

Giving a Helping Hand to Haiti's Elite

Aesop's Fables, illustration by Francis Barlow, 1687



Haitian Proverb:

"Bourik travay, chwal galonnen."

"The donkey does the work, the horse gets the profit."

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

Although now defunct, the Group of 184 was the most powerful coalition of "civil society" organizations in Haiti during the lead up to the 2004 coup. Dominated by Haiti's business elite—and generously funded by American, Canadian and European government "aid" and "democracy promotion" agencies—the G184 coordinated and led the successful campaign to destabilize Haiti's elected government and depose President Aristide. This umbrella group for Haitian "NGOs" pushed the agenda of Haiti's largest corporations—the owners of which are among that 1% of the country's population that owns nearly 50% of its wealth. The amazing thing however is that the G184 did all this under the bogus guise of representing a diverse cross section of Haitian society, 90% of which is impoverished.

The G184 was led by two of the country's most reviled multimillionaires, who are both of middle eastern heritage: (1) Andy Apaid, Jr., a U.S. citizen and the owner of Haiti's largest

sweatshops, and (2) Reginald Boulos, owner of a Haitian pharmaceutical firm whose products had killed dozens of poor Haitians.¹ Both are linked to influential media corporations² belonging to the National Association of Haitian Media (ANMH). (See pp.26-37.)

Two commanders of the "rebel" death squads—whose rampages created a pretext for the foreign invasion, occupation and 2004 regime change—have revealed that they received money, weapons and logistical support from top business leaders in the G184.³

This is especially interesting because CIDA funneled \$23 million into the hands of the G184 and projects run by ten of its member groups.⁴

The G184 and some of its most vociferous members also received a helping hand from CIDA-funded organizations in Canada that made it their business to encourage and promote Haiti's anti-Aristide movement.

Rights & Democracy

In January 2004, just one month before the Canadian-backed coup in Haiti, this Canadian government agency—which poses as an objective "NGO"—published a report called "Haiti: A Bitter

Bicentennial." Before praising the G184 as Haiti's most likely saviour, Rights and Democracy (R&D) set up the storyline by stating:

"The polarization that characterizes the Haitian political scene has not prevented civil society from proposing popular alternatives to the irreconcilable positions of political groups."⁵

Then, placing the G184 at centre stage, R&D described the G184's heroic role in striving to "create a space for mediation between the political formations," because of its "dismay at the irresponsible discourse emanating from both sides of the political spectrum."⁶

Referring to this elite-led network as a "citizen movement" that "could catalyze the changes need[ed] for Haiti to break the impasse," R&D's supposedly objective reportage reads more like a paid advertisement for the theatre it was producing: The G184's "very existence demonstrates that civil society is attempting to....look beyond confrontation to provoking dialogue in an effort to find solutions" to a "partisan standoff."⁷

R&D's promotion of the G184 as a neutral arbitrator is absurd. Rather than being a mediating force between polarized groups, the G184 was the elite-led coalition that united organizations fervently engaged in the highly partisan struggle to oust Aristide.

Although R&D's report conceded that "some" G184 members "are associated with the political opposition," it slyly noted that "as a whole [it] is perceived as being separate from it." This "perceived" impartiality was of great value because it allowed the G184 to be presented by Canadian and U.S. officials—and their shills in various "NGOs"—as the detached advocate for "a new model of governance in the form of a social contract."⁸

R&D's report flattered this G184 initiative saying it "may prove to be a highly useful instrument for public discussion." However, it did not divulge that the development of this "social contract" was financed by CIDA. The G184 and one of its right-wing member groups—the New Haiti Foundation think tank (also led by Andy Apaid,

Jr.)—received \$334,000 from CIDA to develop this “New Social Contract.”⁹

Neither does R&D’s report acknowledge that R&D itself is funded almost entirely by CIDA and other Canadian government departments.

If R&D seriously wanted to provoke “dialogue” across Haiti’s political spectrum, it would have talked to some NGOs representing the voters who had elected Aristide’s government. However, every one of the dozen Haitian groups consulted for R&D’s report shared CIDA’s view of the Aristide government as a “difficult partner.”¹⁰ Not a single “NGO” listed in R&D’s report was among the hundreds of groups that valued the existing “social contract” between Haiti’s electorate and its political representatives. Instead, R&D consulted with people like Yolene Gilles of the National Coalition for Haitian Rights. (See p.49.)

Three of the other “NGOs” that it consulted were G184 members:

- Center of Economic and Social Research (CRESFED)
- Ecumenical Human Rights Center
- Peace and Justice¹¹

The first and last of these were funded directly by CIDA. In fact, *all* 12 groups consulted for this R&D report are beneficiaries of CIDA’s largesse. At least nine received direct CIDA funding, while the remainder were financed by CIDA-funded groups in Canada.

