

Canada's 'Right Arm': FOCAL's Role in the Privatization of Haiti

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On behalf of the Canadian government, the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) is playing a central role in facilitating certain key aspects of a major neocolonial 'reconstruction' program in Haiti. This program involves the dismantling and subsequent restructuring of Haiti's entire political, economic and social structure by the "international community." What we are witnessing in Haiti is the complete destruction of a nation, to serve the interests of capital. Every aspect of Haitian society is being colonized and opened up to the 'free' market flood of foreign products. Much of the country is being handed over to a supposedly "progressive" "civil society" of extremely wealthy Haitians, or simply seized by transnational corporations. The role of Haiti's elected government is being reduced to simply watching over this colonial arrangement as the Haitian state becomes increasingly powerless.

By doing all this, the threat that a future Jean-Bertrand Aristide might bring popular reforms is being eliminated. The 2004 coup, the brutal murder of thousands in resistant neighbourhoods, and the continuous extensions of the UN occupation were (and are) necessary to assure this program's successful implementation. Canada has taken a leading role in this whole operation and, as former Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay has stated, "Canada will be [in Haiti] for an indefinite period of time."¹

FOCAL, which bills itself as "an independent, non-governmental organization"² is, in reality, a Canadian government-funded "think tank" that was established in 1990 as part of a cabinet strategy to deepen ties with Latin America and the Caribbean.³ That was the same year that Canada joined the Organization of American States (OAS). In the early 1990s, Canada's economic and po-

litical interests in the region increased because—according to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)—the area had "moved from state-run, protectionist economies to a more liberalized, free-market approach."⁴ (By 1990, Nicaragua's populist Sandinista government had been forced out of power after the U.S.-instigated *contra* war and embargo. Meanwhile in El Salvador, Guatemala and Peru, revolutionary forces had either capitulated or been beheaded by 1992. In other words, through genocidal tactics, imperialism had successfully crushed many popular movements.)

Through all aspects of its work, FOCAL supports the political and economic interests of the Canadian government. A 2004 Foreign Affairs review of FOCAL happily states that it "effectively fills a strategic niche that is currently unoccupied by any other institution in Canada."⁵ The government and its policy makers rely on FOCAL to provide "an up-to-date snapshot of what is really happening on the ground."⁶ Unfortunately however, FOCAL—like other CIDA-funded institutions—are hopelessly out of touch with Haiti's impoverished majority. FOCAL has preferred instead to initiate partnerships with Haiti's notoriously self-interested business elite. FOCAL has been instrumental in forging links between the Canadian state, Haitian corporations and international financial institutions, like the World Bank and the IMF. Together they are working to achieve their common strategic goals.⁷

Despite its self-promoted image as an "independent policy institute,"⁸ FOCAL is actually a powerful tool of the Canadian government. This is reflected in FOCAL's funding, 70% of

which comes from two sources: CIDA and Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs.⁹ Much of the rest comes from "other Canadian government departments," the OAS, the Ford Foundation (established by the Nazi supporter, Henry Ford), and multi-billionaire George Soros' Open Society Institute.¹⁰

Since the 2004 coup, FOCAL has made Haiti a top priority. In terms of creating strategic partnerships, it describes three key areas of its work:

- (1) "Private Sector Involvement and Development"
- (2) "Facilitating and Expanding Latin American Involvement in Haiti,"
- (3) "Developing the Haitian Diaspora as a Development Actor."¹¹

FOCAL's executive-director, and the coordinator of its Haiti Project, is Carlo Dade. This BA graduate has an impressive sounding resumé. He is a former official of the World Bank, a founding member of the U.S. Enterprise Research Institute and Foundation for Latin America, and a former-employee of the Inter-American Foundation (IAF).¹² The IAF is a U.S. government 'aid agency' that funded Haiti's pro-business "civil society" organizations before and after the 2004 coup.¹³

