Embedding CBC Reporters in Haiti’s Elitist Media

By Richard Sanders, Editor, Press for Conversion!

The goal of Freedom Network (RL), says Paul Breton, the director of its international programs, is to assist the media in “countries in transition to democracy.” RL’s founder and CEO, Réal Barnabé, also stresses their noble sounding ambition to “promote press freedom in countries in transition, and in emerging countries,” such as “Iraq, Haiti, Kosovo [and] Bosnia.”

Left unmentioned is that these places have all been ravaged by wars, invasions and/or regime changes in which Canada and its allies have actively participated. And neither do Barnabé or Breton question whether these military interventions have actually created real “transitions to democracy.” That is accepted as a matter of faith.

Since its creation in 1996, RL has worked hand in glove with the Canadian government in about 25 carefully targeted countries. In this work, funded largely by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), RL has often teamed up with other Canadian organizations. For example, when conducting seminars on “business journalism” for Haitians and Iraqis, RL teamed up with the Haitian-Canadian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Alternatives, respectively. (See pp.5-6.)

RL also works with a slew of governmental and quasi-governmental entities that support the kind of democracy, human rights, development and press freedom, that led to the 2004 regime change in Haiti. (See pp.30-31.)

Media Project In Haiti

RL was initially contracted by CIDA—during the Canadian-backed coup regime—to conduct a two-year, $2 million project called “Media and Democratic Development in Haiti.” This project began in May 2005 but has been extended until August 2008. RL’s partners in this enterprise are Alternatives, which created a “Media in Haiti” website and the CBC’s Canadian Institute for Training in Public Broadcasting (CITPB), which described the project as “promoting democratic transition in Haiti.”

Their method of promoting democracy includes sending Canadian journalists to work in the Haitian newsrooms of an extremely right-wing media cartel called the National Association of the Haitian Media (ANMH). This network—formed in 2001 by the “owners and directors of 12 radio and three TV stations”—was a cornerstone of the Group of 184 (G184) (See pp.50-53). This CIDA-funded coalition’s propaganda effort to overthrow Haiti’s democratically elected Lavalas Party government, was led by Haiti’s media elite in ANMH. See pp.34-37.)

ANMH’s stated “mission” is “to help Haitian journalists’ associations and to professionalise the Haitian media.” This directly matches RL’s mission to “support activities” of Haitian journalists or media associations and to assist in the “professionalization of a free press.”

With this shared ideological mission, RL forged intimate ties with several ANMH companies. Backed by CIDA, RL hired Canadian journalists to spend a month at a time working with six Haitian news teams including ANMH’s Le Matin, Le Nouvelliste, Radio Metropole and Radio Caraibes. In January 2004, independent journalist Kevin Pina, listed these radio stations among the “active players in the U.S. campaign to destabilize Haiti’s constitutional government. With total disregard for principles of ‘objective journalism,’ they circulate exaggerated reports of violence by Lavalas, turn a blind eye to violence on the part of the opposition [whose]...clear objective...is to throw the constitution in the trash and force President Aristide to resign.”

This process of working “alongside reporters and editors...in the field” and “in their daily tasks,” says RL, means “the expert acts as a partner.” This strategy created a “bond of trust” between these Canadians and the Haitian “journalists and managers” who hosted them. RL, which calls this process “accompanying” or “coaching,” notes that they made it “clear that the coaching would respect the needs and editorial line and freedom of the media.” (Emphasis added.)

What was the “editorial line” of Haiti’s media? Charles Arthur’s report on Haiti in the World Press Freedom Review explained:

“The main, Port-au-Prince-based media houses—grouped in the National Association of Haitian Media (ANMH)—continued to take an open position of support for the ouster of [Aristide’s] Lavalas Family government and of extreme hostility to the large swathes of the poor population who continued to voice support for the exiled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The ANMH radio stations in particular exercised a clear editorial line favouring the Group of 184, a political platform led by the country’s small private sector. At the same time, these stations’ news broadcasts consistently described opponents of the interim government, living in shanty-towns, such as Bel Air and Cité Soleil, as ‘outlaws’ and ‘terrorists.’”