R&D also consulted several CIDA employees in Haiti including Philippe Vixamar and Dilia Lemaire, from Fonds d’Appui à la Justice et aux Droits Humains,¹² which administered CIDA grants there. Soon after the 2004 regime change, CIDA appointed Vixamar to become the coup-installed regime’s Deputy Minister of Justice. (See p.39.)

When he left that post in 2005, soon after the shamed resignation of his boss—the U.S.-appointed Haitian Justice Minister Bernard Gousse—CIDA replaced Vixamar with Dilia Lemaire. This long-time CIDA employee was listed in an August-2004 World Bank document¹³ as the coordinator of the Movement of Haitian Women for Education (MOUFHED). This G184 member group, that received CIDA funding,¹⁴ is one of R&D’s partner organizations in Haiti.

Alternatives

Alternatives’ communications director and editor of its publication, François L’Écuyer, paints a rather pleasant picture of the G184, praising it as “a large coalition of civil society organisations, and many opposition parties,”¹⁵

“representing 13 vital sectors of national life ranging from business sectors and popular urban farmer, from intellectuals, artists, young people and students, professionals and women.”¹⁶

L’Écuyer does not however reveal Alternatives’ own links to some of these G184 members. For example, Alternatives invited these Haitian “NGOs” to fly delegates to the Québec Social Forum (QSF) in August 2007:

- MOUFHED
- Papaye Peasant Movement (MPP)
- Groupe Médialternatif (GM)¹⁷

MOUFHED and MPP both held memberships in the G184, and were CIDA funded.¹⁸ Although GM was not a G184 member, it produces *Alterpresse*, which—giving vent to literally thousands of anti-Aristide/anti-Lavalas articles, interviews and press releases in four languages—is probably the most complete online media source for G184 propaganda.¹⁹ The *Alterpresse* website contains more than 400 citations of Haitian media outlets belonging to ANMH, the G184’s influential media association, and about 100 uncritical reports covering ANMH’s part in the struggle to oust Aristide’s government.

Alternatives also organized a QSF workshop at which these Haitian delegates made presentations:

- Ronald Colbert, GM
- Chavannes Jean-Baptiste, MPP
- Dilia Lemaire, consultant on women and development.²⁰

Colbert, a founder and the current administrator of GM, had previously worked for *Le Nouvelliste*, a newspaper belonging to the G184’s ANMH, and for two other G184 members:

- Reflection and Action Group for Freedom of the Press
- Haïti Solidarité Internationale²¹

Jean-Baptiste is a peasant leader who drew the MPP into a “bizarre alliance” to “uncritically support” G184 leader Charles Baker, an “elite owner of a Haitian garment industry sweatshop” and other “Duvalierist members of the

tiny, mostly ‘blanc’ (light-skinned, Francophone), Haitian elite.”²²

Although Alternative’s François L’Écuyer “admitted that all 15 groups [that] Alternatives works with in Haiti (many of whom are themselves funded by CIDA) are anti-Lavalas,”²³ it has only one official partner in Haiti—the Haitian Platform of Advocacy for an Alternative Development (PAPDA). One member of the PAPDA coalition of eight anti-Aristide groups—the National Association of Haitian Agronomists (ANDAH)—was a member of the G184²⁴ that worked with another influential G184 member, the Haitian Medical Association.²⁵

PAPDA director, Camille Chalmers, who was on Alternatives’ board of directors, co-signed a statement on the G184-led demand for Aristide’s resignation:

“PAPDA praises the courage and foresight of the Haitian people who are mobilizing in greater numbers every day to demand the resignation of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. PAPDA is happy to associate itself with this demand and reiterates its conviction that President Aristide’s departure constitutes an essential element of any real way out of the crisis facing the country today.”²⁶

Alternatives has also lent support to several G184 member groups by providing a platform on its website for the promotion and/or publication of their anti-Aristide/anti-Préval diatribes:

- Haitian Union Coordination²⁷
- Papaye National Peasant Movement Congress²⁸
- Haïti Solidarité Internationale²⁹
- CRESFED³⁰

Development & Peace

Development & Peace (D&P) presented a glowing picture of the G184 when describing it as having a “relatively progressive nature from the perspective of Haitian politics.”³¹ However, D&P did not try to pretend—as R&D had—that this elitist coalition was a neutral force in Haitian politics. Instead, D&P’s “Background Paper on Haiti,” was more upfront, saying that

“some sectors of the opposition formed a movement known as the Group of 184, a group that was later to be at the forefront of civil society

Links to the Group of 184

calls for Aristide's departure."³²

D&P did however echo R&D's praise for the G184's main project, which it described as a "'new social contract' between rich and poor, urban and peasant dwellers."³³ In so doing, D&P perpetuated the illusion that the G184 was intent on mediating the chasm between Haiti's various social sectors and class divisions. And, like R&D, this D&P report did not mention that CIDA had financed this G184 project.