In a FOCAL policy paper published one month after Aristide's ouster, Dade referred to Haiti's twice-democratically elected and widely-popular president as "increasingly corrupt and demagogic." He went on to essentially blame Aristide for the devastating effects brought on by the U.S. and Canadian aid-embargo of Haiti, and called his presidency the "most spectacular" of Haiti's historic failures.¹⁴ Dade represented FOCAL before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade (SCFAIT) in April 2004, as members of Aristide's popularly-elected Lavalas Party were being brutalized by foreign troops and openly-rampaging rebel soldiers. (See pp.14-15.) He advised MPs that quelling opposition to the newly empowered "interim government" would require that "it



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appears to be democratically done. That,” he said, “creates a situation where you can start to rebuild institutions.”¹⁵ Canada, he continued, would need to undertake a 10-year project to rebuild Haiti’s government, ministry by ministry. And, Dade listed a right wing, U.S. State Department-funded business group, the Center for Free Enterprise and Democracy (CLED), its founder Lionel Delatour (see sidebar below), the Haitian private sector and Haitian Diaspora as examples of the “good people” that Canada should work with.

Haitian Diaspora and the ICF

The Martin government followed Dade’s recommendations and, in December 2004, helped FOCAL organize a two-day conference in Montréal with the Haitian Diaspora. This event, the first of its kind in Canada, had over 500 participants. Besides selected representatives of the Haitian Canadian community, many organizations, embassies and government-funded institutes from the U.S., Haiti, France and Latin America were also present. Top officials from the Canadian government rubbed shoulders with officials from the illegal, coup-installed dictatorship. Prime Minister Paul Martin, Foreign Affairs Minister Pierre Pettigrew, Prime Minister Gerard Latortue (the head of Haiti’s puppet regime) and top ministers in Haiti’s *de facto* government were among the keynote speakers. Prominent invitees included representatives from various organizations behind the destabilization of Aristide’s elected government including the:

- International Republican Institute (see pp.17-18.)
- Haiti Democracy Project (see p.52)
- Group of 184 (G184) (see pp.50-53)
- ENFOFAMN (see p.49).

The purported goal of the conference was to

“bring together the Haitian Diaspora ... present the Interim Cooperation Framework (ICF) and seek input from the Diaspora on how it can work through and support the ICF.”¹⁶

The ICF is the neo-liberal agreement adopted in July 2004 by the unelected Latortue regime at the direction of foreign powers that backed the

coup. Drafted by various international institutions, including the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and CIDA, it was the first step in Haiti’s post-coup restructuring. Its aim was primarily to reverse the popular reforms put in place by Aristide’s government. Among the ICF’s devastating measures, key Haitian public enterprises were privatized and the minimum wage, doubled by Aristide, was cut in half. Canada was key in the creation, financing and implementation of this agreement.

FOCAL’s Montréal conference enabled the Canadian government to build the Diaspora’s support for the ICF and the foreign military occupation of Haiti. This began the process of assimilating them as “stakeholders” in the government’s program. (Once made to feel involved in a program, it becomes increasingly difficult for “stakeholders” to criticize it.)

Why was it so crucial to get the Diaspora ‘on board’? As Dade explained during testimony at SCFAIT,

“They are the largest source of aid in Haiti.”¹⁷ Indeed, annual remittances by the Diaspora to Haiti are four to six times larger than all forms of international aid combined¹⁸ and make up 25% of Haiti’s entire GDP. The result is an enormous source of funds to Haiti that had previously been largely independent. This made the Diaspora an impediment to the colonial plan for Haiti—such as during the 2000-2004 aid embargo on Aristide, when the Diaspora was virtually Haiti’s only source of desperately-needed assistance.

While its Montréal conference was of great significance to the imperial project in Haiti, an even greater contribution made by FOCAL was to organize two high-level conferences between Haiti’s private sector and various international banks and developmental agencies involved in Haiti’s so-called “reconstruction.” It is important to examine how these two crucial meetings have impacted the privatization of Haiti’s education system.

