Teleco) management positions and those

accomplices then caused Teleco to enter into agreements with certain US and Canadian telecommunications carriers, granting them significantly reduced rates for services provided by Teleco in exchange for kickbacks, which further reduced those rates.” That the post-Aristide US-installed Latortue “government opened (Teleco’s) books and claimed the company had been looted.” By “Aristide....stealing millions of dollars in telephone revenues.” Not a shred of it true. Not a bit of evidence to support it, but they tried anyway. By filing suit that was later withdrawn.

Some Background

In July, the FCC fined IDT \$1.3 million – the New Jersey telecom company run by one of John McCain’s top fund raisers, Jim Courter. It was for failing (in 2003 and 2004) to file a contract for telephone service to Haiti. According to the FCC, IDT paid Teleco an illegally low rate for calls it handled between Haiti and the US.

Courter was a New Jersey Republican congressman from 1979 – 1991. A former gubernatorial candidate as well, and one of McCain’s 20 national finance co-chairmen until he resigned because the fine generated negative publicity.

Portfolio magazine published two articles on the incident by freelance journalist Lucy Komisar. Hired by the Haiti Democracy Project (HDP) to write them. An organization infamous for vilifying Aristide and his government. Founded in November 2002, it’s based in Washington. Staffed by former US government officials. Bankrolled by Haiti’s right-wing Boulos family. Rudolph Boulos a prominent Haitian businessman. He and HDP have close ties to the Bush administration.

This was an encore for Komisar who misreported earlier about Aristide. Unproved charges of corruption and other accusations. Typical corporate-sponsored agitprop. Directed at leaders who dare oppose Washington, neoliberalism, and instead pursue socially enlightened policies. In the case of Haiti, in the poorest country in the hemisphere. With its unimaginable level of poverty that Aristide was dedicated to alleviate. The human need his agenda addressed. His impressive successes in spite of overwhelming obstacles. Mostly from Washington under Democrats and Republicans.

The reason why twice coups removed him and why Haitians want him back. In any capacity. Just his presence. To be home with his people. What America won’t allow. Nonetheless, one day he will be. Why writers like O’Grady and Komisar keep resurrecting old canards. For figures like Aristide, they never die. They don’t even fade away.

The Teleco issue is about Aristide’s supposed “corrupt” IDT dealings. The company paid Teleco 8.75 cents per minute for long-distance calls and not the FCC-established 23 cent rate (at the time) for other carriers. Komisar claimed IDT paid its fees to a Turks & Caicos company she identified as “Mount Salem.” She then alleged that 5.75 cents went to Teleco and 3 cents to Aristide. That Turks & Caicos lawyer Adrian Corr was Aristide’s legal counsel. That he ran “Mount Salem,” and that he confirmed that “Aristide owned the shell.”

Her whole story was invented and bogus. By his own admission, Corr never represented Aristide. Never set up a shell company, and never kicked back funds to anyone as Komisar and O’Grady claim.

O’Grady’s article is about Fusion Telecommunications. Its 1999 contract with Teleco. That it

violated FCC rules by granting the company a preferential rate. Access to Haiti's network "at a rate of 12 cents a minute, dropping to 11 cents after the first three million minutes each month" as opposed to "the FCC's official rate (of) 50 cents a minute, dropping to 46 cents in 2000."

She also claimed an IDT "whistleblower alleged he was fired in 2003 for objecting to a deal in which IDT would get a low termination rate in exchange for depositing payments in an account for Aristide." Fusion denies it made any improper payments, and the FCC has no evidence it did. Not good enough for O'Grady who said "Haitians can be forgiven for not putting much stock in those words." Readers can be forgiven for questioning O'Grady's credibility. Komisar as well.

For his part, Aristide was a parish priest before being elected president. He never had and today has no ownership stake in any company, including the so-called "Mount Salem." Ira Kurzban represents him as legal counsel. He refuted Komisar's accusations and stated: "Mr. Corr did not and does not represent President Aristide and President Aristide had no interest in or knowledge of any company - 'shell' or otherwise - set up in the Turks & Caicos for any purpose. Mr. Corr never set up 'Mount Salem,' any 'shell' company, or any other company for President Aristide."

He added that: "these repeated false stories of corruption against President Aristide are part of a continuing disinformation campaign against (him) that began when he first took office in 1991." The same type charges levied against democrats like Hugo Chavez. The latest example in a trial just concluded in a Miami courtroom. About a suitcase filled with \$800,000 for Argentina's President, Christina Kirchner. For her successful campaign last year. Both presidents denounced the accusation, but it's still front-page news in each country and currently in America. "Suitcasegate" The New York Times called it after a "wealthy Venezuelan businessman (was convicted of) acting as an 'unregistered agent' (for his country) on American soil."

Unwarranted according to his lawyer who plans to appeal, and said the trial was a "political circus in which (his client) is a pawn of the US government." He earlier called the case politically motivated to embarrass the Chavez government. Venezuela's Foreign Minister, Nicolas Maduro, said the charges were "absolutely rigged" and that the defendant wasn't an "unregistered (Venezuelan) foreign agent."

Contrast this case and accusations against Aristide to Wall Street's massive fraud. At the heart of the world's financial crisis. That goes unmentioned in mainstream reports. Lets criminals loot the federal treasury and puts taxpayers on the hook for the tab. The same ones defrauded by the scheme. Now left high and dry on their own while world-class democrats like Aristide and Chavez are pilloried. Accused of all kinds of bogus things. Even though Aristide is no longer Haiti's president.

No matter because it's how Washington operates. With full support from its echo chamber in the press. From writers like Komisar and O'Grady well paid to comply. It's up to readers to reject their accounts. Not become hostage to their message, and rely on alternative news for the truth. There's plenty around and places to find it as readers of this web site know.

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