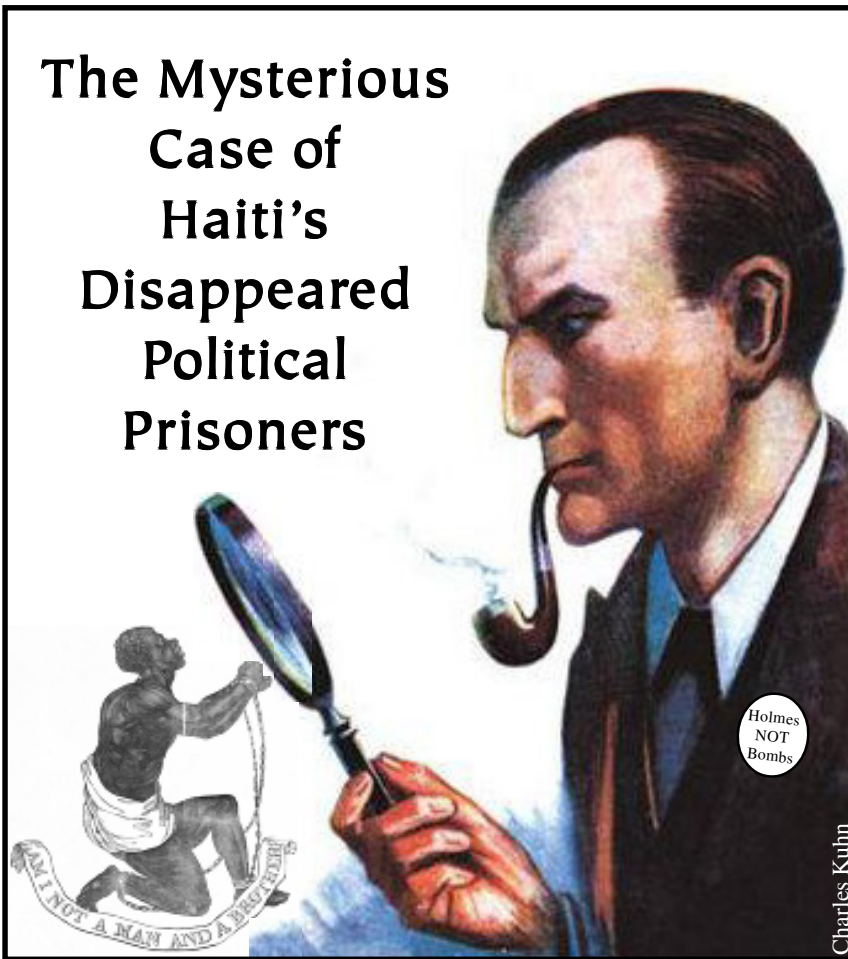


The Mysterious Case of Haiti's Disappeared Political Prisoners



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

Pretend for a moment that you are Sherlock Holmes and that the case before you is the mysterious disappearance of hundreds of political prisoners in Haiti following the 2004 coup. To be precise, these prisoners didn't actually vanish. It was all an illusion, a political sleight of hand, designed to remove living evidence of a crime so massive that even your arch-enemy—the evil supervillain, Professor James Moriarty—would have blushed.

Let's begin this true crime story on November 19, 2004, when Paul Martin—during the first-ever visit to Haiti by a Canadian Prime Minister—told a bevy of reporters that: “There are no political prisoners in Haiti.”¹ We must set aside the mystery of why none of these journalists responded: “But Prime Minister Martin how can you say that? Your counterpart, Yvon Neptune, Haiti's legitimate Prime Minister has been illegally imprisoned without charge for almost five months.” (See pp.44-46.)

Martin's statement was contra-

dicted that same month by two sources: (1) the Justice and Peace Commission of Haiti's Catholic Church, which estimated that 700 political prisoners were then in jail,² and (2) representatives of the deposed Lavalas government that told the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas' Mission to Haiti “that over 4,500 political prisoners are currently being held.”³

The existence of Haiti's political prisoners was also confirmed by numerous human rights investigations led by such organizations as the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti,⁴ the Quixote Center,⁵ the National Lawyers Guild,⁶ the Ecumenical Program on Central America and the Caribbean,⁷ the Haiti Accompaniment Project⁸ and the University of Miami Law School's Center for the Study of Human Rights.⁹ Reports issued by these groups and others, all documented the existence of political prisoners during the coup-installed regime's campaign of terror against political supporters of President Aristide and his elected government.¹⁰

An excerpt from Peter Hallward's recent book *Damming the Flood* also

reveals the deficit of truth in Martin's statement. Considering Canada's central role in the 2004 regime change that had caused Haiti's jails to overflow with political prisoners, Martin's denial was a declaration of innocence on behalf of his government.