FOCAL’s Point Man on Haiti

Lionel Delatour—a FOCAL advisor and organizer of its first Willson House conference—was a key member of Haiti’s elitist-led, U.S. and CIDA-funded Group of 184.¹ (See pp.50-53.)

Delatour is also a founding board member of the Haiti Democracy Project (HDP),² a right-wing, U.S. State-Department-linked “NGO,” funded largely by the Haitian pharmaceutical magnate and G184 leader, Reginald Boulos. (See p.52.) The HDP—like Canada’s Rights and Democracy—called on the UN’s military force in Haiti, MINUSTAH, to be “more aggressive” in its violent crackdown against Aristide supporters.³

Delatour also helped create the aggressive, neo-liberal Center for Free Enterprise and Democracy (CLED), another U.S. government-funded “NGO” that brought together Haiti’s powerful business groups to help oust Aristide’s elected government. CLED and the Haitian Chamber of Commerce and Industry are the two Haitian organizations affiliated with the National Endowment for Democracy’s Center for International Private Enterprise.⁴ (See p.47.)



Lionel Delatour

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**Willson House Process:
Part One, Meech Lake**

Overlooking Meech Lake, Québec, near Ottawa, there is a Canadian government facility called Willson House. This is where plans for the 2004 coup against Aristide were hashed out in early 2003. Appropriately then, it was at here that FOCAL held its first ‘private sector’ meeting in September 2005. This conference—which began “The Willson House process”—was organized in collaboration with FOCAL’s U.S. counterpart, a conservative think tank called the Inter-American Dialogue (IAD).¹⁹ It receives funding from the World Bank, the U.S. government’s Agency for International Development (USAID), a slew of corporate foundations and government agencies including CIDA and Canada’s Mission to the OAS.²⁰

This FOCAL-IAD event brought together members of Haiti’s business elite—hand-picked for their “vision of the country”—and “responsive” donor agencies such as USAID, CIDA and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).²¹ The meeting was the brainchild of two men: Joe Clark (the former Prime Minister of Canada, the president of FOCAL and a member of the IAD) and IDB president Enrique Iglesias, who identified Haiti as an ideal focus for private sector development.

The man enlisted by FOCAL to be its chief advisor for this meeting was



Willson House

Haitian Proverb:

“Ti chen gen fòs devan kay mèt li.”

**“A little dog is very brave
in front of his master’s house.”**

Lionel Delatour.²² He continues to advise FOCAL on all of its private sector work in Haiti.²³ With the involvement of Delatour, it is not surprising that top invitees to the Willson House conference, included Reginald Boulos, a spokesperson for G184 and one of the wealthiest, and perhaps most hated people in Haiti. Also there was Max Chauvet, director of the USAID-funded newspaper *Le Nouvelliste*,²⁴ who was a leader of the National Association of Haitian Media.²⁵ (See p.28, pp.34-37.)

The FOCAL-IAD meeting dealt with the usual neoliberal themes regarding the supposed need for a 10-15-year contract for Haitian security, decentralization of the national government, pri-

vatization of state enterprises and the development of tourism and manufacturing in Haiti. The delegates also expressed concern that after the next election, Haitians might empower yet another “anti-business” government. They therefore stressed that policies should be put in place prior to the 2006 elections to prepare for such a dire consequence. Another undemocratic conclusion of the meeting was that private sector dialogue, with every level of government, should be institutionalized so business could help shape state policies and co-manage international financial aid with the coup regime.

