

# Helping Businesses Profit from Poverty and the Coup

By Richard Sanders

Canada's new embassy in Haiti, with tennis court, helipad,<sup>1</sup> pool<sup>2</sup> and high-tech, insurmountable wall,<sup>3</sup> is located in Petionville, a posh Port-au-Prince suburb. Completed for \$20 million by Quebec engineering giant/war industry, SNC-Lavalin,<sup>4</sup> and opened in the summer of 2004,<sup>5</sup> it is reputed to be "the most modern foreign embassy in Haiti."<sup>6</sup>

One of the embassy's most important functions is promoting Canadian business interests in Haiti. And, Haiti's "interim government" (March 2004-Feb. 2006)—having been illegally installed and empowered by the U.S./Canada/France-led coup—was keen to open its doors as wide as possible to foreign investors.

The Canadian embassy's Trade Commissioner Service says that its mandate is to promote

"Canada's economic interests in Haiti and support the efforts of Canadian companies who have selected Haiti as a target market for their products, services or technologies."<sup>7</sup>

To do this, our embassy offers "six core services" to help Canadian businesses that want to profit from what our ambassador in Haiti, Claude Boucher, says is "probably the world's poorest country."<sup>8</sup> (See: "Embassy Offers 'Core Services' to Canadian Firms.") (While Haiti is the poorest nation in the Americas, it is not the "world's poorest." Boucher's error reveals that—like the embassy he serves—his attention is not on Haitian poverty, but rather on creating wealth for Canadian businesses.)

Appointed in August 2004,<sup>9</sup> Boucher focused much of his next two years justifying Canada's role ousting Haiti's democratic government, providing a diplomatic veneer of respectability for Haiti's newly-unelected regime and helping Canadian companies take advantage of the extraordinarily business-friendly, post-coup environment.

Like Ambassador Boucher, one of the chief responsibilities of Haiti's unelected Prime Minister, Gerard Latortue, was to meet and greet profit-hungry delegations of Canadian businessmen who began scouring the coun-

*Canada's embassy in Haiti works hard helping Canadian companies turn a profit in this hemisphere's poorest nation. Top Canadian officials worked closely with their allies in Haiti's corporate elite, and its illegally-installed puppet regime, to promote Canadian business interests. Their main efforts focus on winning lucrative "reconstruction" projects and privatizing Haiti's public sector. With poverty rampant, many Haitians slave away in sweatshops for Canadian firms, like Gildan, to which a Liberal cabinet minister gave Canada's top award for "excellence" in "ethical responsibility."*



## Embassy Offers 'Core Services' to Canadian Firms

*Canada's Embassy in Haiti is keen to provide six "core services" to any Canadian firm seeking to turn a profit in the poorest country of the Americas:*

### (1) Market Prospect

Help to assess your market potential in Haiti: geographic and/or sectoral info., and advice on doing business.

### (2) Visit Information

Practical guidance for your trip: hotels, interpreters, support services, etc.

### (3) Key Contacts Search

Qualified contacts & partners in Haiti: buyers, distributors, lawyers, etc.

### (4) Face-to-Face Briefing

Market intelligence from our officers.

### (5) Company Information

Current info. on businesses in Haiti.

### (6) Troubleshooting

Advice on resolving critical business challenges."

**Source:** "Embassy of Canada to Haiti," Dep't of Foreign Affairs and International Trade website. <[www.infoexport.gc.ca](http://www.infoexport.gc.ca)>

try for lucrative, coup-enabled investment opportunities. One such trade mission toured Haiti between October 19 and 23, 2004. Both Boucher and Latortue were involved in meetings linked to this mission, and the latter welcomed these Canadians to Haiti by saying "It is trying times that one finds out who one's true friends are."<sup>10</sup>

Who were these "true friends" of Latortue's regime? Marie-France Lebreton of the Francophone Business Forum (FBF) described them as "businessmen" representing 12 Quebec and New Brunswick firms specializing in: "road infrastructure, telecommunications, energy, urban planning, waste disposal, sustainable develop-

ment, agroindustry, manufacturing, fishing, fish farming, the environment, renewable energy, water treatment, education and training."<sup>11</sup>

This was the first such Canadian trade mission since Aristide was kidnapped in February 2004. To prepare for the Canadian delegation, the FBF held "meetings and work sessions with government officials, notably with Prime Minister Gerard Latortue and Trade Minister Danielle Saint Lot."<sup>12</sup> (See page 42.) According to Lebreton, the result of these meetings was that "Several letters of understanding and agreements will be signed with private and public Haitian entities."<sup>13</sup> The trouble with this should be obvious. Haiti's

## BUSINESS

“public... entities” had just come under the control of Latortue’s illegal government. Although it had no mandate from Haiti’s electorate, this puppet regime was eager to sell off Haiti’s public assets to private, foreign investors.

