

Coming to the Aid of Haiti's Regime Change

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

During the lead up to Haiti's 2004 coup, the Québec Association of International Cooperation Organizations (AQOCI) supported the campaign to oust Aristide's elected government. Then, after the regime change, this coalition of several dozen large aid agencies not only ignored the newly-installed regime's human rights abuses, it played a key role in quashing an effort by Montréal's anti-war coalition to expose Canadian complicity in the coup.

AQOCI expressed its political bias through Canada's most virulently anti-Aristide network, the Roundtable on Haiti. (See pp.48-49.)

AQOCI receives grants from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), including \$150,000 for 2005-2006, and \$200,000 for 2006-2008.¹ Although most of its funding comes from Québec's foreign affairs ministry, it has also received grants from the Intergovernmental Organization of the Francophonie.²

Kevin Skerrett, a labour activist and Canada Haiti Action Network organizer, notes that before the coup:

"AQOCI became swept up in the anti-Aristide government hysteria generated by CIDA-funded groups in Haiti such as NCHR. [See p.37.] On December 15, 2003, AQOCI issued a press release urging the Canadian government to withdraw all support from the 'Lavalas party regime.' They denounced the Aristide government for being 'riddled with abuses of human rights.'"³

So, while Aristide's government sustained attacks led by Haiti's corporate elite and its partners in Washington, Ottawa and Paris, AQOCI put all of the blame for the political crisis on Haiti's elected government. AQOCI

was unequivocal and

"called for intervention by the Canadian government to denounce the responsibility of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's regime for the deterioration of the current situation."⁴

This news release also revealed AQOCI's extreme bias by twice using the derogatory swear word, "*chimère*." This pejorative slur is regularly used as a verbal weapon in Haiti to tar poor black Aristide supporters in urban



slums, as if they were all violent thugs.⁵

AQOCI's news release also quotes its vice president, Suzanne Loiselle, who "denounces" Aristide's elected government for having "lost all legitimacy, ignoring the human rights of its people and ignoring the calls for democracy of the international community."⁶ Loiselle is a sister from the Société des Auxiliatrices des âmes du Purgatoire⁷ and a director of Entraide

Missionnaire (EMI), a Catholic missionary association that has received CIDA funding.⁸ Like AQOCI, EMI is a member of the Roundtable on Haiti (CPH). In 2005, an open letter from the CPH to Canada's prime minister was co-signed by Loiselle and Marthe Lapierre of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (D&P).⁹ (See pp.19-25.) The only source of information that their letter cited was the thoroughly-discredited, CIDA-funded group formerly known as NCHR-Haiti.¹⁰ (See p.37.)

Associations


Among AQOCI's 62 current members, almost half have projects in Haiti.¹¹ A search of CIDA's website reveals that every one of the 27 AQOCI member groups involved in Haiti receives significant funding from this government agency. Among these CIDA-funded AQOCI groups are several that followed the government's regime change policies in Haiti:

- Alternatives (see pp.6-7.)
- Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (see pp.13-15.)
- D&P (see pp.19-25)
- Equitas (see p.35)
- Oxfam-Québec (see p.23)

AQOCI's website also notes that its two main partners are:

- Rights & Democracy (see pp.44-47)
- Amnesty International—which produced several unbalanced (NCHR-based) reports on Haitian human rights abuses before, during and after the 2004 coup.¹²

AQOCI also holds an important position as Québec's "provincial council" for the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC), Canada's largest network of aid agencies. An extensive search of its website¹³ could not find a single critique of the



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role played by the Canadian government, or its agents, in helping to:

- destabilize Aristide's government,
- plan Haiti's 2004 regime change,
- prop up Haiti's coup regime, or
- hide the abuses of that regime.

Although CCIC has been complicit through this silence, it does not seem to have taken the active role that AQOCI did in promoting the Canadian government's disastrous actions in Haiti.

Dissociations

AQOCI has also worked within Montréal's anti-war coalition, the Collectif Échec à la guerre (CEG). In fact, AQOCI helped set up CEG in late 2002 and has, at times, played a very active role within it.¹⁴ Although the CEG has done excellent work to oppose the Afghan and Iraq wars, it was unable to play a role in exposing the Canadian government's complicity in Haiti's 2004 coup or the subsequent Latortue dictatorship. To understand why, it is necessary to examine AQOCI's role in the CEG.

The goal of the CEG, which now lists about 225 members,¹⁵ is to oppose "U.S. military domination over the planet—and more particularly...Canadian collusion and participation."¹⁶ Its platform states that "[i]n general,... [CEG] opposes all wars of aggression" and the U.S. "policy of domination in which military power constitutes the major asset to extend the empire to the whole world." It also seeks to

"dissociate Canada's policies and economy from this aggressive U.S. stance and will demand that the Canadian Government...refuse to... participate directly or indirectly in wars of aggression and to become an associate in the implementation of neo-colonial mandates."¹⁷

Furthermore, CEG "calls upon all nations of the world to firmly oppose the hijacking of the United Nations to benefit U.S. war plans."¹⁷

With this strongly worded platform to support them, the representatives of member groups attending CEG meetings between January and May 2005, had numerous discussions about Haiti.¹⁸ They drew up an excellent position paper denouncing Canada's "collusion" in the "violent overthrow of the Haitian government" and denounced

the invasion and occupation of Haiti.¹⁹

Raymond Legault, the CEG's main organizer and spokesperson, explains that this statement on Haiti was discussed and agreed to at CEG's general meeting on May 25, 2005. While some CEG activists wanted to disseminate the statement, others disagreed, saying it was not in a "publishable" form. More importantly, the CEG position was put on hold because many of its members had not yet endorsed the statement. Although it was emailed to all member groups, the CEG decided not to allow further publication of the Haiti statement, whether in print, or even on their own website, until it had unanimous approval from all members.²⁰ However, the statement did not disappear completely for it was placed on the website of the Québec Coalition for Peace.²¹

Because CEG operates by consensus, lack of support from even one or two of its member groups is enough to prevent the Collective from taking an action. This is exactly what happened. AQOCI's unwillingness to endorse the CEG statement marked the beginning of the end for its principled stand against Canada's role in Haiti.

Only one other CEG group joined AQOCI in blocking consensus—Development and Peace (D&P). D&P even sent a letter to the CEG (dated July 13, 2005) to officially dissociate itself from CEG's statement on Haiti.²² Although D&P was a member, it did not send representatives to CEG meetings. However, AQOCI was and still is considered very important to CEG.

Thanks largely to AQOCI's opposition to CEG's stand on Haiti, those attending the collective's meeting in October 2005, decided to "suspend" their statement.²³ This effectively killed CEG's policy on Haiti which was already in a state of limbo.

Since then, Montréal's largest peace coalition has not undertaken any opposition to Canadian "collusion" in Haiti's 2004 coup or the human rights catastrophe that followed. And, not only has CEG's website—which is hosted by AQOCI²⁴—never published their statement on Haiti, it does not contain a single article, news release or other document (from any other source) that even mentions the word "Haiti."²⁵

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