Martin's claim would, of course, have been recognized as patently false by Haiti's political prisoners themselves, and by their families, friends, colleagues and neighbours. But this was irrelevant because our PM's outrageous utterance was not meant for the ears of these poor Haitian voters who had been robbed of their government by the Canadian-backed coup. Neither were his words aimed at activists who had read the reports cited above, for they would not be influenced by Martin's swaggingly false intonements.

The target audience for Martin's reassuring words was Canada's general public. They were the ones who needed convincing that Canada's role in the 2004 coup had not sparked a crime wave of state terrorism surpassing even the excesses of the previous, CIA-backed coup against Aristide in 1991.

An obvious question arises: “Was Martin lying or was he perhaps duped into denying the existence of Haiti's political prisoners?”

There is yet another explanation. Perhaps Martin was agnostic on the truth of this statement. It was, after all, not *his* job to confirm the veracity of a PM's utterances, even when *he* was that PM. Fact checking, he may have mused, was a job delegated to others much farther down the chain of command.

“Follow the Lie”

Legend has it that *Washington Post* reporter Bob Woodward had a secret source, dubbed “Deep Throat,” whose advice for uncovering the Watergate burglary was the famous phrase, “Follow the money.” Let's pretend that we too have such a source, named “Deep Pockets,” and that her advice to us is “Follow the lie back to its source.”

Since Martin's political coaches could not be expected to do any actual research, to whom would they turn for their material?

Two well-placed suspects come to mind. Both are known to have vehe-

mently denied the existence of Haiti’s political prisoners, and both would have had the ear of Martin’s handlers.

One was Pierre Espérance, the executive director of the National Coalition for Haitian Rights–Haiti (NCHR-Haiti). (See pp. 12-13.) His fanatical bias against Aristide and all things Lavalas is widely known, and his systematic collaboration with the coup regime in the dirty business of illegally incarcerating many of Haiti’s most prominent political prisoners is easily verifiable.¹¹ Despite all this, in July 2004, Espérance proclaimed to Canadian journalist Anthony Fenton: “I can tell you right now that there are no political prisoners in Haiti.”¹²

Our other main suspect is Philippe Vixamar, the deputy minister in the coup-regime’s so-called “Department of Justice,” which oversaw the country’s police, courts and prisons. He too went on record, in November 2004, as having “denied that there are any political prisoners in Haiti.”¹³

CIDA—

Lurking in the Background

Our two suspects shared something important—a common paymaster. In fact, their careers are both deeply interwoven with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Vixamar had been given his key post in the coup regime by CIDA, for which he had already been working for four years. And, his salary—as the illegal regime’s Deputy Minister of Justice—was actually paid by CIDA.¹⁴

As for Espérance, within days of the 2004 coup, his outfit—which Peter Hallward referred to as “Haiti’s highest profile human rights group”¹⁵—was awarded a \$100,000 CIDA contract.¹⁶ NCHR-Haiti then proceeded to shamelessly fabricate evidence to incarcerate Lavalas politicians and activists. Before taking on his top CIDA assignment within the coup government, Vixamar reviewed NCHR’s “special project” for his CIDA bosses and concluded: “The project has been effectively launched. NCHR is demonstrating a lot of professionalism.”¹⁷

Once CIDA had elevated Vixamar to his coup-government position, he continued to praise Espérance’s work with NCHR-Haiti. In fact, Vixamar

is quoted as being “fully confident” in the Justice Department’s “exclusive reliance” upon NCHR “to alert it when the Police or the Courts commit human rights abuses.”¹⁸ However, Vixamar not only denied the existence of political prisoners, he went much further and “denied that there are human rights and constitutional abuses within the criminal justice system.”¹⁹

So, Who Dunit?

