

Why is this “NGO” Acting as a Tool of Imperialism?

By Nikolas Barry-Shaw, researcher and activist with Haiti Action Montréal.

It is a strange day when a progressive NGO finds itself on the same side of an issue as Roger Noriega, the U.S. diplomat notorious for his role in organizing the *contra* army that terrorized Nicaragua in the 1980s. Yet this is precisely the case with Alternatives, a Québec-based “non-governmental international solidarity organization.” Its mandate would normally put such a group at odds with Noriega. Not so, reveals the July 2005 edition of *Le Journal Alternatives*, a monthly publication inserted in Montréal’s *Le Devoir* newspaper.

Alternative’s director of communications, François L’Ecuyer, had a front-page article in the *Le Devoir* insert called “The Militarization of Peace in Haiti.” This shameful parody of journalism was filled with unsubstantiated assertions, illogical arguments, anonymous sources and anecdotes masquerading as hard evidence.

L’Ecuyer bizarrely announced that “word is spreading” that MINUSTAH (the UN military force in Haiti) has a pro-Lavalas bias. As evidence, he said:

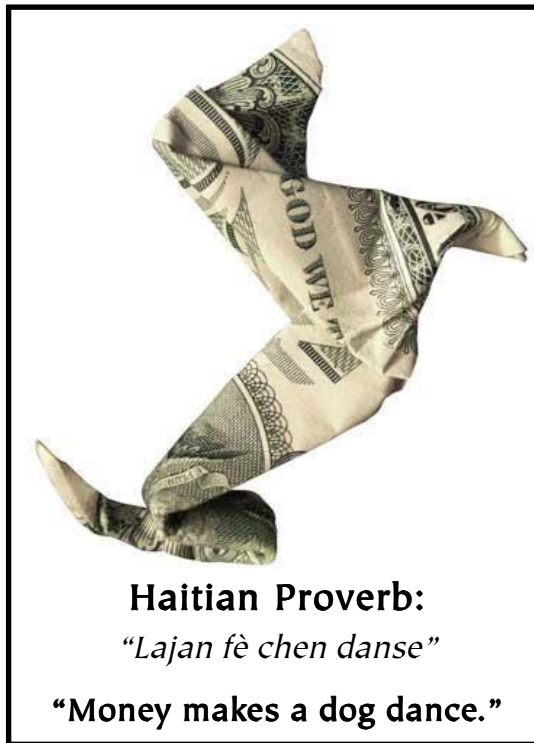
“In February 2005, demonstrations by armed Aristide supporters proceeded under tight protection of the UN forces, who carefully kept the police away.”

Without a specific date, we can only guess which protests he is referring to. Perhaps the one on February 8 by thousands of peaceful Lavalas supporters that, according to *Agence Haitien Presse*, “was interrupted by a police patrol accompanied by...*attachés*, who reportedly began shooting at the demonstrators, injuring several of them,” before UN troops intervened. Or maybe it was the February 28 rally, when UN

troops stood by as Haitian National Police (HNP) fired on unarmed protesters, killing five and wounding dozens.

This incident so embarrassed the UN that it was compelled to provide a modicum of protection to protesters. Under this protection, numbers swelled at peaceful rallies calling for Aristide’s return and for the release of hundreds of political prisoners.

MINUSTAH, however, soon returned to its habit of letting the HNP terrorize peaceful rallies. On March 24,



police opened fire on a rally, killing three to five people. On April 27, nine more were killed despite UN supervision. The UN’s quick reversal was largely due to badgering by the coup regime and elite-owned Haitian media that—like L’Ecuyer—accused the UN of defending Lavalas “gangsters.”

L’Ecuyer’s hazy accusations are flatly contradicted by a detailed Harvard Law School human rights report

studying the performance of the UN in Haiti. This study, from October 2004 and January 2005, found that:

“MINUSTAH has effectively provided cover for the police to wage a campaign of terror in Port-au-Prince’s slums. Even more distressing than MINUSTAH’s complicity in HNP abuses are credible allegations of human rights abuses perpetrated by MINUSTAH itself.”

On July 6, Reuters said that: “about 400 UN troops with 41 armored vehicles and helicopters, and several dozen Haitian police officers, conducted a raid in Cité Soleil, Haiti’s largest slum.”

While the UN claimed only five “criminals” had been killed “[r]esidents said the number of people killed... ranged from 25 to 40.” Reuters quoted the head of the *Medecins Sans Frontieres* in Haiti saying “27 people [were] wounded by gunshots on July 6. Three quarters were children and women.”

By thoughtlessly regurgitating claims of the UN’s pro-Lavalas bias, Alternative’s L’Ecuyer obscured serious human rights abuses by the UN, and aided the elite’s push for even more repressive UN actions against the poor, such as the July 6 massacre.

L’Ecuyer’s solution to the problem of insecurity was to arm and otherwise support the HNP. The U.S. complied with another shipment of weapons to the installed government in early August, despite a long-standing arms embargo. According to numerous human rights reports, the HNP are the leading cause of Haiti’s escalating violence. A recent International Crisis Group report notes that the HNP

“have taken over old FAd’H [military] practices, including military-style operations in the capital’s poor neighbourhoods with little regard for collateral damage to civilians.”

This is hardly a surprise, considering more than 500 ex-soldiers were being integrated into the HNP, with top ranks staffed almost entirely by former military. Meanwhile, another 500-1000 ex-soldiers were in training as police [in mid-2005]. In addition to wanton attacks on the poor, according to the ICG and other sources, the new



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“In a country like Haiti, in which democratic culture has never taken hold, the concept of the common good and the meaning of elections and representation are limited to the educated elites, and in particular to those who have received citizen education within the social movements.”