Attendees agreed to consolidate their work and chose Haiti’s edu-

Doing the State’s “Controversial” Work

By Richard Sanders

During Haiti’s coup-empowered regime, Canadian government and banking interests knew it was “controversial” to recruit Haiti’s business elite to influence important policies, like privatization, that should really only be decided by a duly elected government. So, to facilitate this “risky” enterprise, FOCAL—a CIDA-funded agency—stepped forward to take on the task. This was revealed by former Progressive Conservative Prime Minister Joe Clark, who—as FOCAL’s president—chaired the Willson House meeting at Meech Lake near Ottawa in September 2005:

“There’s no question that the private sector 20 years ago was a large part of what went wrong in Haiti. It colluded with some of the worst of the rulers in Haiti.... People were



Joe Clark

Canadian Prime Minister (1979-80)
Former Foreign Minister (1984-91)
Director, FOCAL (2004-present)

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.”* (Emphasis added.) (Matt Campbell, “Interviewing Joe Clark,” *mattcampbell.ca*, October 12, 2006.)

Source: “The ABCs of Haiti’s Elite: Apaid, Boulos and Canada, *Press for Conversion!*,” March 2007, pp.47-49. coat.ncf.ca/our_magazine/links/60/60-10.pdf

cation system as their first project. The IDB agreed to assist the process, which they dubbed the Willson House Process, and invitee Carl Braun of Haiti's private Unibank was assigned the task of creating a foundation to channel funds into a program to privatize Haitian education. Delatour's CLED was assigned to do outreach to other important private actors and FOCAL agreed to secure funding and support from the OAS Office for the Promotion of Democracy. Carlo Dade referred to the process started at the conference as

"ground-breaking developments...in Haitian education" that held great promise to "produce initiatives beyond education."²⁶

The following month, the newly-engaged Haitian private sector attended the International Donors' Conference on Haiti in Belgium. There, plans were made to extend the ICF into the term of the soon-to-be elected Haitian government. The ICF would then serve as a bridge to lead the new government from the election to the elaboration of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). PRSPs are supposed to assist countries promote growth and reduce poverty in close consultation with international financial institutions.²⁷ However, they are in reality, a coded way of corroding the power of Third-World states. Like the failed Structural Adjustment Programs they have replaced, PRSPs are a mandatory

requirement for developing countries desiring loans and debt cancellation.

Building on the drafts created by the foreign-backed, coup-imposed Latortue regime, the newly-elected Préval government created an interim PRSP for 2007-2009 that continued the process begun under the ICF. However, Préval's government has complained that most of the promised funds are not being disbursed. And, those funds that are forthcoming are not being channelled through government ministries. FOCAL's Carlo Dade provides a clue to why this is the case by saying:

"Of course, not everyone had high expectations for the new government. Those in the Haitian private sector and international community who supported his candidacy did so somewhat reluctantly and have been waiting to be surprised by the new president. In this case, Préval is looking a lot like Godot."²⁸

The private sector, however, has continued to "meet expectations" since the Willson House meeting. In April 2006, Carl Braun officially launched Foundation Unibank to work with national and global institutions to develop Haiti's social programs.²⁹ Then, in December 2006, the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) opened a Haiti office to strengthen the private sector's role in development.³⁰ CIPE is one pillar of the National Endowment for Democracy. (See p.47.)

Willson House, Part Two: Meeting in Atlanta

In February 2007, FOCAL and IAD reconvened the Willson House process for a conference at the Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia. This event, called "The Role of the Private Sector in Improving Educational Outcomes in Haiti," was co-chaired by Joe Clark. FOCAL's report acknowledged CIDA's central role saying:

"FOCAL...wishes to express gratitude to the Canadian International Development Agency for taking over the role of principal financial sponsor and champion of the Willson House process, and consequently of the Atlanta roundtable."³¹

The only representatives of Haiti's elected government attending this conference were the Minister of Education and Vocational Training, and (supplanting his brother Reginald from the first Willson House meeting) Senator Rudolph Boulos, a G184 leader and founder of the Haitian Democracy Project. (See p.52) Boulos has been investigated for involvement in the murder of journalist Jean Domin-ique, and for violating Haitian laws regarding eligibility to hold elected office.