Both Espérance and Vixamar could easily be considered prime suspects in this case. They shared a highly partisan anti-Aristide worldview, were considered authoritative sources and denied outright the existence of any political prisoners. What’s more, both were culpable in the CIDA-funded persecution of these prisoners. As a result they were both motivated by a keen desire to keep their CIDA jobs, hide their personal guilt and shield their foreign mentor from blame for its crimes against humanity in Haiti.

However, considering all these facts, we must be reconsider our analysis of *who was informing who*.

CIDA could well have funded *other* Haitians to monitor and oversee the human rights situation in that country, but it did not. It was CIDA that selected Espérance and Vixamar for their important jobs. By repeatedly hiring such well-known anti-Aristide actors, and by working closely with the Haitian elite against the elected government for several years before the coup, CIDA clearly demonstrated which side of the political fence it was on.

Therefore, Haitian individuals and organizations knew exactly what to say and do in order to win prized contracts from CIDA. They knew exactly what Canadian aid officials wanted to hear. So, when characters like Espérance and Vixamar made ridiculous statements like “There are no political prisoners in Haiti,” it would be naive for us to think that these words *influenced* the powers that be within CIDA.

By extension, we can be sure that these two CIDA employees in Haiti were not powerful puppetmasters pulling the strings of Canada’s top politician. Rather, these employees were themselves puppets in a large-scale Canadian production on the Haitian stage.

Towing the Line, Online

A similar dynamic exists between key CIDA-funded players in Canada and their benefactors within the Canadian government.

Following the lead of Prime Minister Martin, and the momentum of the government’s juggernaut in Haiti, these CIDA-funded organizations hid evidence at the crime scene by sweeping political prisoners under a verbal rug. So, to build upon the new transitive verb given to us by survivors of U.S.-backed dictatorships throughout Latin America, these prisoners were “linguistically disappeared.”

This cover up can be documented by putting the websites of CIDA-funded organizations under our magnifying glass. There are about six dozen Canadian “NGOs” listed by CIDA as government “partners” “active in Haiti”²⁰ during the 2004-2006 coup period. When their 71 websites were subjected to comprehensive electronic searches for occurrences of the term “political prisoners,” the results were startling. In scanning the many thousands of documents on these websites, not a single webpage was found in which *any* of these organizations took a stand to support Haiti’s political prisoners, or to denounce the coup-regime for jailing them. There is not a single instance of *any* CIDA-funded group calling for the release of these prisoners. In fact, these “NGOs” never even mention the existence of Haiti’s political prisoners, let alone criticize the Canadian government for its role in supporting this grave injustice. As far as CIDA’s 71 “partners” were concerned, it was as if Haitian political prisoners simply did not exist.

It is perhaps not surprising that some of these organizations did not advocate for Haiti’s political prisoners. Most of these government-funded aid agencies active in Haiti, do not consider it part of their work to expose and oppose Canada’s key role in the 2004 coup, or the accompanying repression, murder and imprisonment of prodemocracy advocates and political opponents by the Canadian-backed dictatorship there. But neither do they mention the existence of political prisoners anywhere in the world. However, fifteen of these CIDA “partners” *did*

“No Political Prisoners”

advocate on behalf of political prisoners in *other* countries, if not in Haiti. Let us examine how a few of these organizations skirted around, downplayed or “linguistically disappeared” the issue of Haiti’s political prisoners.

Rights & Democracy (R&D)

There are 161 webpages within R&D’s website that refer to political prisoners. These documents draw attention to the horrific plight faced by political prisoners in eleven different countries plus those in what R&D calls the “Arab world.” Many of the stories convey heart-rending personal details about specific prisoners and R&D does not hesitate to point the finger at the governments responsible. Most of R&D’s references relate to two countries, Burma and China. There is however not a single reference to the existence of any political prisoners in Iraq, Afghanistan or Haiti—three occupied countries where Canada is now focusing the vast bulk of its aid and foreign policy initiatives.

