

A Government-Owned “Human Rights” Group

By Kevin Skerrett, researcher, Canadian Union of Public Employees and activist, Canada Haiti Action Network

There are times when the things that people say—or publish—can get people killed.

On December 14, 2006, Rights and Democracy (R&D)—Canada’s best-funded “human rights organization”—may well have done exactly that when it published a news release about a crime spree in Haiti.¹ Following a series of well-publicized kidnappings in Port-au-Prince, R&D published a statement ridiculing the recently elected Haitian government’s “policy of dialogue with violent gangs,” and its supposed preference for “dialogue at the expense of justice.”²

The content of R&D’s text—blaming all of the kidnappings and other crimes on “armed gangs” from the capital’s poorest neighbourhoods—matched the ugly tone of Haiti’s right-wing elite-owned media. [See pp.26-37.] Such accusations are often thinly veiled references to popular organizations linked to the Lavalas party and movement of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Tens of thousands of Haitians associated with these groups built a popular, grassroots resistance against the 2004 coup and the continuing military occupation of Haiti by Canadian-backed UN forces. In contrast to this popular movement are the small, elite-backed and CIDA-funded groups such as those cited by R&D in its news release: the National Coordination for Advocacy on Women’s Rights (CONAP) and the Platform of Haitian Organizations for Human Rights, whose membership includes the internationally-discredited National Coalition for Haitian Rights-Haiti (NCHR) (See p.37.)

As a result, R&D’s accusations ignored the complex realities admitted by RCMP Chief Superintendent David Beer, director general of International Policing, who led the 1400-strong UN police force in Haiti.

“The extent and depth of corruption, crimin-



Kena Betancour/Reuters

Haitian Proverb:

“Bel dan pa di zanmi”

“Smiling teeth don’t mean someone is your friend.”

ality and politicization of the HNP [Haitian National Police] exceeds what had been anticipated. *Police were discovered to be actively involved in kidnapping and drug trafficking* [and]...special units of the police...were implicated in significant human rights violations.” (Emphasis added)³

Despite such inconvenient complexities, and clearly calling for a more aggressive crackdown, R&D urged Haitian authorities to use “vigorous efforts to arrest and prosecute” gang leaders blamed for all the kidnappings.

Barely one week after R&D’s appeal for “vigorous efforts” to protect “innocent victims,” the UN occupation force in Haiti—a so-called “peacekeeping” operation with the French acronym MINUSTAH—went into action. At 4 a.m. on December 22, MINUSTAH launched a massive military force, including helicopters, into densely-popu-

lated impoverished neighbourhoods within Cité Soleil. Its stated objective was to advance the “struggle against insecurity, following the recent wave of kidnappings in the capital.”⁴

The result was entirely predictable. After several hours of automatic gunfire, journalists estimated that 20 innocent civilians, were shot and killed.⁵ Some 30 others were admitted to the Médecins Sans Frontières hospital, which reported that most were women and children. A Reuters reporter stated: “About 400 UN soldiers in armored vehicles, backed by Haitian police forces, stormed...Cité Soleil in a move to dislodge heavily armed gang members.... A Reuters photographer counted nine bodies from the clashes that ensued and eyewitnesses counted four others dead. At least 30 people were wounded, according to humanitarian aid workers. All of the casualties were believed to be civilians.”⁶

Mainstream press reports said 39 residents were killed or injured. Others put the toll even higher. According to eyewitnesses, “most of those killed were simple citizens whose only crime was to



Rights and Democracy

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live in the targeted neighbourhood.”⁷ UN “peacekeepers” and the Haitian police that waged this attack are significantly directed, overseen and financed by Canadian officials, police and military advisers in close consultation with the Canadian Embassy.

This episode offers some perspective into R&D’s commitment to basic human rights in Haiti. Although R&D is ostensibly an independent “non-government organization” (NGO) dedicated to human rights, it nevertheless called for a “vigorous” crackdown by police and military forces known to have already killed dozens of innocent people. Then, when the resulting operation killed or injured dozens of innocents in one of the world’s poorest neighbourhoods, R&D was completely silent. In the weeks that followed this deadly assault (which won fulsome praise from both Canada’s Ambassador to Haiti⁸ and Haiti’s right-wing business class), R&D published no comment whatsoever on the raid, the killings, or the violated human rights of the victims in Cité Soleil.