The list of Haitian invitees reads like a who's who in the ouster of Aristide. At least seventeen of the twenty delegates were linked to the G184. In addition, Preval's assigned economic

Haiti's Elite and Private Schools

By Richard Sanders

For many years, the Haitian Foundation for Private Education (FONHEP) was led by Rosny Desroches who was Education Minister during the neo-Duvalierist military junta of General Henri Namphy (1986-1987).¹ Desroches also led the Civil Society Initiative Group which, "wholly unrepresentative of the Haitian majority,...was predominantly a collection of business and religious elite organisations."² When it evolved into the anti-Aristide Group of 184, Desroches was one of its leading representatives.



Rosny Desroches

Founded in the late 1980s with funding from USAID,³ FONHEP became one of Canada's "Key Haitian Partners" after the 2004 coup. CIDA gave FONHEP \$7 million to col-

laborate with the coup regime and its allies in the Haitian Economists' Association, several right-wing private education foundations and the Catholic, Methodist and Anglican churches.⁴ In August 2007, FONHEP received another \$455,000 from CIDA.⁵

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advisor and former USAID employee Gabriel Verret, also participated.³²

Two examples of 'public private partnerships' in education were presented at the meeting:

- (1) a Colombian project in which 110 corporations were involved in privatizing Colombia's education sector, valued at about US\$2 trillion!³³
- (2) Mayor Bloomberg's program to corporatize New York City's public education system. Contrary to FOCAL's glowing claims, this program has thrown NYC's public system into chaos.³⁴

The FOCAL-IAD meeting in Atlanta sketched out these private sector involvements as models for the privatization of Haiti's education sector. The expectation was for a 30-year framework bringing together an increasing number of private sector actors to work with the state to develop education policy, regulatory guidelines, specialized training programs and to create a central private structure for education funds. This framework was enthusiastically embraced by the participants, including representatives from Haiti's private banks and schools, Promo-Capital, Haiti's Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Haitian Tourism Association, and the Haitian Foundation for Private Education. (See "Haiti's Elite and Private Schools," p. 11.) The FOCAL-IAD delegates agreed to form a coordinating group, led by Foundation Unibank and the IAB, to get donors to direct ICF funds to the project.

As Carlo Dade and fellow FOCAL staff-person Leslie Fillion-Wilkinson proudly put it in late 2007, the "groundbreaking developments...in Haitian education" were the result of a "considerable breakthrough" that had all begun in 2005 thanks to FOCAL's revolutionary "Willson House process."

Dade and Fillion-Wilkinson further boast that this FOCAL-facilitated process is "now firmly in the hands of the Haitian private sector." And, so detached are they from reality in their assessment of this corporate-led process that they actually describe the business executives that FOCAL recruited into this scheme as "leaders of the progressive Haitian private sector."³⁵ With such supposedly "progressive" Haitian

corporate bosses as these, representing the elite interests of the G184, who needs regressive ones?

Thanks to FOCAL's "progressive" efforts, the ability of Preval's elected government to build a visionary Haitian public education system—without the interference of foreign and domestic corporate powers—has been severely undermined, if not eliminated. But unfortunately, this is just the beginning of what FOCAL and its masters in the Canadian government have in store for Haiti.

As Carlo Dade said to a parliamentary committee in 2004,

"Start with one institution [and] as money comes in and as you work with the Diaspora...[in] a staged process...from there you can start building other institutions"³⁵

FOCAL's privatization plan for Haiti's education system is but one focus within an entire colonial program that is now being foisted upon that occupied country. FOCAL and the twisted private enterprise networks that it has helped to meld have already begun discussing future projects for Haiti. They now have their sights set on using private enterprise partners to transform public health, public transport, public markets, public housing, and so on.

When will the implementation of such neoliberal colonial plans ever end? One can only imagine the dire consequences that future CIDA-funded, FOCAL efforts in Haiti will have in further entrenching the private sector's predatory influence over government policies in that impoverished country.

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