

# The ABCs of Haiti's Elite: Apaid, Boulos and Canada

By Richard Sanders

Although they have never held political office, Andy Apaid, Jr., and Réginald Boulos are arguably the two most powerful men in Haiti. However, unlike the vast majority of Haitians, they are not descended from African slaves. Neither are they poor. Apaid isn't even a Haitian citizen but "was born to Haitian parents in the U.S. and came to Haiti in 1976 as a foreign businessman on a visitor's visa."<sup>1</sup>

However, these two white millionaires of Middle Eastern stock are the top industrialists, financiers and spokesmen for Haiti's virulent right-wing elite. As a result, they are the darlings of the Canadian and American government, and their corporate and NGO allies, who cynically call themselves "friends of Haiti."

To promote the shared interests of their class (at home and abroad), Apaid and Boulos lead Haiti's Group of 184 (G-184), which human rights investigator Thomas Griffin described as a "business-centered coalition" composed of "wealthy individuals, businesses, professional, media and other associations."<sup>2</sup> He notes that in

"combination with the violent band of armed attackers closing in on Port-au-Prince, it provided the political force in Haiti that led to Aristide's ouster in February 2004."<sup>3</sup>

Established in December 2002, "after a powwow with the International Republican Institute in Santo Domingo [Dominican Republic],"<sup>4</sup> the G-184 rallied Haiti's rich and powerful against Aristide. Its members are funded by the Haitian-American Chamber of Commerce, the governments of the U.S.<sup>5</sup> and Canada (through the Canadian International Development Agency).<sup>6</sup>

Using deception and subterfuge, Apaid, Boulos and their cronies, fuelled the hatred of Aristide to a fevered pitch and set the stage for the 2004 coup. They financed and spoke at elite-sponsored rallies, provided frequent sound bites for domestic and foreign corporate media, and lead a general strike that most Haitians completely ignored.

After the coup, they hailed its

illegally-installed, puppet regime and worked together to pressure UN forces to escalate their raids against Aristide supporters in shantytowns like Cité Soleil, home to 300,000. (See page 18.)

Apaid and Boulos financed and armed a Cité-Soleil gang, led by Thomas Robinson (aka "Labanyè"), who was "perhaps the best known of all local gangsters." His goal was to "stifle the political voice of the poor and to wipe out the Lavalas movement."<sup>7</sup>

In December 2004, Labanyè thugs massacred Aristide supporters in Cité Soleil. This precipitated a UN attack that killed even more Aristide allies. As one Cité Soleil resident said

"Labanyè, controlled by Andre Apaid and Reginald Boulos, began a heavy attack...and many people were killed. The UN then used this as a pretext to invade our neighbourhood and end our calls for Aristide's return. It is clear they are working together to exterminate us."<sup>8</sup>



## Andy Apaid

Apaid's links to Labanyè are particularly strong. For his human rights report, U.S. lawyer Thomas Griffin interviewed "Cité Soleil residents, police officers and Cité Soleil leaders" who "stated that Apaid 'bought' Labanyè with US\$30,000."<sup>9</sup>

Griffin spoke to eyewitnesses who said that in July 2003, Apaid held a meeting with "several Lavalas street leaders in Cité Soleil." Also present was Leon Charles, who became Chief of Police after the coup. Apaid asked

"the young men to become the violent arm of his movement to undermine the elected government, and to crush the democracy movement in Cité Soleil. Only Labanyè agreed."<sup>10</sup>

Apaid admits that he then "directed the police to protect Labanyè's life, and 'not to arrest him, but to work with him.'" Apaid also said he had "great influence over Labanyè." This was corroborated by "numerous police officers" who "confirmed that Labanyè is killing for Apaid...that they remain under orders not to arrest him" and that "the protection order came from Andy Apaid and 'the bourgeoisie.'"<sup>11</sup>

After the coup, Labanyè gang's violence continued. Griffin reports that on September 30, 2004, when "a large group of Cité Soleil residents" tried to join a pro-democracy rally, "Labanyè and his gang began shooting at the crowd.... [and] many were killed." After that, "regular ...political meetings for Lavalas supporters in Cité Soleil" were "cancelled due to fear."<sup>12</sup>

Apaid had previously displayed endorsed violence as a political and economic tool. In a 2003 BBC interview, he "voiced support for rioters in Gonaïves who had torched government buildings."<sup>13</sup> He also "pulled a gun on demonstrators" from a union "who tried to picket in front of his plant."<sup>14</sup>

Apaid has links to Guy Philippe, the former police chief who led the rebel rampage across Haiti in February 2004, burning police stations, killing Lavalas supporters and creating the pretext needed by U.S., French and Canadian forces to impose a new government. Apaid is said to have

"funded [Philippe's] army. In a telling incident in northeast Haiti... on March 1, members of Philippe's gang attacked striking workers at the request of the employer."<sup>15</sup>

