

Undermining Haitian Sovereignty. The Role of Canada

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Can cute Canadian Caribbean dreams about enchanted islands come true? Or is reality more complicated and Canada a far less benign actor than we imagine ourselves to be?

In a recent *Boston Globe* opinion [titled](#) "Haiti should relinquish its sovereignty", Boston College professor Richard Albert writes,

"the new Haitian Constitution should do something virtually unprecedented: renounce the power of self-governance and assign it for a term of years, say 50, to a country that can be trusted to act in Haiti's long-term interests."

According to the Canadian constitutional law professor his native land, which Albert calls "one of Haiti's most loyal friends", should administer the Caribbean island nation.

Over the past 15 years prominent Canadian voices have repeatedly promoted "protectorate status" for Haiti. On January 31 and February 1, 2003, Jean Chrétien's Liberal government organized the "Ottawa Initiative on Haiti" to discuss that country's future. No Haitian officials were invited to this assembly where high-level US, Canadian and French officials decided that Haiti's elected president "must go" and that the country would be put under a Kosovo-like UN trusteeship.

Four months after Ottawa helped overthrow Haiti's elected government Prime Minister Paul Martin [reaffirmed](#) his government's desire to keep Haiti under long-term foreign control. 

"Fragile states often require military intervention to restore stability", said Martin at a private meeting of "media moguls" in Idaho. Bemoaning what he considered the short-term nature of a previous intervention, the prime minister declared "this time, we have got to stay [in Haiti] until the job is done properly."

A few months later a government-funded think tank, home to key Haiti policy strategists, elaborated a detailed plan for foreigners to run the country. According to the Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) plan for Haiti's future, commissioned by Parliament's foreign affairs committee, the country's different ministries would fall under Canadian oversight. Québec's ministry of education, for instance, would oversee Haiti's education system. The FOCAL plan put Haiti's environment ministry under Canadian federal government supervision.

FOCAL's proposal was made after the 2004 US/France/Canada coup weakened Haiti's democratic institutions and social safety network, spurring thousands of violent deaths and a UN occupation that later introduced cholera to the country. Irrespective of the impact of foreign intervention, colonialists' solution to Haiti's problems is to further undermine Haitian sovereignty.

Haiti is but one piece of the Caribbean that Canadians' have sought to rule. Earlier this year NDP MP Erin Weir asked if Canada should incorporate "the Turks and Caicos Islands into Confederation." Weir echoed an idea promoted by NDP MP Max Saltzman in the 1970s, Conservative MP Peter Goldring through the 2000s and an NDP riding association three years ago. A resolution submitted to the party's 2014 convention [noted](#),

"New Democrats Believe in: Engaging with the peoples and government of Turks and Caicos Islands, and the British government to have the Turks and Caicos Islands become Canada's 11th Province."

As I discuss in the current issue of *Canadian Dimension* magazine, leftists have long supported the expansion of Canadian power in the region.

In a 300-page thesis titled "Dreams of a Tropical Canada: Race, Nation, and Canadian Aspirations in the Caribbean Basin, 1883-1919" Paula Pears Hastings [outlines](#) the campaign to annex territory in the region.

"Canadians of varying backgrounds campaigned vigorously for Canada-West Indies union", writes Hastings. "Their aspirations were very much inspired by a Canadian national project, a vision of a 'Greater Canada' that included the West Indies."

Canada's sizable financial sector in the region played an important part in these efforts. In *Towers of Gold, Feet of Clay: The Canadian Banks*, Walter Stewart notes:

"The business was so profitable that in 1919 Canada seriously considered taking the Commonwealth Caribbean off mother England's hands."

✖ At the end of World War I Ottawa asked the Imperial War Cabinet if it could take possession of the British West Indies as compensation for Canada's defence of the empire. London balked. Ottawa was unsuccessful in securing the British Caribbean partly because the request did not find unanimous domestic support. Prime Minister Robert Borden was of two minds on the issue. From London he dispatched a cable [noting](#),

"the responsibilities of governing subject races would probably exercise a broadening influence upon our people as the dominion thus constituted would closely resemble in its problems and its duties the empire as a whole."

But, on the other hand, Borden feared that the Caribbean's black population might want to vote. He [remarked](#) upon

“the difficulty of dealing with the coloured population, who would probably be more restless under Canadian law than under British control and would desire and perhaps insist upon representation in Parliament.”

Proposing Canada acquire Turks and Caicos or rule Haiti may be outlandish, but it's not benign. These suggestions ignore Caribbean history, foreign influence in the region and whitewash the harm Ottawa has caused there. Even worse, they enable politicians' to pursue ever more aggressive policies in the region.

Yves Engler is the author of [A Propaganda System: How Canada's Government, Corporations, Media and Academia Sell War](#) and [Canada in Africa: 300 years of aid and exploitation](#). [Read other articles by Yves](#).

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