As Réginald Boulos (see pages 47-49), said enthusiastically:

“Haiti today offers a lot of opportunities for foreign investors to be involved in privatization....’ The electricity, water and transport industries, he says, are all being audited for privatization. He is also enthusiastic about the telecommunications sector, which represents a big market for foreign investors.”<sup>14</sup>

Latortue and Boucher also collaborated on the creation of the Haitian-Canadian Chamber of Commerce and Industry [HCCCI]. In fact, they “presided over the founding”<sup>15</sup> of this bilateral business association in June 2004,<sup>16</sup> soon after Latortue took power. The HCCCI’s first president, Robert Hans Tippenhauer (see page 33), who attended high school in Québec,<sup>17</sup> described the Chamber as “the link between Canadian investors and Haiti.”<sup>18</sup>

Tippenhauer made no secret of his appreciation for Canadian government representatives in Haiti saying “the mere presence of these officials is good for us.” He singled out special

praise for Boucher saying he was “one the most active ambassadors” in Haiti.<sup>19</sup>

In an interview with activist and writer Anthony Fenton, Tippenhauer outlined his view that because Canada played such a decisive role in ousting Aristide and in empowering the illegal, “transitional” government that took control, Canadian businesses were entitled to have first dibs on the lucrative, “post-conflict” reconstruction contracts. In his more carefully-coded words: “considering the active role that Canada is playing with their lead role in the transition, Canadian firms should have a first look at these projects.”<sup>20</sup>

This, of course, is typical. Re-

## The Coup Regime's Minister of Commerce

By Richard Sanders

**D**anielle Saint-Lot is not your average Haitian. For one thing, she is a former head of Haiti’s Chamber of Commerce.<sup>1</sup> And, she was made Minister of Commerce, Industry and Tourism by Haiti’s unconstitutional regime in 2004. Such credentials were certainly good enough for our government and its corporate allies who were anxious to collect some of the spoils after the illegal, Canadian-backed regime change.

Canada’s Foreign Affairs Minister Pierre Pettigrew held a meeting and “photo op” with Saint-Lot on October 8, 2004, in Montreal.<sup>2</sup> She was in there at the invitation the Department of Foreign Affairs to address a meeting of Canadian corporations wanting to profit from Canadian government-funded “rebuilding” programs in Haiti.<sup>3</sup> Later that month, Saint-Lot was preparing the ground back home for a delegation of Canadian businesses that were on a trade mission to Haiti.<sup>4</sup>

As Minister of Commerce, Saint-Lot promoted the so-called “Red Carpet” project—a U.S. government-funded initiative “to ease the path of investors.” Presumably, this special treatment was also extended to Canadian investors. As *Business Week* proclaimed, Saint-Lot “champions the clothing and textile industries”<sup>5</sup> of Haiti. Such “champions” are no doubt highly prized, especially by Canadian businesses—like Gildan Activewear of Montreal—which weaves Third World sweatshops into the fabric of Canadian corporate profiteering. (See pages 44-46.)

Saint-Lot has been championing this work for some time. She held government positions during the “Baby Doc” dictatorship and in the military-dominated era just prior to Aristide’s democratic rise to power. This is revealed by an elitist, U.S. government-funded NGO, Vital Voices, which notes that: “Throughout the 1980s, she occupied several important positions in Haiti’s Ministries of Commerce and Industry and Foreign Affairs and External Cooperation.”<sup>6</sup>

After Aristide’s landslide victory in the 1990 elec-



tions, Saint-Lot moved from the government to the private sector. She was, for instance, the Director of Training for RAMAK, a controversial, radio-development program. Prior to the 2004 coup, RAMAK “received millions in USAID grants towards indoctrinating radio stations in Haiti towards the U.S. embassy rhetoric.”<sup>7</sup> RAMAK was a subsidiary of Creative Associates International Inc.(CAII), a Washington-based corporation that makes millions by spearheading U.S. government propaganda efforts in the Third World. CAII’s expertise is in melding “development work with political, military and economic influence strategies.”<sup>8</sup>