By using violence to oppose Aristide, Apaid followed "the political footsteps of his father." André Sr., "founder of Alpha Sewing in the 1970s," was "close to dictator... 'Baby Doc' Duvalier." Apaid Sr. even led a "civil society" (read: bourgeoisie) campaign to support the 1991-1994 military coup against Pres. Aristide, which successfully eased U.S. sanc-

tions on the export of goods from Haiti's assembly sweat-shops."<sup>16</sup>

While at a 1991 business conference in Miami, soon after Aristide's expulsion, Apaid, Sr., was asked how he would react if Aristide returned to Haiti. His reply: 'I'd strangle him!'"<sup>17</sup> Apaid was then president of PROMINEX, a U.S. government-funded project, spending millions of dollars "to encourage U.S. and Canadian firms to move their businesses to Haiti."<sup>18</sup>

The elder Apaid was "one of the chief lobbyists in the U.S."<sup>19</sup> for the military junta that ousted Aristide eight months after his first landslide election. And, he was "a major financial contributor" to Marc Bazin,<sup>20</sup> the World Bank bureaucrat installed as Prime Minister by the military regime in 1992.

In the 1990s, the most profitable part of Apaid's empire was Alpha Electronics. Its products were sold to U.S. war industries, such as Sperry/Unisys, IBM, Remington and Honeywell, for use in radar and sonar equipment.<sup>21</sup>

Apaid, Jr., "like his family before him, is the owner of several of the largest factories in Haiti."<sup>22</sup> U.S. Congress woman, Maxine Waters, noted that Apaid, who "owns about 15 or 16 factories in Haiti" was "accused of not paying his taxes, and that Mr. Aristide was insisting that he pay his taxes."<sup>23</sup>

Apaid's aversion to paying taxes was but one reason for his hatred of Aristide. Apaid also doesn't like paying his sweatshop workers. They receive some of the lowest wages in the Western Hemisphere. The textiles they make for North American firms, have made millions for Apaid and his importers, like Canada's Gildan Activewear. (See pages 44-46). This put Apaid in conflict with Aristide, who doubled the minimum wage. Apaid's free-trade-zone sweatshops "often pay below the minimum wage and...his employees are forced to work 78-hour weeks."<sup>24</sup>

Two weeks before the 2004 coup, Maxine Waters drew the attention of U.S. reporters to Apaid, saying: "I challenge the Department of State to find out about this man. Why do we have someone in Haiti [with] an American passport, owning factories in Haiti, triggering a coup, and leading the so-called opposition to a democratically elected president?"<sup>25</sup>



## Dr. Reginald Boulos

**B**oulos, the president of Haiti's Chamber of Commerce, is another industrialist of Middle Eastern heritage who was a leading light in the reactionary right's G-184.

He, and his brother Rudolph, are also key to the "Haiti Democracy Project," a right-wing, Washington-based front that used U.S. government "resources and programs and their diplomatic, State Department, Pentagon and UN/OAS [Organization of American States] connections, to help carry out the 2004...coup."<sup>26</sup>

The Boulos family is a longtime fixture in Haiti, owning "the USAID-funded Radio Vision 2000, the Delimart supermarket and *Le Matin*" newspaper.<sup>27</sup> Dr. Carlo Boulos ("papa doc" to Réginald and Rudolph) was appointed health minister by dictator "Papa Doc" Duvalier. Carlo founded Pharval Labs,<sup>28</sup> a pharmaceutical firm with many skeletons in its closet.

For instance in 1992, during the military regime, when a Pharval factory exploded—killing 15 and wounding hundreds—there was "never any explanation or investigation."<sup>29</sup>

In 1996, two poisonous Pharval cough syrups killed 88 children.<sup>30</sup> This tragic story has a Canadian connection:

"The toxic syrup base—which contained diethylene glycol, used in antifreeze and as a solvent—[was] traced to a shipment received by Pharval Labs, headed by Dr. Reginald and Rodolphe Boulos.... Pharval sold some to 4C (Caribbean Canadian Chemical Co.).... Their customers are the majority of the population, while those with the means

buy foreign-made medicines."<sup>31</sup>

The Canadian company, 4C (which brings to mind "3B," the villainous, Canadian-linked pharmaceutical firm in John LeCarré's *Constant Gardener*), is "a leading manufacturer and distributor of pharmaceutical...items"<sup>32</sup> in Haiti. When the deadly syrup was "distributed throughout poor neighborhoods of the capital,"<sup>33</sup> it was not Haiti's elite who died. A decade later, Pharval paid \$10,000 each to 70 victimized families.<sup>34</sup> Haitian organizations blamed the deaths on "privatization, because the state has dumped peoples' health into the hands of the private sector."<sup>35</sup>

In 2002, Pharval CEO Rudolph Boulos was investigated for "possible involvement in the assassination of Haitian journalist Jean Dominique who had been very critical of Pharval."<sup>36</sup>