Such views were echoed in RL’s newsletter when Guy Filion—the assistant program director for CBC’s French news services—praised the Haitian media’s election coverage by saying that besides airing live media conferences of the coup-installed prime minister, the regime’s police and the UN forces occupying the country, “Even thugs from Cité Soleil were giving
Radio Metropole

RL worked in close partnership with Radio Metropole, a national station reaching Haiti’s entire population. Its owner and CEO, Richard Widmaier, was then president of ANMH, having held this position during the crucial pre-coup period as well as under the rule of the repressive Canadian-backed regime that followed. (See p.34.)

Jean Martin, a 30-year veteran of CBC’s Radio-Canada, received an RL contract to “coach” Metropole journalists for a month. Upon his return to Canada, Martin received lavish praise from ANMH’s president, which RL proudly published. Widmaier said: “Mr. Martin’s presence in our newsroom and in the field has enabled our reporters to improve their reporting, interviewing and on-air presentation techniques. We had productive discussions on such issues as newsroom management, the importance of editorial meetings and the coverage of current events during an election period. As a result, this has definitely raised the standard of our information programs.”

This rave review clearly indicates that Martin followed RL’s policy of showing “respect” for the host’s “editorial line.” He seemingly did not rock the political boat at Radio Metropole, criticise its blatantly subjective news, or question the ethics of media ownership by corporate leaders pushing their elitist agenda to overthrow the elected government.

RL’s close links to Metropole were also revealed by Émélie Rivard-Boudreau who said “we maintain good relations with Nancy Roc, journalist from Radio Métropole.” The independent Haiti Progrès newsweekly has referred to Roc as a “virulently anti-Aristide reporter.” This may explain why she has for so long been a darling of the foreign media. Having launched her so called “brilliant career” in 1986, Roc has worked for CNN, NBC, CBC, BBC, TV5 and the Voice of America. Now living in Montréal, she continues to air programs on Metropole and organizes Haitian-Canadian events for government and corporate sponsors. Roc is now coordinating a major teleconferencing project whose partners include RL, the governments of Canada, the U.S., France and Haiti, several banks and corporations, CIDA-funded organizations in Haiti and Canada, and seven ANMH members: Télé-Haïti, Métropole, Vision 2000, Radio Kiskeya, Radio Caraïbes, Le Nouvelliste and Le Matin.

TNH and RNH

Nancy Roc was also praised in RL’s newsletter for hosting a program produced by RL and Télé Québec. This praise came from Jacques Price Jean, the director general of Haitian National Television (TNH). In April 2004, soon after Aristide’s elected government was toppled and replaced, Price Jean was appointed by the coup regime to head the de facto government’s TV network. Before being elevated to run the dictatorship’s TV programs, Price Jean had worked for Radio France Internationale and Tele-Haiti. Tele Haiti, the country’s biggest private TV network is a member of ANMH. It was
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founded by G184 leader and sweatshop owner, Andy Apaid.44 “Rebel” leader Guy Philippe, whose campaign of terror in February 2004 provided the pretext for the foreign invasion, coup and occupation, has identified Apaid as one of several prominent Haitian business leaders who supplied weapons and money for his paramilitary offensive against Aristide’s government and its supporters.35

Price Jean, the TNH’s coup-empowered director general wrote to “congratulate” and “thank Réseau Liberté for supporting the TNH.”36 RL’s support came in the form of a month’s “coaching” during the coup regime by Pierre Mignault, a 30-year veteran of CBC’s Radio-Canada.37

The TNH’s links to ANMH were also revealed by Guy Filion, another Canadian journalist who worked in Haiti for RL. He reported that TNH broadcast a program “on the day after [the 2006 election] with its radio partners of the Association nationale des médias haïtiens (ANMH).”38

RL also embedded a long-time Radio-Canada journalist (Marc Gilbert) in Haiti’s National Radio (RNH).39

In explaining its decision to partner with the radio and TV stations that were administered by the coup-regime, RL said that these “were natural choices considering their evolution towards greater independence from the government”40 and “in their evolution towards increased independence from political power.”41 Apparently RL, like the G184 and ANMH, believed these stations had been too pro-Aristide before the coup, but thought they were improving under the coup regime’s tutelage. This view was also shared by the TNH’s Price Jean, who said his station was no longer perceived as a “pro-government propaganda tool.”42

RL’s founder Réal Barnabé, says they have “worked particularly hard on the theme of transforming state TV and radio to public service,”43 and this theme recurs in numerous other RL documents.44