R&D’s blind spot for Haiti’s political prisoners is especially telling because R&D presents its efforts as contributing “to the reinforcement of democratic development in Haiti as a foreign policy priority for Canada.”²¹ Similarly, R&D claims that “Haiti has been an important priority for Rights & Democracy over the past 15 years.”²²

L’Entraide Missionnaire (EMI)

This CIDA-fund organization published one issue of its newsletter which—plagiarizing from an Agence Haïtienne de Presse report (AHP)²³—mentioned in passing that Lavalas “militants” held a protest on March 4, 2005, “to demand the liberation of all political prisoners.”²⁴ EMI’s summary then implied that these «militants» had been violent at a protest on February 28, when in reality—as AHP had made clear—it was Haitian police who had turned violent, shooting and killing five peaceful protesters.²⁵

Alternatives

The Alternatives website has 41 webpages referring to political prisoners in 19 countries. Although two of these documents mention Haiti, they actually reveal more about Alternatives’ systematic *disregard* for Haitian political prisoners than its solidarity with them. One is an interview with photojournalist Darren Ell²⁶ who has often criticised Canada’s role in the 2004 coup. However, the quotations used from Ell’s in-



Julie Maas / Gerald and Maas with Night’s Lantern www.nightslantern.ca

terview gave no indication that the Haitian political prisoners he was referring to were victims of the Canadian-backed dictatorship. As such, Alternatives’ readers remain uninformed.

The only other reference to Haiti’s political prisoners on Alternatives’ website is a declaration penned at the 2005 World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre, Brazil (January 2005). This statement—which Alternative’s *did not* endorse—reads, in part:

“Whereas, on February 29, 2004, U.S. soldiers forced President Aristide onto a plane and into exile. The elected Lavalas government was replaced with an unelected puppet regime. This unconstitutional regime, backed by the U.S., France and Canada, using members of Haiti’s

former army, has waged a war against the Lavalas movement: thousands have been killed in violence against protesters, organized workers and grassroots groups; *at least 700 political prisoners sit in Haitian jails*, and rape is routinely used against grassroots women and girls as a weapon of repression.”²⁷ (Emphasis added.)

This excellent declaration concludes with various demands including: “Political prisoners must be freed, politically-motivated persecution must end.”²⁸

This important document is remarkably out of place on Alternative’s stridently anti-Aristide/anti-Lavalas website. It also stands out as the *only* indictment of the coup regime to be found on *any* of the 71 websites published by CIDA-funded partner organizations.

This Alternatives anomaly has an explanation. Not only does Alternatives claim a major concern for Haitian human rights, it is one of the leading Canadian promoters of the WSF. For example, as Alternatives explained elsewhere, it helped sponsor the participation of 14 members of Canadian NGOs in the 2003 WSF saying that “it is apparent that the expertise of Canadian NGOs, representing a respected democratic society” could “enrich

Brazilian society” by “sharing our knowledge of coalition building” including with “provincial and federal governmental authorities.”²⁹

Most tellingly, this Alternatives’ document is dated February 29, 2004, the very day that Canadian commando troops secured the Port-au-Prince airport allowing U.S. Marines to kidnap President Aristide and force him into exile, thus precipitating the coup and a human rights disaster that Alternatives then did its very best to ignore. Remarkably, this Alternatives document, which extolled the value of sharing Canadian NGO “expertise” in collaborating with governments, did not even mention Haiti or the regime change of that day.

Although Alternatives should receive some credit for posting the

Porto Alegre declaration on Haiti to its website, it must be noted that it only did so with much reluctance and after receiving considerable pressure. Demands that Alternatives include this declaration on its website were part of a concerted campaign effort launched by Haiti Action Montréal.³⁰

When Alternatives finally did agree to include the WSF’s Haiti resolution on its website—a full seven months after the document had been launched—this CIDA-funded group made sure to introduce it with a very noticeable disclaimer that stated:

“N.B.: *The World Social Forum doesn’t endorse any declaration. The ‘Porto Alegre Declaration on Haiti’ was launched at the initiative of a group of people during the last WSF. A critique of this launch can be found at: http://www.alterpresse.org/article.php3?id_article=2168”*

The “critique” that Alternative’s encouraged people to read, entitled “Aristide Lobbyists confront the Haitian delegation” (*Colette Lespinasse, “Lobbyistes d’Aristide confrontés à la délégation haïtienne,”* January 31, 2005), is a shrill example of the kind of pro-coup propaganda that fills CIDA-linked websites. For instance, it refers to Haitian human rights activist Lovinsky Pierre Antoine with the elitist slur, “*chimère*.” (See pp.14-15.) Lovinsky founded one of Haiti’s legitimate human rights organizations—the September 30th Foundation—which represented impoverished victims of the two coups against President Aristide. He was one of Haiti’s most honest advocates for democracy and human rights. Tragically, in August of 2007, soon after declaring his intention to run for the Lavalas party in future elections, Lovinsky was kidnapped and has not been returned. Not surprisingly, comprehensive Google searches of the 71 CIDA-funded Canadian partners active in Haiti, do not unearth even one reference to Lovinsky’s organization, or to his very existence, let alone to any documents condemning the capture of this internationally respected human rights defender. Lovinsky was thus “disappeared” both physically and electronically.

