

# Combating Poverty and the Enemy of Civil Society

By Richard Sanders, Editor, *Press for Conversion!*

The Montréal-based Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI) is a largely CIDA-funded aid agency whose “mission” is “combating poverty and exclusion”<sup>1</sup>—based on its “core values” of cooperation, respect, equity and commitment. Unfortunately, when it came to “combating” poverty in Haiti, CECI joined the propaganda efforts of Canada’s most-virulently anti-Aristide network, the Roundtable on Haiti (CPH). (See pp.49-50.)

In mid-February 2004, CECI endorsed an outrageously partisan CPH statement that echoed the voice of Haiti’s wealthy elite, and their foreign backers, by demanding that “Aristide must go.”<sup>2</sup> This statement came just before the coup when U.S.-armed “rebels” were shooting their way through Haiti with impunity,

terrorising Aristide supporters, burning down police stations, health clinics and setting hundreds of convicts free from prisons to join their politically-motivated killing spree. (See pp.14-15.)

This vitriolic CECI-endorsed document not only labeled Aristide’s elected government a “regime of terror,” it ludicrously placed Aristide on a par with the Duvaliers. It abounded in ridiculously exaggerated claims seemingly lifted from Haiti’s rightwing media and from such anti-Aristide organizations in Haiti as CONAP, the Group of 184 (G184) and the National Coalition for Haitian Rights-Haiti.<sup>3</sup> These CIDA-funded groups were all cited favourably by CPH as representing the best interests of Haiti’s “civil society.”<sup>4</sup>

To its credit, CECI eventually parted company

with the CPH. Yves Engler, a researcher and activist with Haiti Action Montréal, has noted that “a CECI spokesperson” told him “they were uncomfortable with the political nature of the CPH.”<sup>5</sup>

However, CECI continues to “partner” with such elite, anti-Aristide groups in Haiti as SOFA (a member of the G184<sup>6</sup>) and ENFOFANM,<sup>7</sup> whose representative, Danielle Magloire, was instrumental in the coup process. (See p.49.) These two CIDA-funded groups demanded the ouster of Aristide’s

was the “enemy” of “civil society,” discounts the fact that the majority of Haiti’s impoverished society supported their elected government. For example, on January 1, 2004—just two months before the coup—the *Miami Herald* reported that “hundreds of thousands” of Haitians enthusiastically rallied to support their president.<sup>10</sup> No anti-Aristide protest, before or since, ever came close to drawing so many participants. So, the so called “civil society” that CECI, CPH and other CIDA-funded

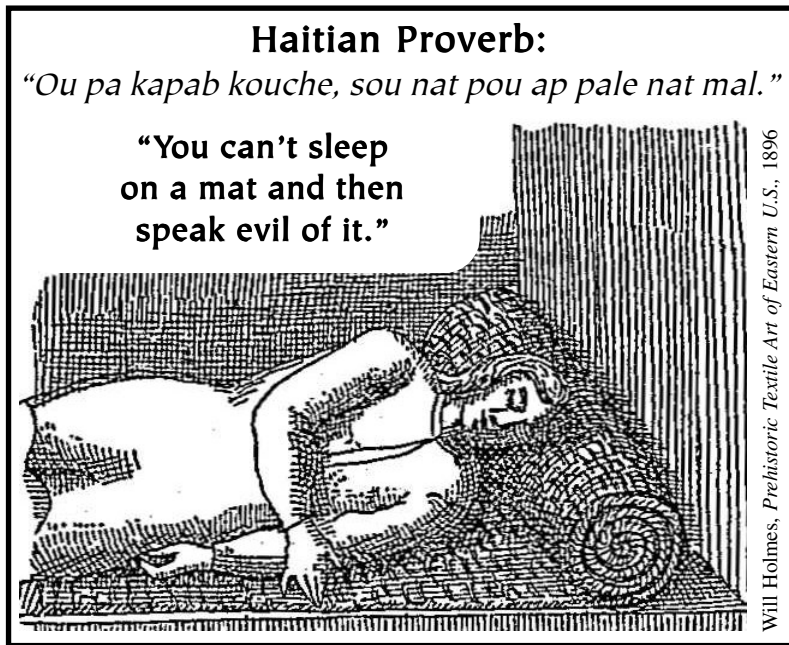
groups saw as the “enemy” of Aristide was actually only a small, partisan segment of Haiti’s entire “civil society.”

In order to promote its efforts, CECI has teamed up with a well-known Québec musician of Haitian origin named Luck Mervil. While Mervil was in Port-au-Prince in 2004, he proudly took part in “rallies and marches for the departure” of the “dictator Aristide,”<sup>11</sup> says Haitian journalist Nancy

Roc—a hardline anti-Aristide activist with Haiti’s G184-linked Radio Metropole. (See p.27 and “Richard Widmaier,” p.34.) Whether this was during Mervil’s CECI-sponsored tour to Haiti that year is unknown.

