

Creating the Necessary Pretext Incident

By Peter Hallward, Professor of Modern European Philosophy, Middlesex University, UK.

When the International Republican Institute (IRI) and Group of 184 (G184) went looking for supporters for their campaign to destabilize Haiti’s elected government, it wasn’t difficult to enlist some students to the cause. The International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) put considerable time and money into the creation of new student groups, including FEUH (Fédération des Etudiants de l’Université d’état d’Haiti) and GRAFNEH (Grand Front National des Etudiants Haitiens). As anyone active in the movement will tell you, scores of “student leaders” were offered money and visas to the U.S. and France in exchange for helping organize anti-Aristide protests.

As women’s rights activist and investigator, Anne Sosin explains:

“Only a fraction of the students in the system participated in the protest movement and many did so to get visas to leave Haiti; many of the so-called students were not actually students in the state University but were sent in to sow chaos.”

By the end of 2003 “many of the student leaders had taken workshops with the International Republican Institute.” In exchange for this modest investment, the IRI bought itself the perfect cover for the coup—idealistic young democrats like the quasi-student Hervé Saintilus (leader of FEUH), who could then be quoted by the *New York Times* demanding that “Bush and the State Department come get this toxic garbage [Aristide] out of here as fast as they can.”¹

All that was missing was a suitably clear-cut reason to protest a presi-

dent who (along with Préval) had done immeasurably more for Haitian education than any other president in the country’s history.

FEUH found the pretext it needed when, in July 2002, it presented the government’s removal of state university’s rector, Jean-Marie Paquiot, as a gross violation of the university’s autonomy. In reality, Paquiot’s four-year term had expired six months previously. As he continued to stall elections for his successor, the exasperated Fanmi Lavalas (FL) education minister replaced him with a temporary appointee. Since Paquiot was the recipient of significant IFES support, critics of the government quickly organized a vocal campaign in his defense.

A few months later, as usual, FL bowed to public pressure and allowed Paquiot to return to his post, pending the arrangement of imminent elections. The media made sure, however, that

Video Evidence Reveals True Culprits

By Kevin Pina, journalist and documentary film producer

A video tape of events at the university clearly shows that Lavalas militants were *outside* the building when the transgressions occurred and that so-called “students” were in complete control of the facility when the Rector entered. The anti-Aristide “students” can be seen pummeling the police and press with large rocks. As the Rector enters with a police escort, the “students” chant “no police” several times from behind the large metal gate, at which time the Rector is heard asking the police to let him enter unescorted. This does not sound like a compound under siege from within, but rather a site under the complete control of those inside. As you hear the crashing sounds of computers in the facility, Lavalas popular organizations members comment on the tape, “Oh my god. They are going to blame us or the police after this is over.” The tape irrefutably shows that the only camera crew allowed to enter the facility was Andy Apaid’s Tele-Haiti, while the rock-throwing students kept the other media outside. In that case,

how could it be that Lavalas militants were inside and in control of the university facility? One student who left the campus bloodied may hold the key:

“We were attacked by student members of the opposition for being pro-Aristide. After they broke the computers they...held a quick meeting. They had cell phones and talked with someone on the outside. Then they brought into the room the faculty member responsible for the computers and he talked for several minutes with someone on the cell phone ...[and] he agreed with them.”

As I watched the tape I could sense that the “facts” had been rehearsed. The “students” shamelessly forced tears as they left the facility blaming the evil Lavalas grassroots organizations for attacking them.

Editor’s Note:

The video evidence described in this article is shown in Pina’s documentary, “Haiti: The Betrayal of Democracy.”

Source: “Haiti Under Siege,” *Black Commentator*, January 15, 2004. www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=4967

CIDA-funded Propaganda about “Black Friday”

By Richard Sanders

The CIDA-funded agencies in Canada that helped spread propaganda about “Black Friday,” include:

- Alternatives
 - Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale
 - Development and Peace
 - Entraide Missionnaire
 - Rights and Democracy
- Much of this propaganda originated from Haitian groups that were also on the CIDA payroll, such as:
- National Coordination for Advocacy on Women’s Rights (CONAP) and Women’s Info (EnfoFanm)
 - Group of 184
 - National Coalition for Haitian Rights
 - Platform to Advocate Alternative Development (PAPDA)

Editor’s Note:

Articles and statements, published by these CIDA-funded “NGOs,” that convey the propaganda version of “Black Friday,” are listed on COAT’s website: coat.ncf.ca/our_magazine/links/63/BF.htm

“Black Friday”

their listeners remembered the important point: a dictatorial Aristide had trampled on one of the last independent institutions in the country. An initial student protest against this government interference was staged in November 2002, but neither it nor the occasional rally that followed was able to generate much public interest.