Soon after it very reluctantly

posted the Porto Alegre resolution to its website, Alternatives ran an article by its director of communications, François L’Écuyer, who harshly criticized this resolution and its proponents. L’Écuyer even went almost as far as to suggest that Canadian activists should not get drawn into supporting the “Aristide lobbyists” behind this declaration because doing so would be akin to endorsing the violence of terrorists in Iraq like “Zarquaoui and the other Talibans of this world.”³¹

Development & Peace (D&P)

Immediately after the Canadian-backed coup regime was finally ousted by elections in March 2006, D&P published a 13-page report summarizing events in Haiti.³² Although Haiti was just emerging from one of the darkest chapters in its history—when prodemocracy Lavalas supporters were hunted down, killed, exiled or imprisoned—D&P focused all of its vitriol against Aristide, his government and its supporters. In a fashion typical of all the “NGOs” funded by the governments behind the 2004 regime change, D&P’s document ignores or downplays the horrors of the coup-installed dictatorship and actually pretends that things were worse under Aristide’s democratic government.

Although D&P does not actually acknowledge the existence of any political prisoners in Haiti during the coup regime (which it euphemistically calls the “Interim Government”), there is an illuminating two-paragraph section on “Illegal Detentions and the Judicial System.” It begins by noting that “In 2005, Haitian and international human rights organizations documented that more than 95% of the 2000 prisoners in Haiti’s prisons and police holding cells are awaiting trial.”³³

In the next sentence, D&P tries to subtly deflect blame for this situation onto Aristide’s ousted government by saying: “Some [of these 2000 prisoners] have been waiting for up to three years,” (i.e., since *before* the coup). D&P does not explain that the Canadian-backed dictatorship filled Haiti’s prisons with Aristide supporters because—just prior to the coup—“rebels” had emptied jails and released thousands of prisoners, including

death squad leaders from the previous 1991-1994 coup period, who had been convicted during the Lavalas mandate. These “rebels” were later praised as “freedom fighters” by the coup-empowered president, Gerard Latortue, and publicly congratulated by NCHR-Haiti for “arresting” Lavalas supporters.³⁴

The D&P statement then states that in “many cases,” the prisoners are “victims of trumped up charges.”³⁵ D&P does not explain that these prisoners were often not even “charged” but were held unconstitutionally based upon rumours and allegations that were fabricated by none other than NCHR-Haiti. Earlier in the document NCHR-Haiti was referred to as “Development and Peace’s partner the former National Coalition for Haitian Rights.”³⁶

While D&P refused to admit the existence of “political prisoners” during the coup, it made sure to state that those being held were “accused of political violence carried out during the Aristide government.”

D&P then names five of these accused Lavalas leaders but neglects to explain why its website had never previously mentioned them during the entire two years that they had rotted in jail without a shred of evidence ever having being presented against them. The five prisoners listed were:

“Lavalas Family prime minister Yvon Neptune,...former Interior Minister Jocelerme Privert, former Lavalas Family deputy Amanus Mayette, Lavalas Family executive representative Jacques Mathelier and folk-singer and Lavalas Family militant Annette Auguste (Sò Anne.)”³⁷ (See p.46.)

A web-wide google search finds hundreds of examples of media reports and human rights organizations that refer to one or more of these five individuals as “political prisoners.”³⁸

But not only does D&P refuse to refer to these five as “political prisoners,” it actually says this about them:

“While there have been serious due process violations in each of the above cases, most were strongly associated with the Aristide government and *are believed to be implicated in violent crimes*, even if this has never been proven by prosecutors in a dysfunctional judicial sys-

“No Political Prisoners”

tem. *It is difficult to classify most of these as nonviolent prisoners of conscience imprisoned for the peaceful expression of their beliefs.*³⁹ (Emphasis added.)