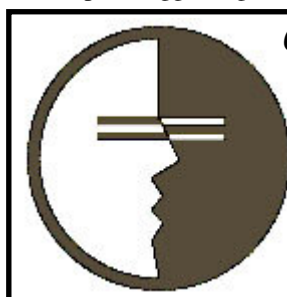
Yves Engler has noted that “prior to the coup, CECI’s honorary spokesperson, Haitian-Québec singer and high profile Québec nationalist, Luc Mervil, led a demonstration in Montréal demanding Aristide’s ouster.”<sup>12</sup>

Engler also says that CECI has “publicly endorsed the UN occupation. On January 31, 2007, their spokesperson told *Le Devoir* that ‘the muscular interventions led by MINUSTAH [UN military forces] in the hot zones of the capital have cooled down the passion of the armed groups.



elected government and then hide the worst atrocities of the Canadian backed coup regime that replaced it.<sup>8</sup>

CECI’s own summary of Haitian politics reveals the same underlying bias about Haitian “civil society” that permeates all elite-backed Haitian groups and their CIDA-funded Canadian partners within the CPH. For example, CECI explained in early 2004 that the Haitian “state is often seen as an enemy by civil society groups, and vice versa.”<sup>9</sup> This militaristic metaphor suggesting that Aristide’s government



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We can now circulate more freely in the capital.”<sup>13</sup>

While MINUSTAH’s “muscular interventions” were praised by CECI because they allowed its CIDA-paid workers to “circulate more freely” in Haiti, what CECI’s analysis ignores is that the UN’s strongarm operations have killed many innocent Haitians, including children. (See p.27.) Rather than “cool down the passions” of those whose elected government was overthrown, such crimes against humanity will, understandably, enrage them.

CECI’s workers circulating in Haiti have received financing from the World Bank and the Washington-based

Pan American Development Foundation (PADF).<sup>14</sup> Neither are voices of the poor. PADF partners include many large U.S. banks and major multinational corporations, several U.S. government departments, the American Chambers of Commerce in various countries, including Haiti, as well as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).<sup>15</sup>

CECI’s online documents acknowledge the WB and IMF as having funded several of its programs. However, none of CECI’s documents critique, for example, the negative impacts of these agencies’ policies, particularly their structural adjustment programs,

that forced Haiti’s shift from agricultural self-sufficiency to a devastating reliance on imported food, like U.S. rice.<sup>16</sup>

Over half of CECI’s \$30 million annual budget (2005-2006) came from CIDA.<sup>17</sup> One \$200,000 CIDA-funded project in Haiti was called “Democratic Citizenship Education in the Northeast.” Of that amount, \$140,000 was allocated to CECI during Latortue’s regime,<sup>18</sup> i.e., during the undemocratic, Canadian-sponsored dictatorship empowered by Haiti’s 2004 coup. CECI has more recently received CIDA contracts totalling \$25 million. Much of this is for “developing democracy” and “local governance” in Africa and Asia.<sup>19</sup>

## The Revenge of the Haitian Elite

By Richard Sanders

**M**arch 2004 was one of the most brutal periods in Haitian history. Thousands of supporters of Haiti’s deposed Lavalas government were subjected to a vicious terror campaign. The adjacent article by Peter Hallward outlines some of the atrocities committed that month.

Immediately after the February 29 kidnapping of Aristide, a regime change was imposed on Haiti by a combination of foreign troops, paramilitary terror, propaganda from Haiti’s elite-led, foreign-funded “civil society” groups and pressure from the U.S., Canadian and French governments.

The “rebel” forces—led by former CIA-paid death squad organizers and former troops from the military that President Aristide had so bravely dissolved in 1995—rampaged with impunity across Haiti. With the collusion of foreign military forces and the newly-empowered “interim government,” Haiti’s “rebels” attacked supporters of Aristide and his elected government.

In the midst of this incredible violence, in late March 2004, four CIDA-funded groups working in Haiti were testifying before a Canadian Parliamentary committee. The representatives of these quasi-governmental agencies did not even mention the brutal campaign then being waged against Lavalas supporters. Instead, they focused on the alleged crimes of Aristide and his elected government, and expressed their support for the coup-im-

posed regime. (See pp.23-24.)

Also in late-March 2004, while the coup regime’s RCMP-funded and trained police were recruiting “rebels” into their highest ranks, a celebration of Aristide’s ouster took place in Haiti. Flown to the event in a U.S. military helicopter was Gérard Latortue, the Canadian-backed, coup-installed Prime Minister and David Lee, Canada’s ambassador to the Organization of American States. While Latortue praised rebel leaders calling them “freedom fighters,” Canada’s David Lee “nodded his head in approval.” (“Drugs and Politics in Haiti,” Haiti Info. Project, July 24, 2007.)

Sharing the stage with them was Wilfort Ferdinand a rebel leader who had recently led armed gangs in attacks against police stations defending Aristide’s besieged government. Ferdinand was later arrested, on the day after he admitted on radio that the rebels had secretly received weapons, funding and logistical support from business leaders of the USAID- and CIDA-funded Group of 184 (G184) (See pp.50-53.)