In telling contrast, the only reference to Cité Soleil in the entire R&D website appears in an R&D report which claimed that Aristide’s Lavalas Party “dispatched militants...provoking inevitable outbreaks of violence” against Haiti’s Group of 184, a corporate-led and CIDA-funded coalition. (See pp.50-53.) This, R&D alleges,

“occurred notably in Mr. Aristide’s traditional stronghold of Cité Soleil where, on July 12, 2003, delegates from the Group of 184 were accosted by pro-government individuals and pelted with rocks.”⁹

The double standard here is shocking. When multimillionaire leaders of the G184—including Andy Apaid, a notorious sweatshop owner—staged this provocative event demanding the ouster of Haiti’s popularly elected government, their buses were met with rocks in Haiti’s poorest slum. This resulted in a firm condemnation from R&D. But, after that elected government was overthrown, and those responsible then pushed for heavily-armed attacks that killed innocents in the same impoverished neighbourhood, the massacre passed without comment from Canada’s R&D.

Conflicts of interest in human rights monitoring

The contradiction inherent in a human rights group appearing to sanction human rights violations becomes comprehensible when viewed in the larger context of the Canadian government’s role in Haiti and the simple reality that “Rights and Democracy” is not *an NGO* at all but rather *an agency of the Canadian government*. According to R&D’s financial statements, over 95% of its budget is provided directly by several Canadian government departments, including CIDA and Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT).¹⁰ R&D was launched by Parliament in 1989 and modeled on the U.S. government’s National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which is notorious for its overt operations to advance U.S. strategic interests abroad. (See p.47.)

R&D’s financial and structural relationships with NED raise serious questions about the independence and integrity of this Canadian agency. Surely, if the Canadian government were interested in an evaluation of human rights in Iraq, Afghanistan or Colombia, it would be unwise to rely on U.S. government agencies. Is independent human rights analysis any less necessary when it comes to the actions and policies of the Canadian government within a conflict zone such as Haiti?

R&D’s Record in Haiti

Not surprisingly, even a cursory examination of R&D’s primary interventions in Haiti demonstrates little more than uncritical cheerleading for the policies and actions of the federal government and its CIDA and DFAIT funders. The following is a partial but revealing list:

January 2004

One month before the 2004 coup, R&D published *Haiti: A Bitter Bicentennial*, a report on their September 2003 delegation to Haiti. (See pp.50-51.) This R&D report offered uncritical praise for the Group of 184 (G184)—a highly partisan coalition of anti-Aristide/anti-Lavalas organizations. The document fails to mention that two principal leaders of the G184—Andre Apaid, Jr., and Charles Henry Baker—are sweatshop owners representing Haiti’s despised business class. Likewise, the report’s

authors deemed unimportant that Apaid was “a leading figure in the spring 2003 campaign to prevent Aristide from doubling the minimum wage.”¹¹ Also ignored was the key fact that the G184—formed under the auspices of the International Republican Institute (a NED-financed body)—was generously funded by U.S. and Canadian agencies, including CIDA. (See p.50-53.)

February 29, 2004 – Present

R&D has refused to report the widespread human rights violations that were carried out by the Canadian government-backed coup regime in Haiti. Extrajudicial killings, political imprisonment and police abuses reported by Amnesty International, the Haitian Bureau des Avocats Internationaux, the University of Miami and the Human Rights Program of Harvard University have been systematically ignored. Widespread demands for an investigation into the overthrow of the Aristide government are not even reported, let alone supported.



R&D President,
Jean-Louis Roy

March 25, 2004

During his testimony before the House of Commons Committee on Foreign Relations, R&D president Jean-Louis Roy reiterated support for Haiti’s elite political opposition forces, and suggested that the political turmoil in Haiti derives from the failure of Haitians “to agree on a minimum set of common principles.”¹² He did not mention that hundreds of Haitians trying to defend the principle of democracy had already been killed in the aftermath of the Canadian-backed coup.

April 28, 2004

R&D co-sponsored a speaking tour to Montréal by Danielle Magloire, representing CIDA-funded CONAP and the unconstitutional “Conseil des Sages,” and Yolène Gilles of the CIDA-funded NCHR-Haiti. On a second tour to Ottawa and Montréal in 2005, the same duo were provided the funds—presumably by R&D—to lobby Canadian MPs and NGO officials.¹³ (See p.49.)

