

Patronizing Benevolence towards “poor little” Haiti

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

Every year since 1932, the Couchiching Institute on Public Affairs (CIPA) has held large summer conferences at a resort on Ontario’s Lake Couchiching, plus various smaller “round table” discussions for more select audiences. CIPA, describing itself as “Canada’s oldest public affairs forum,” says its goal “is to increase the awareness and understanding of domestic and international issues...through open and inclusive discussion, without advocacy or partisanship.”¹

CIPA brings together “a mix of leading Canadians and international figures from various fields and industries,” with “interested, engaged citizens from across Canada.”² Over the years, its speakers have included Henry Kissinger, Michael Ignatieff, Conrad Black and Paul Martin,³ and the annual “Couchiching Award” has been bestowed to Preston Manning, Elizabeth May and Michael H. Wilson.⁴

CIPA has received much funding from corporations, large banks and Canadian government departments such as

- Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)
- Human Resources and Social Development Canada
- Citizenship and Immigration
- Foreign Affairs and International Trade
- National Defence
- Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness⁵

Only two CIPA speakers have dealt with Canada’s role in Haiti. They propounded two highly paternalistic views that: (1) the supposed benevolence of wealthy governments is the only hope for Haiti and other poor nations, and (2) the poverty, violence and undemocratic history of Haiti is of their own making.

Robert Greenhill

Robert Greenhill has spoken at three of CIPA’s summer conferences, in 1998, 2001 and 2006. In 2006, he was the president of CIDA, having been appointed in May 2005 by Paul Martin’s newly formed government, midway through the Canadian-backed, coup-installed regime in Haiti.

What expertise did Greenhill bring to Canada’s Third World aid agency? CIDA’s biography of Greenhill describes him as the “Alternate Governor for Canada on the Board of Governors of the World Bank Group.”⁶ He also has a BA from the London School of Economics and a Masters in Business Administration from the European Institute of Business.⁷ And, Greenhill worked for Bombardier Inc., which CIDA describes as “Canada’s leading aerospace and rail-transportation manufacturer.”⁸ Greenhill was Bombardier’s senior vice

president of strategy, its president and the chief operating officer of Bombardier International in 2000.⁹ Not mentioned by CIDA, or CIPA, is that Bombardier is one of Canada’s leading military industries supplying complex components and services for a wide array of weapons delivery systems used in U.S., Canadian and NATO wars.

Although none of this seems to qualify Greenhill as an expert on Haitian democracy, he played that role for CIDA at CIPA’s 2006 conference. On a panel called “To the Political: Africa and the Developing World -- Progress Questioned,” Greenhill delivered a “primarily -- good news” view of “progress” that wealthy countries are seeing in the “developing world,” such as the “accelerating rate of growth,” “economic gains,” the “emancipation of women,” and “[s]uccessful democratic systems...being put into place.”¹⁰ All these gains, he explains, resulted from kind support given by the governments of Canada and its wealthy allies.

When Greenhill was asked to elaborate on “Canada’s role in Haiti with respect to Aristide,” the session’s note taker recorded his comments by saying:

“Haiti: Canada has played a progressive role for the past 40 years. Look at the interim period after Aristide left and the new presidential election. Clear that the Haitian government appreciates the role Canada plays. The people of Haiti see Canada as honest, capable and committed. Reinforce the legitimacy of racist domination.”¹¹

Pointing to “the interim period after Aristide left,” as a supposed example of Canada’s “progressive role” in Haiti, is audacious to say the least. So too is his contention that Canada, one of the leading nations behind the 2004 coup, is seen by impoverished Haitians as “honest, capable and committed.” Finally, the meaning of the last line defies explanation.

The next question returned Greenhill to “Canadian policy in Haiti and the role...of these so called free and fair elections.”¹² Once again, CIDA’s president was positive, enthusiastic and upbeat about Canada’s role saying the “[r]ecent election was considered free and fair.”¹³ He seems not to have heard of the more than twenty

glaring and systematic irregularities in that election.¹⁴ Neither did Greenhill consider it unfair that the country’s leading party—which had just been ousted in a violent coup—had its leader deposed, kidnapped and exiled. Neither does

he mention that the Lavalas Party’s most popular candidates—and many of its top political organizers, campaigners, activists and supporters—were either illegally jailed without charge, exiled, driven into



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Haitian Proverb:

“Bay kou bliye, pote mak sonje.”