Radio Kiskeya

RL also works closely with another prominent leader of ANMH. As RL has explained, “we maintain good relations with Liliane Pierre-Paul from Radio Kiskeya.”45 Pierre-Paul founded the station and is its “co-owner, program director and [news] anchor.”46 She also “helped found”47 ANMH and is the secretary on its executive board.48 In her opinion, ANMH “promotes pluralism, democracy and freedom of the press.”49 Her husband was the executive secretary of the G184 and her sister helps lead SOFA, a CIDA-funded anti-Lavalas women’s group.50

In 2006, Pierre-Paul reported glowingly on a Haitian Film Festival in Montréal sponsored by the Canadian and Québec governments, RL and several CIDA funded “NGOs,” such as Rights and Democracy, Alternatives and Oxfam Québec.51 This event coincided with a three-day CIDA-funded workshop organized by RL and co-sponsored by CBC’s CITPB, to train a dozen Haitian journalists in “cultural journalism.”52

Pierre-Paul’s anti-Aristide bias permeates much of her work. For example, even when covering Brazil’s football victory over Argentina in the 2005 World Cup, she managed to include a political diatribe in which she placed Aristide on a short list of Haiti’s “worst dictators.”53 Putting Aristide in the same category as the Duvaliers (1957-1986), Avril (1988-1990) and Cedras (1991-1994), Pierre-Paul then went on to describe how Haiti’s dictators always misled the people by pretending to represent them. She then noted that after “each bloodthirsty coming to power,”54 these dictators always invested millions in the carnival. Aristide however did represent Haitians, because he came to power through two landslide elections, that were anything but “bloodthirsty.”

Radio Caraïbes

For at least a month during the coup regime, RL embedded Derek Quinn, the senior editor at the CBC’s Radio Canada International, in the newsroom of Radio Caraïbes, a powerful station that reaches the entire Port-au-Prince population and much of Haiti’s countryside. An RL article on “coaching” states that: “Based on the content of Radio Caraïbes’s broadcasts, as well as its membership in the National Association of Haitian Media (ANMH), its listeners would tend to share the political views of the Group of 184 (opposition to Jean-Bertrand Aristide).”55

This analysis seems to suggest that listeners choose this station because they share its political views. But, more likely, Radio Caraïbes’s audience has only come to “share” the station’s anti-Aristide, pro-G184 bias, because they have absorbed these elitist views by listening to the station. Afterall, is this not why political and economic elites purchase media companies in the first place? Their goal is to wage propaganda campaigns, influence people and make money in the process.

Le Matin & Le Nouvelliste

Another RL coach is André Lachance, who has worked for the Journal de Montréal, Radio-Canada, Tele-Québec and Syfia International.56 Syfia, the news agency of the International Organisation of the Francophonie (OIF), is funded by the governments of Belgium, Canada, France and Switzerland.57 Lachance also says he spent three years with the OIF Haitian training journalists with Alterpresse, HaitiPress Network, Le Nouvelliste and Le Matin.58 Then, he worked with RL as “a trainer/accompanist (coach) with journalists from Radio Ginen, Le Nouvelliste, Ticket Magazine, Anaïze, Le Matin and Spotlight.”59 Le Nouvelliste and Le Matin are Haiti’s only daily newspapers, while Ticket and Spotlight are their weekly celebrity/entertainment magazines. Lachance explains that in 2007, he “spent not less than five months in the newsrooms of Le Nouvelliste and Le Matin.”60

These two newspapers are stars in the ANMH pantheon. ANMH’s Le Matin, is owned by Reginald Boulou, who was a G184 leader and the president of one of its key corporate member groups, Haiti’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He is also a founder and financier of the Haiti Democracy Project (HDP), a Washington-based lobby group representing Haiti’s elite. (See p.52.) Le Nouvelliste’s owner, Max Chauvet, is a founding member of ANMH and its current treasurer. He commented in 2005 that thanks to the coup regime, Haiti’s media had made “progress”61 toward press freedom since Aristide’s successful ouster.
Teaming up with ANMH

In October 2007, the Association of Haitian Journalists (AJH) held its elections. It did so thanks to financing from RL, ANMH and Marie Laurence Jocelyn Lassègue, the former general-secretary of another G184 member group, Fannm Yo La (which was also funded by CIDA). Two RL staff members—Paul Breton and Jacquelin Telémaque—were “observers” at these elections, which took place in the auditorium of RL partner and ANMH member, Radio Caraïbes. The result was a new AJH executive dominated by ANMH-linked journalists:

- Jacques Desrosiers, from Le Matin—owned by the G184’s leader, Boulos—became the AJH’s new secretary-general.
- Marie Raphaëlle Pierre, from another ANMH station, Radio Ibo, became AJH’s administrative secretary. Ibo’s director, Hérold Jean-François, is a former president of ANMH and sits on its board.