July 6, 2005

UN military forces, backed by Canadian-trained Haitian police, conducted an assault into Cité Soleil, nominally in search of armed gang leaders. Dozens of innocent civilians, mostly women and children, were killed, including Sonia Romelus and her two children. Following a storm of international media attention prompted by wide distribution of gruesome photographic proof of the massacre, the UN force grudgingly announced that an investigation into the incident would be conducted. R&D remained entirely silent. Eventually, MINUSTAH admitted that innocent civilians were killed in the “operation,” but no investigation report was ever made public.¹⁴

October 13, 2005

R&D launched a CIDA-funded “civil society development” project. This \$415,000 program involved opening a Port-au-Prince office for R&D, whose staff is now overseen by the above-mentioned Danielle Magloire.¹⁵ Although this program began just three months after the jailing of the popular Lavalas priest Gérard Jean-Juste, neither R&D nor their Magloire-led office ever commented publicly on his detention or, for that matter, on the hundreds of other Lavalas political prisoners.

February 16, 2006

R&D President Jean-Louis Roy issued a letter responding to the announcement of René Préval’s overwhelming, first-round victory in Haiti’s presidential election. Rather than critically examining significant evidence of manipulation intended to deny Préval’s presidency, Roy “called on” Préval—who enjoyed a much stronger mandate than Canadian Prime Minister Harper¹⁶—to form a government of “national unity.” This would have meant forming a gov-



“Maybe I’ve been a civil servant for too long but I just can’t believe that governments are working against their people.”

**Jean-Paul Hubert,
Interim President, R&D**

erning coalition with the right-wing, elite politicians that Haiti’s electorate had just overwhelmingly rejected.¹⁷

May 7, 2007

DFAIT staff posted videotaped interviews to the YouTube website featuring R&D President Jean-Louis Roy, as well as Canada’s Ambassador to Haiti and the RCMP’s Chief Superintendent. Roy’s interview made it abundantly clear that he views himself and R&D as part of the Canadian government’s “team” in Haiti. He said he was:

“extraordinarily impressed by what Canada is doing in Haiti... [W]e have...Canada has...CIDA has a local team of really great, great quality, Canadians and Haitians. Some of the Haitians have been working there for many, many years... women’s groups, the Group 184.”¹⁸

December 3, 2007

The Harper government appointed Jean-Paul Hubert as Interim President of R&D. This career foreign service officer has spent decades representing the Canadian government in various African, European and Latin American embassies. Hubert then became Canada’s first Ambassador to the Organization of American States (OAS) (1990-1994). More recently (2004-2008), he became Canada’s representative on the OAS’s Inter-American Juridical Committee, and is its president. Hubert’s committee ignored the fact that OAS member states violated its Democratic Charter by financing and supporting paramilitary and civilian groups that carried out Haiti’s 2004 coup.

In 2001, as Canada’s Ambassador to Argentina, Hubert dismissed as

“exaggerated” concerns that the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) would facilitate the privatization of health care:

“Will FTAA do away with [health care]? I can’t believe that.... Maybe I’ve been a civil servant for too long but I just can’t believe that governments are working against their people.”¹⁹

Conclusion

This brief review of R&D should make it clear that the notionally “independent” R&D does not operate with any meaningful autonomy from the Canadian government. There is clearly a danger in having a government-funded agency that pretends to be an NGO and then assumes a prominent role in “selling” government policies. Not only has R&D’s marketing job targetted the media, the general public and legitimate NGOs, it has—most absurdly—also helped to lobby MPs.

Canadians and their political representatives deserve access to well-researched and independently-verified information about human rights and democracy around the world, especially in countries such as Haiti and Afghanistan where Canada’s military, police, diplomats and aid workers are directly engaged. Considering its government funding and structure, R&D cannot reasonably be expected to provide any such objective information. Rather, R&D will continue to directly support and amplify the public relations agendas of the Canadian government, its military, and their proxies. Tragically, the real role of R&D in Haiti has been to undermine human rights and to betray a poor but dignified democracy.