This outrageous D&P statement leaves many questions unanswered, and still more unasked. For example, why did D&P have such difficulty “classifying” these prisoners as “nonviolent” when no evidence of their guilt had ever been presented? And, although it says that these prisoners “are believed to be” violent, why did D&P neglect to mention the basis for their presumption of guilt? Had this CIDA-funded human rights organization never heard of article 11 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? It states that

“Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial.”⁴⁰

Perhaps D&P believes that this basic human right to a “presumption of innocence” does not apply when political prisoners are held without charge by a regime that was installed with the help of R&D’s primary financier—the Canadian government.

Evidence?

Who Needs Evidence?

Just as D&P felt no compulsion to cite any evidence supporting their apparently, faith-based contention that these Lavalas leaders were “implicated in violent crimes,” the coup-imposed regime’s CIDA-funded “Ministry of Justice” displayed a similarly startling disregard for due legal process and international law. Eventually, after the 2006 elections had vanquished the illegal Canadian-backed dictatorship, the prisoners named by D&P were vindicated when all charges against them were finally dropped.

The ludicrous travesty of justice inflicted upon these five prominent Lavalas leaders was repeated *ad nauseum* against hundreds—perhaps thousands—of other lesser known po-

litical prisoners in Haiti. In December 2006, Haiti’s Bureau des Avocats Internationaux, published a “partial list” detailing 117 cases of political prisoners.⁴¹ When this author used COAT’s custom Google.com search

erished supporters of the elected but deposed Lavalas government reside in a prison of poverty from which they are still heroically struggling to escape, not unlike their enslaved ancestors.

The Haitian elections of 2006—funded, overseen and falsely sanctified as free and fair by the Canadian government⁴²—were widely seen as the key to allowing Haitians an escape into the open air of democracy. The alleged purpose of overthrowing Haiti’s elected government was to bring democracy to this “failed state.” However, to see Haiti’s election through Canada’s rose-coloured glasses is to ignore not only the many practical faults of that electoral process but also to disregard a major function of the political persecution that occurred during the preceding two-year coup period.

The murder, exile, imprisonment and wholesale intimidation of thousands of Lavalas leaders and activists had a massive impact upon the outcome of the 2006 elections. The regime’s brutal witch hunt prevented many Lavalas leaders from running,

campaigning and organizing—let alone voting—for Haiti’s most popular political party.

One of Haiti’s most prominent political prisoners during the coup period was “Sò Anne” Auguste (see pp. 47-49). She explained during her long, unjust and illegal imprisonment that:

“They’re doing this to me because I am an organizer and I stand with the people. They know that we can bring millions into the streets and they want to prevent us from doing that.”⁴³

By putting Haiti’s political prisoners under the illuminating lens of his unbiased scrutiny, the illustrious Sherlock Holmes would surely have discerned the huge fraud of the case before him. He would quickly have realised that it was not simply a matter of discerning the hidden origin of a single political lie, namely, “There are no political prisoners in Haiti.” Obviously, this



“There are no political prisoners in Haiti.”

engine to scan the websites of 71 CIDA partners active in Haiti, not a single reference to any of these 117 political prisoners was found.

However, the extent of this CIDA-backed coverup is far more disturbing than merely ignoring the existence of Haiti’s political prisoners. These prisoners were an open secret visible to all who cared to see. They were hidden in plain sight on the tip of a monumental iceberg of Haitian victims. Lurking beneath the surface of Haiti’s brutal prison system is the fact that the entire country is home to millions of citizens who were robbed of their entire elected government by the Canadian-backed coup d’état. And, improv-

huge case cannot be solved by merely saying that Canada’s prime minister was strung along by some CIDA-funded confidence men in Haiti or that he was fleeced by CIDA’s well-paid and compliant “NGOs” back home in Canada. Martin’s statement cannot be so easily decontextualized from the awful tapestry of disinformation that the Canadian government—and its many “non-governmental” agents—had been weaving around Haiti for several years.

However, by carefully tugging away at this one thread, Holmes would no doubt have been able to unravel a whole woolly mass of deceptions that were carefully woven together into the cultural blindfold that is now so firmly pulled down over the eyes of Canada’s population. This example of mass deception is but one disturbing jingle in a widespread propaganda campaign that was used to sell Haiti’s 2004 coup to Canadian taxpayers.