**“The giver of the blow forgets,
the bearer of the scar remembers.”**

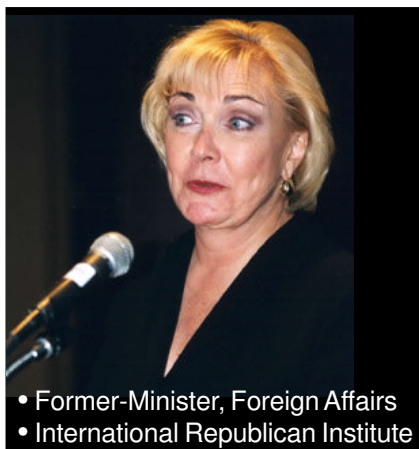
hiding or murdered. Although this obviously had a devastating impact on the party’s success in the elections, Greenhill praises the process as “free and fair.”

Greenhill’s least positive assertion is that “Haiti has been through a very challenging period.”¹⁵ He follows this incredible understatement with the suggestion that “Now is the best opportunity for political reconciliation.”¹⁶ By this he seems to suggest that those who led Haiti’s Canadian-backed regime during this “challenging period”—and planned and executed the human rights violations—should not be prosecuted. Instead, his idea is that this is a marvellous opportunity for Haitians to put all the atrocities behind them and move along towards “political reconciliation.”

CIDA’s president then comments on the need to “[b]ring in democratic elected government and focus on the key social and economic needs for the country.”¹⁷ But he does not reconcile this high-sounding proposition with the reality that Canada had just helped to *overthrow* Haiti’s democracy. Neither did he reconcile the dream to “bring in democratic elected” government with his department’s key role in propping up a government that was *appointed* by Haiti’s elite and foreign military powers after the 2004 coup.

Barbara McDougall

In January 2007, Barbara McDougall—who was Brian Mulroney’s Minister of Foreign Affairs (1991-1993)—addressed CIPA’s “Round Table” at the University of Toronto’s Faculty Club.¹⁸ Although this CIPA event’s title—“Helping Hapless Haiti”—has alliterative attractions, it belittles the people of that country and belies patronising attitudes that permeate discussions about Haiti in elite circles. While “haplessness” connotes the utter inability to help oneself, the subtitle—“Is International Aid Turning



- Former-Minister, Foreign Affairs
- International Republican Institute

Things Around?”—reinforces this analysis by implying that progress may finally occur in Haiti thanks only to the benevolent intervention of helpful foreigners.

In a book review that same month, McDougall called Haiti the “running sore of the Western Hemisphere” and called it a “poor little place that tugs at the heartstrings.”¹⁹ She also refers to that country’s “history of incompetence and violence” and asserts most tellingly that Haiti’s man-made disasters are “largely of its own making.”²⁰

There is, of course, a whole other theory regarding the underlying reasons for Haiti’s status as the poorest country in the Americas. That theory, which was obviously rejected out of hand by McDougall at her CIPA talk, is that Haiti’s history of poverty and violence, has actually been *caused* by foreign intervention. It is, after all, the international community that organized, imposed and benefited from centuries of slavery, invasions, coups, death squads, indebtedness and collaboration with Haiti’s predatory corporate elites.

But far from raising any such serious issues as foreign culpability for Haiti’s crises, CIPA’s event was not even presented in a terribly serious manner. It was advertised with light-hearted, personal, cutesy puns, like “join us...for a rich discussion with Barbara about this poor little country.”²¹

McDougall’s premise is revealed by these questions posed in the event’s publicity: “Why does Canada have such a strong interest in supporting democracy? What about human rights?” This begs the question of whether Canada *does* support Haitian democracy and human rights. Canada’s key role in overthrowing Haitian democracy, and then empowering a coup regime that trampled human rights, raises the need to question Canada’s true “interest” in Haiti.

CIPA’s promo for the event also asks: “Can newly elected René Préval heal the damage done by his predecessors, most recently Jean-Bertrand Aristide?” But Aristide was *not* Préval’s most recent predecessor. McDougall was clearly not about to discuss any examples of the “damage done” during the brutal Latortue regime that Canada had so helpfully empowered after the illegal ouster of Aristide.