Things were different a year later. On December 5, 2003, a student rally in support of the G184 turned into a brawl between anti- and pro-government protesters. Perhaps two dozen students were injured, and Paquiot's legs were allegedly broken in the mêlée. For many critics of the FL, this was the defining moment of its demise. “Most knowledgeable observers,” says the anti-Lavalas journalist Cali Ruchala, identify the December-5 clash as the single-most important incident leading to the coup of February 29, 2004:

“This was the day Aristide's partisans opened fire on demonstrating students at the University of Haiti, shocking many diehard supporters of Lavalas and some of Aristide's most committed allies.... Never in the past had an assault seemed so brazen, or the roles so clearly defined.”²

According to Aristide's political opposition, the assault represented the climax of “*chimère*” mayhem, the single most violent episode in a long campaign of state-sanctioned intimidation. [See “Epithets without Borders, pp.14-15.] “After December 5,” said G184's Hans Tippenhauer, “we told the students ‘whatever you do, we are behind you.’” The incident became known in opposition circles as “Black Friday,” and thanks to G184 channels like Andy Apaid's Tele-Haiti and Radio Métropole, the violence received massive media attention.

In reality, however, things were not so clear-cut. “The standard media account,” insists Haitian-born Canadian social justice activist Kim Ives, “was completely false.” A Haitian Press Agency reporter described the incident as follows:

“One member of a popular organization (OP) and one student were shot and wounded on Friday, December 5 during a confrontation between students and OP members downtown in the capital. Many other peo-

ple, students and OP members, were also injured with stones and sticks. The confrontation started when students, reinforced by members of the Convergence and the Group of 184 began to throw volleys of stones on OP members who were in front of the national university premises and the social sciences faculty.... demand[ing] the resignation of governmental authorities. Furious, OP members got into the university yard.... Violent blows with sticks and stones were exchanged ...between opposition members, students and OP members. That's when an OP member named Harold was shot from the roof of the social sciences faculty, where the students and G184 were. Shooting continued to try to stop the police from evacuating the wounded OP member. The police had to shoot in the air to force students and OP members to leave. In this confusion, one student, Carlo Jean, was shot and wounded according to a Justice of the Peace. The students accuse the police of not protecting them against those they call ‘*chimères*,’ [but] members of the G184 and the Haitian trade union who were inside the university office... are accused of encouraging students to commit violent acts.”³

Aristide and Prime Minister Yves Neptune immediately denied responsibility for the violence, and condemned it in the strongest terms. According to Neptune, and several witnesses, including a Haitian police spokesman, it was the students who had prevented the police from entering the university to defuse the situation. When the case eventually came to trial in the spring of 2006, Paquiot was unable to remember the identity of his attackers and refused a court request for medical documentation of his injuries. A doctor who treated him at the hospital later confirmed that his legs were not broken after all.⁴ Almost all of

“the student plaintiffs ignored summons to appear before the investigating judge and never testified; none of the victims and witnesses who testified were able to identify any of the defendants as their aggressors or place them at the scene of the incident.”⁵

In the meantime, however, December 5 provided the IRI and IFES with exactly the sort of publicity they were looking for. When Tom Griffin, a lawyer and human rights investigator from the University of Miami, spoke to them in November 2004, IFES administrators told him that they

“believed that violence by Aristide supporters during a demonstration at the state university on December 5, 2003 was the ‘mistake’ that put him ‘over the top’ and effectively signalled the end of his government.... The administrators say that the university had been brought to the boiling point by FEUH, IFES’ ‘sensitized’ association of university students. They said that IFES had held ‘sensitization’ meetings at the university that became anti-Aristide rallies.”⁶

The IFES and its G184 allies made sure that after December 5 there would be no going back. A protest that had its origins in a trivial dispute about the university rectorship quickly snowballed into a major campaign for the unconditional elimination of Aristide. ANMH news outlets like Radio Signal FM immediately rallied in support of what its director called the students’ “noble cause,” and provided round-the-clock coverage of their struggle to “combat the dictatorship.”⁷

References

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3. “Protest and Violence at the State University on December 5,” *AHP*, December 5, 2003.
4. Interview with Dr. Marie-Antoinette Ganthier, Pétionville, January 9, 2007.
5. Brian Concannon, “Analysis of *Ordonnance de clôture* in December 5, 2003 case” (April 21, 2006); interview with Georges Honorat, Port-au-Prince, April 20, 2006.
6. Thomas Griffin, *Haiti Human Rights Investigation*, November 2004, p.22.
7. Anne-Marie Issa, interview with Isobel Macdonald, December 2005, in Macdonald, “Covering the Coup,” p.99.

Source: Excerpt, *Damming the Flood: Haiti, Aristide and the Politics of Containment*, 2008.