Through RAMAK’s 2001-2004 “civic education” program, CAII helped pave the way for the latest coup in Haiti. It was *deja vu* all over again. Back in 1991, the CAII had been “involved with the [first] coup against democratically-elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.” In 1989, the CAII had assisted “the Contra guerillas in Nicaragua.”<sup>9</sup> Not surprisingly, the CAII is now contracted by the U.S. government to “lead the rebuilding of education” in Afghanistan and Iraq (since 2001 and 2003 respectively).<sup>10</sup>

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construction contracts are generally won by companies based in the very “investor” nations whose governments were responsible for the wars, coups, loan indebtedness and/or foreign-aid sanctions that created the problems in the first place. As such, Third World countries blighted by war and poverty, are converted into cash cows that First World entrepreneurs in the “nation-rebuilding” business can then milk.

Such “reconstruction” industries are now raking in about US\$200-billion a year. And, although Haiti falls behind the huge windfalls of profit reaped in Iraq and Afghanistan, within a month of the 2004 coup, the *Toronto Star* looked hopefully upon Haiti as “the latest procurement hot spot.”<sup>21</sup>

If you still think these supposedly-altruistic, “nation-building” contracts are all about helping poor civilian populations get back on their feet, then think again. Such contracts also include a big slice for “military-support” work. Besides needing military helicopters, armoured assault vehicles, weapons and ammunition, the thousands of foreign troops occupying Haiti also need “housing and feeding,” “laundry, ...flush toilets, ...showers and mail” delivery. And, you can be sure that occupying forces received these basic services long before many Haitians ever will. Doug Brooks, president of the euphemistically-titled International Peace Operations Association (representing U.S. firms competing for military-support contracts), estimated that Haitian operations alone would yield his member firms \$100 million a year.<sup>22</sup>

In the first month of the military occupation, Bill Durch, a senior

associate at the Henry Stimson Center (a think tank whose directors include former U.S. State Department bureaucrats, an investment banker and representatives of war-industry giants, Lockheed Martin and Boeing),<sup>23</sup> had high hopes for the UN’s Haiti mission, at least in terms of benefits for war-related contractors. Durch said the Haiti mission would “pump up” UN procurement figures, and added, “It’s a good time to be a vendor.”<sup>24</sup>

So, who are these “vendors” that celebrate a “good time” when countries, like Haiti, have their democracies overthrown and are then occupied by foreign troops whose UN-sanctioned role is to protect an imposed and brutally-repressive regime? The UN, which forks out more than \$800 million per year in contracts, publishes an annual list of “approved suppliers.” The number of Canadian firms on this list went up 20%, from 176 in 2002,<sup>25</sup> to 212 in 2007.<sup>26</sup> On the list of approved UN vendors in Canada are several of our country’s most prestigious and profitable, war profiteers: Computing Devices, Frontec, Military International, Oerlikon Contraves, SNC-TEC and SNC-Lavalin International.<sup>27</sup>

Thanks to the staggering boom in Haiti’s poverty and its two-year, post-coup deficit in democracy, SNC was very successful in turning a handsome profit. One of Canada’s most diversified firms, SNC-Lavalin has tentacles firmly set in many sectors, including this list from its website: agribusiness, chemicals & petroleum, environment, health care, infrastructure, light industry & manufacturing, mass transit, mining, metallurgy, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology, power, project financing and management, pulp and paper.<sup>28</sup>

But let’s not forget war technology. In 2003, SNC reported a “\$270-million income from the sale of bullets and ammunition” alone. In May 2004, one of its subsidiaries, SNC-TEC, joined a

“consortium led by General Dynamics Ordnance and Tactical Systems, and signed a contract to build 200 million bullets for the U.S. Department of Defense...to meet the rising needs of U.S. occupation forces in Iraq [and probably Haiti too].<sup>29</sup>

In 2005, it was reported that SNC “provides 70% of Canada’s military ammu-

munition.”<sup>30</sup> This, of course, has been used in various conflicts, including in Haiti.

But of all its business dealings in Haiti, SNC’s most high-profile success was to design and construct Canada’s swanky new embassy. This is a symbolic cornerstone of Canadian complicity in Haiti’s coup government because it is from this location that our government runs many of its business, military and diplomatic operations.

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