The top rebel leader, Guy Philippe, who was free to run for president in the Canadian-sponsored elections of 2006—but received less than one percent of the vote—has since been targeted for arrest by U.S. drug enforcement agents. However, efforts to capture him only started after he too publicly admitted that G184 leaders had armed and financed their attacks against supporters of Aristide, his government and Haiti’s democracy.

By Professor Peter Hallward, Professor of Modern European Philosophy, Middlesex University, UK.

**A**s they rolled into Port-au-Prince on March 1, “armed rebels said...that they intended to kill suspected gang members loyal to the president,” and that’s exactly what they did. Over the next couple of days many hundreds of Lavalas supporters were killed. In St.-Marc, for instance, the anti-Lavalas gang RAMICOS took its revenge against the *organisation populaire* Bale Wouze, and in the first few days of March executed around 20 of their enemies.<sup>1</sup> In Cap-Haitien, dozens of Aristide supporters were shot. “It was chaos,” remembers the director of Cap-Haitien’s Radio Africa, “and scores of people were killed.”<sup>2</sup> All across northern Haiti, rebels wielded absolute and entirely unsupervised power for several months, acting as judge and executioner with complete impunity.

The *Associated Press* confirmed on March 23 that “dozens of bullet-riddled bodies have been brought to the [Cap-Haitien] morgue in the last month.” In Les Cayes, said Reuters, “armed rebels who helped oust Haiti’s first democratically elected leader carry out public executions, unchallenged by police or foreign troops.”<sup>3</sup>

Back in Port-au-Prince, the rebels began punitive incursions into the La Saline and Bel Air [slums] that left hundreds of people dead or missing.<sup>4</sup> Working with the newly “depol-

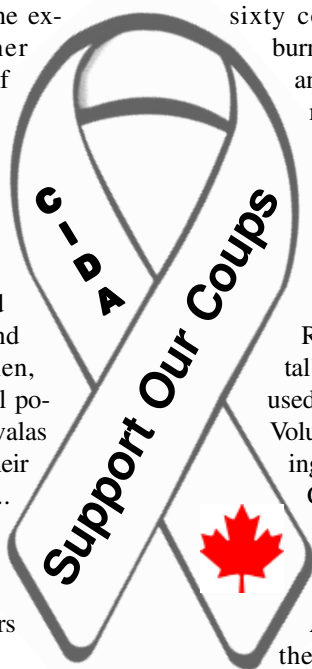
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iticized" Haitian police, the ex-army rebels were further strengthened by scores of affluent vigilantes who helped hunt down "pro-Aristide gangs." Several such "upper-class paramilitary groups" set to work in Cité Soleil. Armed with assault weapons and led by young, affluent and U.S.-educated businessmen, they waited until the initial police assault had forced Lavalas militants to retreat back to their slums. Then "dozens of... paramilitaries went out... to finish the job. 'We're cleaning up the neighborhoods,' said one."<sup>5</sup> Survivors testified that

"more people died after February 29, 2004 than September 30, 1991 [i.e., the first coup against Aristide]; ...back then we didn't have to endure a systematic campaign of open shooting in the streets."<sup>6</sup>

By March 3, 2004, the eight largest hospitals in Port-au-Prince stopped admitting patients. According to the morgue's director, some 800 bodies were "dumped and buried" on March 7. As he explained to a human rights delegation led by the Miami-based lawyer Thomas Griffin, bodies would have to be dumped by the truckload on a regular basis, many with their hands still tied around their backs and bags over their heads. Griffin's team confirmed some isolated details of the bigger picture. On March 23, between forty and



sixty corpses were partially burned near Port-au-Prince, and on March 28, the city morgue dumped another 200 bodies.<sup>7</sup> It is certain that the number of bodies collected by the morgue is itself only a fraction of the total number of people killed. Residents of the capital's slums quickly became used to the sight of bodies. Volunteers were still collecting bodies in and around Cité Soleil almost every day, until the end of 2005.

For weeks after Aristide's overthrow, the names of people included in the new government's lists of "most wanted" were broadcast by pro-coup radio stations. Anyone associated with Lavalas went into hiding. Griffin's delegation met with around thirty members of organizations involved in Lavalas-related literacy and street-children programs a month after the coup, and noted that "every single one of them has been in hiding since March 1." [Editor's note: In contrast, the U.S.-based Quixote Center's human rights delegation in late March-early April met with elite-backed anti-Aristide groups that *were not in hiding*. These included NCHR, CSIG, PAPDA and CONAP, which all received CIDA funding and are praised as partners of Canada's CIDA-funded agencies.]

In the spring of 2004, the elaborate and fragile network of popular groups that enable so many poor Haitians to endure their destitution was smashed beyond hope of immediate repair.

U.S. Marines had "no instructions to disarm the rebels" and "were under orders not to use force to halt Haitian-on-Haitian violence."<sup>8</sup> Journalists visiting Haiti in early April 2004 learned from witnesses that in Bel Air, between 15 and 50 people were killed on March 12, with the connivance (if not active participation) of U.S. troops.

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**Source:** Excerpts, *Damming the Flood: Haiti, Aristide and the Politics of Containment*, 2007. pp.253-257.