Another scandal "victimizing innocent Haitian children and implicating Dr. Reginald Boulos," was revealed in 1996, when the Washington Office on Haiti (WOH) and the U.S. National Vaccine Info. Center (NVIC) reported that five years earlier, "over 2,000 Cité Soleil children had been innoculated with a measles vaccine" that was up to "500 times" stronger than "normal." This "U.S. government test" was conducted by the U.S.-funded Centres pour le Developpement et la Sante (CDS), headed by Reginald Boulos.<sup>37</sup>

WOH and NVIC said the vaccine "resulted in a higher than expected death rate" but "how many Haitian babies died as a result" is unknown.<sup>38</sup>

Boulos' CDS also used Cité Soleil residents as guinea pigs to test 'Norplant,' a subdermal contraceptive.<sup>39</sup> This was "done without...informed consent" and "Norplant removals": "were denied or delayed, even to women who suffered extremely severe side effects such as bleeding extensive enough to cause anemia or paralyzing headaches."<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile, 21 other medical experiments were being done in Cité Soleil.<sup>41</sup> How many were overseen by Boulos?

The good doctor's prestige has not been hurt—at least in the Canadian government's eyes—by his leadership of Haiti's rapacious business elite, his willingness to sacrifice Haiti's poorest of the poor, or his virulent support for the 2004 coup. These are more likely the very qualities that make Boulos an

attractive ally for Canada's plutocracy.

In September 2005, Canada's government flew Boulos to an exclusive, two-day session at its Meech Lake resort, near Ottawa. (This was where the 2003 "Ottawa Initiative" discussed Aristide's ouster and the UN occupation of Haiti. See pages 13-14.) One of the big issues on the table in 2005 was Haitian "privatization" and "private sector provision of public services." With Haiti's election on the horizon, and knowing that such policies are widely opposed, participants said privatization had to be "properly pushed." Some said "the international community" should "put pressure on Haitian actors by providing political and financial support" for privatization.<sup>42</sup>

Boulos was the most powerful among the small handful of Haitian business and regime officials brought in to meet a dozen bankers and 15 top CIDA and Foreign Affairs bureaucrats. Diplomats, like Canada's Claude Boucher, and Haiti's Robert Tippenhauer were there. Also on hand, were the event's U.S. and Canadian government-funded co-sponsors, FOCAL and Inter-American Dialogue (IAD).<sup>43</sup> They had worked with Apaid and Boulos' G-184 to foment the anti-Aristide fervour that facilitated the 2004 coup.

It is not an exaggeration to say that Boulos, and fellow agents of Haiti's elite, were brought to this secretive, invitation-only affair, to conspire with Canadian bankers, bureaucrats and government-funded agencies. Its criminal nature is also clear since Haiti's illegal regime was represented by Tippenhauer and others. (See page 33.)

Canadian banking and government interests knew it was "controversial" to recruit Haiti's business elite to influence policies, like privatization, that should only be decided by a duly-elected Haitian government. So, to facilitate this "dirty work," they contracted a government-funded agency. This was revealed by former Prime Minister Joe Clark, who—as FOCAL's president—chaired the meeting:

"There's no question that the private sector 20 years ago was a large part of what went wrong in Haiti. It concluded with some of the worst of the rulers in Haiti.... People were suspicious of the private sector because they didn't want [to] bring it in and

have those problems repeat themselves. It was controversial enough that it was not the kind of issue [for] the government or a development bank to address directly. It would be risky for them. So we proposed that we would do it. We being FOCAL. We had a very successful meeting. We had some really excellent people come from Haiti. Proving it could work...allowed governments ...[to] find ways to bring the private sector into the official development of transition plans of Haiti."<sup>43</sup>

Boulos was one of so-called "really excellent people" parachuted in to this government-funded confab to boost corporate influence over Haiti's "transitional" government. At the next FOCAL/IAD session held to empower Haiti's private sector, Boulos was the Haitian chosen to report on the 2005 meeting and "subsequent progress."<sup>44</sup>

Like Andy Apaid, Boulos is not squeamish about using violence against Haiti's poor majority in order to fulfil his economic aspirations. For example, at a May-2005 meeting between Haitian business leaders and the illegal regime's Chief of Police, Leon Charles, "Boulos demanded the U.S.-installed government...allow the business community to form...private security firms and arm them with automatic weapons. This was clearly a demand to legalize the business community's own private militias to kill what Boulos, and others in his circle, have referred to as 'Lavalas bandits.' Boulos also suggested the Latortue regime allow businesses to withhold taxes...to buy more powerful weapons for the police."<sup>45</sup>

Displaying a contempt for compromise that typifies the sense of entitlement rampant among corporate elites everywhere, Boulos said: "If they don't allow us to do this then we'll take on [our] own initiative and do it anyway."<sup>46</sup>

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