This patronising statement revealing an incredibly elitist attitude towards Haitians comes from a February 2008 report by Alternatives International and Spain’s Foundation for International Relations and External Dialogue (FRIDE).¹

The report’s Canadian author, Amélie Gauthier, is FRIDE’s “Peace, Security and Human Rights” expert on

Haiti. She has an MA in International Cooperation and Project Management, and a BA in International Business and Finance. Gauthier has worked in the commercial department (2001-2002) and as a political analyst (2005-2006) for Canada’s Embassy in Spain, as a foreign currency market expert for the private sector (2003-2004), at McGill’s Business School (1998–2000) and for

the Spanish Confederation of Business Organizations (2000-2001).²

In November 2007, Gauthier spoke on Haitian development at a Montréal event, promoted by Alternatives, and supported by Canada’s Department of National Defence.³

References

1. *Haiti: Voices of the Actors*, Feb. 2008 www.maximsnews.com/news20080221fridehaitiummissionresearch10802210105.htm
2. Ibid.
3. Programme Missions de Paix www.alternatives.ca/IMG/pdf/programme_missions_de_paix.pdf

HNP engaged in kidnapping and drug running—old habits of the FAd’H. Astonishingly, in an article about the sources of instability and “militarization” in Haiti, L’Ecuyer does not mention the former military, rebranded first as “rebels” while they helped overthrow Aristide and then as “police” to repress poor neighbourhoods.

Correcting L’Ecuyer’s erroneous views leads to an inversion of his main arguments. His cries of UN “softness” towards pro-Lavalas gangs are not justified. Rather, they are attempts to bully the UN into even greater repression. Sadly, the increased frequency of brutal “anti-gang” raids into poor neighborhoods appears to indicate that UN forces are heeding these calls.

Alternatives’ website gives an indication of the forces behind their reprehensible position on Haiti. Over 50% of its funding comes from Canada’s government, with the bulk from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Moreover, in an interview, L’Ecuyer admitted that all 15 groups that Alternatives works with in Haiti (many of which also receive CIDA funding) are anti-Lavalas.

Not coincidentally, L’Ecuyer and Alternatives said little about the widespread human rights abuses committed after the 2004 coup by Haiti’s interim government, a regime that was strongly supported by Canada. This severely undermines the credibility of Alternatives’ commitment to social justice. While Alternatives would no doubt object to being called a tool of Canadian imperialism, L’Ecuyer’s article may lead many to that conclusion.

Source: “Alternatives... to what?” *ZNet*, August 17, 2005.

Malign Neglect or Imperialism?

By Nikolas Barry-Shaw

Pierre Beaudet’s article, “Haiti: Where should the left stand?”¹ defended Alternatives’ position on Haiti and seriously minimized the ruthless violence of the coup regime and its Canadian-trained police. He devoted only one sentence to the repression of Lavalas supporters and voiced only tepid opposition to it. By prefacing his trite reference to the anti-Lavalas witch hunt with the discredited notion that Aristide used “hard nosed gangs” to “create havoc,” Beaudet implicitly blamed the violence on its victims.

Beaudet portrayed Lavalas as little more than a gang of criminals and drug runners. Yet the depth of support that Lavalas enjoys belies such characterizations. Most of its supporters are in the countryside which is not exactly the preserve of ganglords and drug dealers. Dr. Paul Farmer, renowned for medical work in Haiti, notes:

“In all my years in Haiti, [I] have never once seen a peasant with a gun. And almost all...are members of Famni Lavalas. Now I’ve tended to many gunshot wounds, but they’ve been inflicted by former soldiers, police or people who have cars to drive—not peasants.”

In cities, Lavalas mobilized tens of thousands on many occasions since the coup, despite police use of gunfire to break up such protests. Even observers as hostile as the U.S. and Canadian embassies acknowledge that Lavalas is Haiti’s most popular political movement.

Beaudet’s critique of foreign

involvement in Haiti boils down to an accusation of malign neglect. He asserts that Canada has not been “generous” enough with its aid and the international community has failed to “clean up the mess.” Yet UN troops have been trying to “clean up the mess” using frequent raids into pro-Lavalas slums, with deadly consequences.

Contrary to Beaudet’s belief, Canada *was* extremely generous to the Haitian coup regime that it helped install. This regime was exceedingly corrupt and undemocratic. It repressed political opponents on a mass scale and reordered Haiti’s economy along neoliberal lines. But Beaudet’s says this regime was merely “ineffective.”

The hypocrisy (and serviceability to power) of Beaudet’s stance is worth noting. When Aristide was in power, he was accused of being undemocratic, corrupt and neoliberal. Although he received unrelenting condemnation from government-funded NGOs, like Alternatives, the U.S./Canada puppet regime received no such opprobrium. Beaudet was more interested in “the crimes that everyone knew Aristide had committed,” than about the serious crimes of the “interim government.” These are crimes for which we, as Canadians, hold far more responsibility. In short, Aristide is not the issue; Canada’s role as a junior partner to U.S. imperialism is the issue.

Source: “Malign Neglect or Imperialism? NGOs Blind to Canada’s Crimes in Haiti,” *ZNet*, October 24, 2005. www.zmag.org/content/print_article.cfm?itemID=8988§ionID=1