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2. Ibid.
3. David Beer, "Complex mandate: The multifaceted role of international policing," *Vanguard*, September 2006. www.vanguardcanada.com/ComplexMandateBeer
4. Joseph Guylor Delva, "At least nine killed in Haitian slum raid," Reuters, December 22, 2006. www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N22284926.htm
5. Peter Hallward, *Damming the Flood: Haiti, Aristide and the Politics of Containment*, 2007, p.308.
6. See Delva, *ibid*.
7. "Kidnapping: Au moins deux policiers attrapés dans la région de Delmas," *Association Haitienne de Presse*, Dec. 20, 2006. Translation by the author.
8. See Kevin Skerrett, "Ambassador appeals for more deadly operations," *Rabble.ca*, January 31, 2007.
9. Philippe Tremblay, Madeleine Desnoyers and Luis Van Isschot, "Haiti, A Bitter Bicentennial: Report of a mission by Rights & Democracy, September 2003," January 2004, p.15. www.dd-rd.ca/site/_PDF/publications/americanas/haiti_en.pdf
10. Financial statements posted to R&D's website indicate an annual budget of nearly \$10.7 million in 2006/07, reflecting an increase of some 87% over the previous three years.
11. Hallward, *ibid*. p. 193.
12. Hansard, Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, March 25, 2004.
13. News release, "La transition démocratique menacée par la violence en Haïti," Concertation pour Haïti, *Canada News Wire*, April 25, 2004.
14. Andrew Buncombe, "UN Admits Haiti force is not up to the job it faces," *The Independent*, July 30, 2005.
15. R&D Annual Report 2005-2006. www.dd-rd.ca/site/_PDF/publications/annual_reports/annualReport2005-2006.pdf
16. 1984 was the most recent election when a political party won 50% or more of the popular vote. There are only four such elections in the past 100 years. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_federal_election_results_since_1867
17. News release, "Haiti: Préval should form a government of national reconciliation," Rights and Democracy, February 16, 2006.
18. DFAIT's YouTube upload site: www.youtube.com/user/dfaitmaeci
19. Sue Montgomery, *Kingston Whig-Standard*, April 10, 2001, p. 8.

National Endowment for Democracy

By William Blum, former U.S. State Department employee.

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) often does the exact opposite of what its name implies. It was set up in the early 1980s under President Reagan in the wake of all the negative revelations about the CIA in the late 1970s. The CIA was getting an exceedingly bad name, and was causing much embarrassment for the powers-that-be.

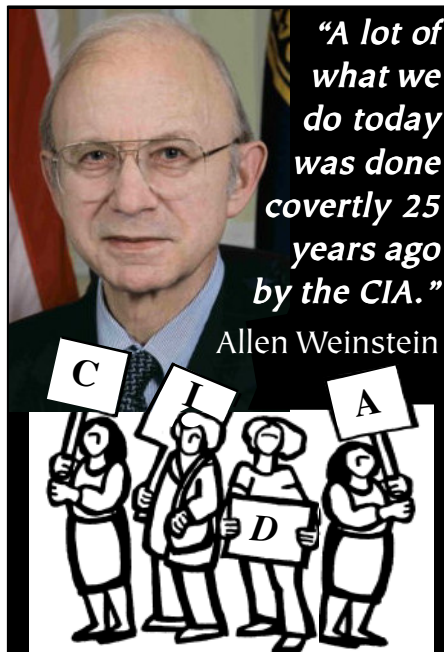
So, many of these awful things were shifted to a new organization, with a nice sounding name—the National Endowment for Democracy—that would do, somewhat overtly, what the CIA had been doing for decades.

It was a masterpiece of politics, public relations and cynicism.

Allen Weinstein, who helped draft legislation to establish NED, was quite candid when saying in 1991: "A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA."

In a multitude of ways, NED meddles in the internal affairs of foreign countries by supplying funds, technical know-how, training, educational materials, computers, copiers, cars, etc., to select political groups, civic organizations, unions, dissident movements, student groups, book publishers, newspapers and other media, etc.

Source: Excerpt, *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower* (2000).



When Canada imposed an aid embargo on Aristide's government, it effectively dropped the 'D' in CIDA. Then, CIDA gave tens of millions to anti-Aristide groups leading the deceptive campaign to oust Haiti's elected government.

R&D: Canada's NED

By Anthony Fenton, co-author, *Canada in Haiti: Waging War on the Poor Majority* (2005)

In the late 1980's, the Canadian government began creating arms-length agencies dedicated to "democracy promotion." Thomas Axworthy and Les Campbell, who have since proposed and conceptualized a "blueprint" for a NED-like structure under the banner of the "Democracy Canada Institute," say policy makers initially sought to create an agency similar to the NED. Then, Parliament created the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (later renamed Rights & Democracy).

R&D maintains a close affiliation with NED, sharing a database on NED's website along with funding and partnering with some of the same organizations. NED describes R&D as a "counterpart institution" and reveals that "During the planning phase for the new Centre, a Parliamentary task force consulted with the leadership of NED."

Campbell was chief of staff for former NDP leader Audrey McLaughlin, and later joined NED's National Democratic Institute, where he is regional director for Middle East operations. Axworthy is a former secretary to Pierre Trudeau, and brother of the former Liberal foreign-affairs Minister, Lloyd Axworthy.

Source: Excerpt, "Canada's Contribution to 'Democracy Promotion.'" *Canadian Dimension*, Nov./Dec. 2006.

NED's Four Pillars

NED's four core institutions are the:

- International Republican Institute
- National Democratic Institute
- Centre for International Private Enterprise
- American Center for International Labor.