International Republican Institute

A Canadian of Haitian origins, Jean Saint-Vil, asked “what exactly constitutes Barbara McDougall’s great experience that qualifies her to speak so authoritatively about the people of ‘this poor little country.’”²² The CIPA tells us that the “Honourable Barbara McDougall has considerable experience working on issues relating to Haiti” and is a “member of the Washington-based Haiti International Assessment Committee [HIAC].”²³

Questioning this qualification, Saint-Vil points out that the HIAC was established by the International Republican Institute (IRI). He then quotes from a *Washington Post* article—published just five days before Aristide’s 2001 inauguration—that linked the IRI and its spawn, the so-called “Democratic Convergence,” with Duvallierists pushing for another CIA backed coup in Haiti:

“Convergence was formed as a broad group with help from IRI... [and] includes former backers of the hated Duvalier family dictatorship and of the military officers who overthrew Aristide in 1991.... The most determined of these men... express their desire to see the U.S. military intervene once again.... to get rid of Aristide and rebuild the disbanded Haitian army... [T]he CIA should train and equip Haitian officers... so they could stage a comeback....”²⁴

As Saint-Vil then states, “this is exactly what happened... in February 2004.” He then refers to an article, “The Other Regime Change,”²⁵ noting the IRI’s creation by the U.S. Congress in 1983 and its \$20 million annual budget from the National Endowment for Democracy. (See p.47.) Among the recipients of IRI funding was the National Association of the Haitian Media.²⁶ (See pp.26-37.) In 1998, the IRI started to conduct a \$3 million

“party-building program in Haiti, training Aristide’s political opponents, uniting them into a single bloc and, according to a former U.S. ambassador there, encouraging them to reject internationally sanctioned power-sharing agreements in order to heighten Haiti’s political crisis.”²⁷

The IRI’s senior officer in Haiti was Stanley Lucas, “the scion of a pro-Duvalier Haitian landowning family.” Amnesty International notes that two of his cousins “organized a machete-wielding mob to hack to death 250 peasants protesting for land redistribution” outside the family ranch in 1987.²⁸

The following year, Lucas—“spearheaded the training of an array of small parties at IRI meetings in Port-au-Prince.” Kim Ives, the editor of *Haiti Progrès*, an independent Haitian weekly, recounts that when he met the IRI representative, in 1988 “Lucas told him he was training Haitian soldiers in counterinsurgency tactics.”²⁹

In February 2001, while still acting as the IRI’s point man in Haiti, Lucas suggested on radio that assassination was one way to get rid of President Aristide. Another method that Lucas knows well is character assassination. Just last year, Lucas posted an article and a radio transcript (from Haiti’s Vision 2000 station—founded by

G184 leader Andy Apaid), claiming that Aristide and his closest associates sacrificed a newborn baby in a Voodoo ritual in 2000.³⁰ Such fabrications were taken seriously by the Canadian-backed Latortue regime and its CIDA-funded Ministry of Justice. It jailed Aristide associates for years based on these unsubstantiated rumours in what was, incredibly, a modern day witchhunt.³¹

Lucas punctuated his outrageous lies with dozens of smiling photos of himself posing with U.S. and Haitian business leaders, OAS officials, Premier Jean Charest and other Québec politicians, heads of state from the Caribbean, Africa, South and Central America, Afghan “tribal leaders,” U.S. senators, congressmen, ambassadors, Republican presidential candidates, three former Secretaries of State, a former National Security Advisor, a former CIA director, and other supporters of his IRI activities in Haiti.

Guy Philippe, leader of “rebel”

forces whose terror facilitated the 2004 coup, describes Lucas “‘a good friend’ whom he has known much of his life.”³²

Despite all this, McDougall—through ignorance or deception—portrays the IRI as a positive force in Haitian politics and calls her IRI committee “a non-partisan multinational group.”³³ Haiti’s problems, she says, inevitably start when “helpful outsiders pack up and go home” and “poor little” Haiti is “left to struggle forward on its own.” And, she concludes, Haitians therefore “deserve the continuing support of outsiders such as Canada.”³⁴

Of course, many Haitian-Canadians like Saint-Vil see things differently. As he remarks, “It would seem that ‘outsiders’ have already contributed more than enough to Haiti’s fortune!”³⁵ We can be sure that the voice of Saint-Vil and other critics of Canadian foreign policy will not be heard at events of the government-funded Couchiching Institute on Public Affairs.

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