News of the AJH election and its elite/foreign funding, raised the ire of many Canadians of Haitian origin and Media Mosaique Montréal published four articles and an editorial blasting his comments. He was, for instance, accused of having a “very condescending attitude” and “a disdain that borders on outright racism.”

Among the comments that got Lachance in hot water were that Haitian reporters “usually speak in Creole, which can be a handicap when time comes to write in French in Media such as Le Nouvelliste and Le Matin...or in websites, like Alterpresse, HaitíPress Network, Radio Kiskeya or Radio Métropole. In their articles, the syntax is similar to the Creole one and ancient and unclear expressions, doesn’t mean you are smart.”

Meaning: French is the language of Haiti’s elite and ruling classes. While all Haitians speak Kreyolé, only 10%-20% speak French. For most Haitians, French is seen as a language for putting on airs.

“Li pale franse.”

“He speaks French.”

Media Criticism 101

A similar paucity of real criticism regarding the disreputable state of Haiti’s elite media can also be found in RL statements. Their few criticisms do not address the major underlying problem that Haiti’s corporate elite owns and controls much of the country’s media and wields it to disseminate propaganda that amounts to veritable class warfare.

When Lachance returned from “coaching” reporters at ANMH daily papers, he ran an article in RL’s newsletter criticising young Haitian journalists. This raised the ire of many Canadians of Haitian origin and Media Mosaique Montréal published four articles and an editorial blasting his comments. He was, for instance, accused of having a “very condescending attitude” and “a disdain that borders on outright racism.”

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“Li pale franse.”

“He speaks French.”

Meaning: He is likely trying to deceive you.
which make the reading difficult and sometimes incomprehensible.”71 Then, referring to a Haitian journalist who spent his money buying French publications to improve his language skills, Lachance says, in English: “These are young journalists like him that we must help, like does Réseau Liberté.72 (sic)

Lachance, who had spent years working for the International Organisation of the Francophonie (OIF), neglected to point out that French is the colonial language of Haiti’s elite. Neither did he address the need for more Kreyole-language media to serve public needs, since it is Haiti’s lingua franca, not French.

Lachance also criticised Haitian journalists who “yield to temptation of practicing ‘press conference journalism,’ preferring answering to invitations—often well-paid—coming from NGO’s (sic) and state institutions.... Without any health or salary insurance, without any salary sometimes, like is often the case among the forty private radio stations in the metropolitan area that encourage their ‘journalists’ to compensate themselves by international NGO’s ‘envelopes [containing money].’”73

Lachance’s analysis does not critique Haiti’s media owners who—seeing their companies as propaganda tools—are happy to have their journalists produce fawning reportage of “international NGOs.” Not only does this practice get media owners off the hook for paying journalists’ salaries, the political messages spread by foreign government-funded “NGOs” (certainly those of the U.S., Canada and France) were generally anti-Aristide and therefore coincided with the economic self-interests of Haiti’s elites.

Lachance’s comments “prompted an outcry” from journalists “in Haiti and abroad, who said they were ‘offended.’”74 However, he quickly be-

The Freedom Network’s International Partners

By Richard Sanders, Editor, Press for Conversion!

Topping the list of international organizations that Réseau Liberté (RL) says it has “worked in connection with” “[t]hroughout all of its activities,”75 are two U.S. government-funded institutions that played absolutely pivotal roles in orchestrating Haiti’s 2004 coup.

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

Thomas Griffin, who was a U.S. federal law enforcement officer for 10 years and is now an attorney, authored the University of Miami Law School’s 2004 human rights report on Haiti.76 As he explained in an interview: “The IFES workers [in Haiti] I...talk[ed] to in confidence, completely take credit for ousting Aristide.... IFES went out and formulated groups that never existed or united pre-existing groups, gave them sensitization seminars, paid for people to attend, paid for entertainment and catering, and basically built group after group.... They reached out to student groups, business groups.... [and] human rights groups—which they actually paid off to report human rights atrocities to make Aristide look bad. It just sort of snowballed. They bought journalists, and the IFES associations grew into the Group of 184 that became a solidified opposition against Aristide. What is probably most interesting is that Gerard Latortue, the [coup-installed] prime minister, was an IFES member for a couple of years before of the ouster of Aristide.”77

Haitian Proverb:

“Ti nèg fè sa l kapab.
Gwo nèg fè sa l vle.”