Neither does D&P reveal that two CIDA-funded Haitian recipients of its support were members of the G184:

- MOUFHED
- MPP.³⁴

FOCAL

Soon after the 2004 coup, FOCAL provided a platform in its magazine for James Morrell, director and co-founder of the Washington-based Haiti Democracy Project (HDP), in which he discussed "the government opposition coalition Group of 184."³⁵ This propaganda piece—later republished on the HDP website, under the provocative title, "Build Unity, Don't Drive Wedges. Leave That to the Haitians"³⁶—concluded that "Canada can base a successful approach to Haiti" on a "coincidence of understanding with the Bush administration" and by "building on such sense of unity as the Haitians managed to achieve in the anti-Aristide uprising."³⁷

Although FOCAL's website describes HDP as an "independent research group" and "an independent organization,"³⁸ it is certainly not independent from the G184, or the U.S. government. HDP's founders and "affiliated operators" include State Department officials and three former U.S. ambassadors to Haiti.³⁹

Tom Reeves, a retired American professor of Caribbean studies—who describes the G184 as "little more than a list of well-known pro-elite and pro-business apologists in Haiti, most of whom have virtually no public following,"⁴⁰ says that "HDP is responsible for shaping the public image" of the G184 in the U.S. "A search of the HDP website," he notes, "shows 143 supportive and often fawning references to the 184."⁴¹ Reeves also reveals that "Dr. Rudolph Boulos and his family



"Papa Doc"
Duvalier
& friends

Haitian Proverb:

"When the character of a man is not clear to you,
look at his friends."

have funded HDP, and are known for their ties to Duvalierists and other right-wing elements in Haiti."⁴²

FOCAL is well acquainted with Dr. Boulos, a director and founder of HDP,⁴³ who is believed to be its main financier.⁴⁴ FOCAL has sponsored his attendance at their events, most recently during a Senatorial delegation to Canada in the Fall of 2007 which was also supported by the HDP.⁴⁵ Boulos also attended a FOCAL conference in Florida on increasing corporate influence over Haiti's education system.⁴⁶

Rudolph's brother, Reginald, was among the select few representing Haiti's corporate elite that were flown to Ottawa in 2005 for FOCAL's government-funded session on boosting "private sector" influence in Haiti. Although he was then a top G184 spokesman, he attended this FOCAL event as the president of Haiti's Chamber of Commerce and Industry, a powerful G184 member group. Also attending this FOCAL meeting was Richard Buteau, vice president the Haitian Tourist Association,⁴⁷ yet another corporate member of the G184.

FOCAL's report acknowledged only one person, Lionel Delatour, as having "assisted...in preparations for the meeting." He is the founder and secretary-general of a G184 member group, the Centre for Free Enterprise and Democracy (CLED). (See p.9.) While leading this USAID- and CIDA-funded think tank, Delatour was in-

volved in the Spring-2004 visit to Canada of the coup-regime's Prime Minister, Gérard Latortue. Delatour was also "visit coordinator" for the FOCAL's delegation bringing HDP founder and financier, Dr. Boulos, and others, to Ottawa in the Fall of 2007.⁴⁸ Delatour is also a co-founder of HDP, the Boulos-funded, U.S. government-linked "NGO" that FOCAL lauds as "independent."

Canadian Executive Service Organization

Every year, the Canadian Executive Service Organization (CESO)—a not-for-profit CIDA-funded organization—sends about 1,500 volunteers with "professional" backgrounds to serve as "mentors, advisers and trainers" for "clients and partners" across Canada and around the world.⁴⁹ CESO's website asks:

"Do you have a business in need of advice and services? Does your community require assistance in financial management, business development and governance?"⁵⁰

Several corporate members of Haiti's G184 took advantage of CESO's kind offers and received about 500 days of assistance from its expert volunteers.

For example, CESO has sponsored at least six projects to help the Haitian Tourist Association with such efforts as organising events, maintaining air conditioning equipment, developing business plans and creating a

seaside resort's management system.⁵¹ Curiously, these "private sector" CESO projects were all funded through a CIDA contract in "support of governance in Haiti."⁵² It was signed in June 2005, midway through the rule of the illegal, Canadian-backed coup regime.

Another G184 member that benefited from CESO's CIDA-funded program was Delatour's CLED. It received more than six months worth of free volunteer help to build its strategic and operational plans, as well as to create and maintain its website.

A third G184 member using CESO's professional expertise was Haiti's Southeast Chamber of Commerce. It gained valuable CIDA-funded training and support on such urgent matters of development assistance as:

- "How to determine the market"
- "The return on investment"
- "Cash flow"⁵³

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