“The little guy does what he can,
but the big guy does whatever he wants.”

The NDI was “[a]mong the funders and organizers of the opposition” that destabilized Aristide’s government says Tom Reeves, a retired, U.S. professor of Caribbean history. In April 2004, during the “first independent U.S. observer delegation” after the coup, Reeves and others met the leaders of many Haitian groups, including those generously funded by Canadian and U.S. government agencies.

In the Haitian city of Jacmel, Reeve’s delegation “met students, women and union organizers who had formed specifically anti-Aristide groups to counter the existing organizations....—for the purpose of joining the demonstrations led by the Convergence and [Group of] 184 to demand the ouster of Aristide earlier this year.”

One leader “proudly asserted his connection to USAID, the State Department Democracy Enhancement program and the NDI” saying: “They trained us and taught us how to organize, and we organized the groups you see here to demand the corrupt government of Aristide be brought down.”}
And many more

RL also works in partnership with a battery of other global institutions. The entities, listed below, are all either out-right government agencies, or quasi-governmental groups that receive substantial funding from governments.

Canadian Government Departments & Agencies

- Canadian International Development Agency
- Foreign Affairs and International Trade
- Human Resources Development Canada
- CBC / Radio Canada

Quasi-Governmental Agencies

- Fondation Fabienne Colas (Canada)
- Groupe de recherche et d’échanges technologiques (France)
- International Media Support (Denmark)
- Independent Journalism Centre (U.S. and European)
- Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society (Canada)
- Panos Institute (U.S., Canada, UK, France)
- Reporters Without Borders (France, U.S.)
- Search for Common Ground (Canada, U.S. & European)

International, Government Agencies

- World Bank
- International Organisation of the Francophonie
- UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- UN Development Programme

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observer of Haitian affairs. Therefore, the Canadian government’s contract with RL to assist election coverage conducted by Haiti’s highly-partisan G184-linked media outlets appears to be a blatant, political conflict of interest.

The Canadian journalists that RL embedded in the Haitian media were tasked to serve the political “needs” of those companies’ owners. To do this, “coaches” were explicitly told by RL that they must “respect the... editorial line” of the media companies hosting them. How different is this from the dynamic by which Haitian journalists lend their media services to whichever “international NGOs” or “state institutions” their employers deploy them to cover?

RL itself is very much like the prosperous “international NGOs” that visit Haiti and bribe its journalists with cash-stuffed “envelopes.” However, instead of handing over money to journalists, RL lends experienced Canadian journalists to Haiti’s media owners. By supplying the salaries of these seconded workers for extended periods, RL serves the economic interests of Haiti’s media employers, helping them push their “editorial line” at reduced costs.

Another dimension of economic servitude that RL’s critiques ignore is that some of ANMH’s powerful media moguls also control much of that impoverished country’s wealth. For example, Tele-Haiti’s founder, Apaid, owns huge sweat shops enforcing slave-like conditions. His company, Alpha Industries, has churned out, among many other things, about “40 million pieces of military outerwear” for U.S. “Air Force, Army, Navy and Marine Corps personnel.” And, Le Matin’s owner, Boulos, owns Pharval Labs whose products killed 88 children in 1996 when distributed throughout Port-au-Prince’s poorest neighborhoods.”

And, neither do RL’s critiques ever mention that the media corporations that hosted Canadian journalists in Haiti were not only deeply engaged in destabilizing Aristide’s elected government but that ANMH leaders were the basis of the G184’s powerful propaganda machine.

One might think that RL would recognize that ANMH’s successful efforts to provoke Haiti’s illegal regime change were a much more significant offence than anything committed by poverty-stricken young Kreyol-speaking journalists who supplemented their pathetic salaries by doing journalistic favours for foreign “NGOs” and the “state institutions” of the repressive coup government.

But recognizing this reality is not what CIDA or the Canadian government at large had in mind when—after helping overthrow Aristide’s government—it contracted RL to assist Haiti’s media in that country’s coup-launched “transition to democracy.”

Haitian Proverb:

“Makak pa janm kwe petit-li led.”

“A monkey never thinks that her own baby is ugly.”

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