Even Holmes would likely be disturbed to note that the culprits behind this complex intelligence operation are still at loose and will likely never be held accountable. As is so often the case, the biggest criminals are those protected as the creators, guardians and enforcers of law and order. When dealing with such crooks, who can possibly jail them? As such, even Holmes could not ensure that justice could be done in this case. Nevertheless, he would see to it that the culprits involved, and the powerful institutions behind them, were revealed. We can only hope that by shaming those guilty of complicity in these crimes against humanity, that we can at least help to prevent similar crimes from taking place in the future.

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Prime Minister Yvon Neptune: CIDA’s Top Political Prisoner

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

One of the CIDA-funded tasks taken on by the National Coalition for Haitian Rights-Haiti (NCHR-Haiti), was to fabricate stories to frame that country’s elected Prime Minister, Yvon Neptune. This was part of a \$100,000 “special project” contracted by CIDA on March 11, 2004,¹ the day before the coup-installed Prime Minister, Gerard Latortue, took power.

NCHR-Haiti’s rumours against Neptune, and other Lavalas leaders, were pushed relentlessly by Pierre Espérance, CIDA’s prime advocate for human rights in Haiti. He concocted an absurd story blaming Neptune for provoking a “genocide” in the La Scierie district of St. Marc on February 11, 2004. It was, however, a “genocide” that never actually took place.

When Espérance wrote NCHR’s second progress report to CIDA on its project to help victims of this fabricated “massacre,” it proudly took credit for putting Neptune behind bars. Under the subheading “Assessment of progress towards projected results,” NCHR-Haiti listed the primary “result” as: “Arrest of former Prime Minister, Yvon NEPTUNE, on June 24, 2004.”²

On July 28, 2006, after Neptune had languished in jail for more than 25 months, he was released on humanitarian grounds.³ Besides being separated from friends and family, and having “survived at least two assassination attempts, as well as a prison massacre,”⁴ Neptune—like thousands of other political prisoners—missed his chance to take part in the 2006 elections.

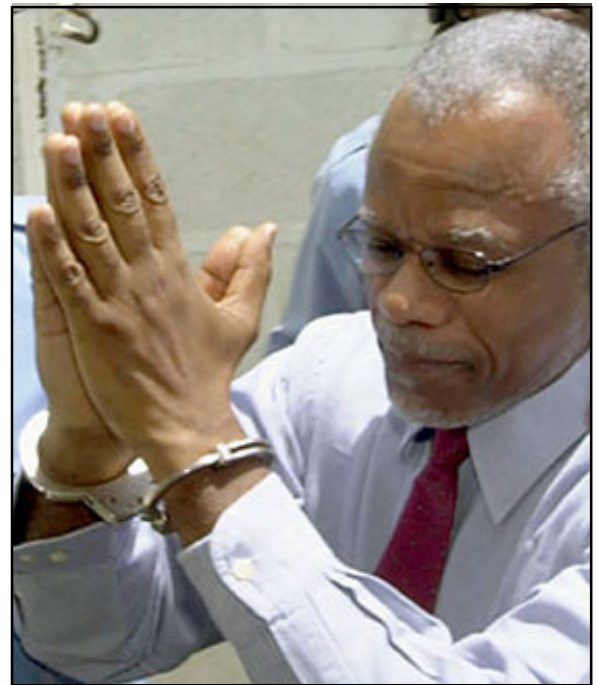
Because Prime Minister Neptune was illegally imprisoned during the entire period of the Canadian-backed coup regime, he could not serve as a candidate in the 2006 election; nor was he able to campaign for Aristide’s Fanmi Lavalas party. This was one of the main functions of Haiti’s political persecution. It removed Lavalas as a force in the 2006 elections, that were hailed as a breakthrough for democracy by the Canadian government and its paid NGOs.

In March 2004, within days of the coup, CIDA gave \$100,000 to NCHR, Haiti’s most partisan, anti-Aristide “human rights” group.

In its June 24 progress report to CIDA, NCHR took credit for the arrest of Haiti’s Prime Minister Yvon Neptune.

Neptune spent 25 months in jail for his alleged role in a “massacre” that was fabricated by NCHR. He was finally released after elections replaced the Canadian-backed coup regime.

CIDA-funded “NGOs” in Canada either ignored this travesty of justice or joined the propaganda war against Neptune.



Thony Belizaire/Agence France-Presse

CIDA-funded “NGOs”

Neptune’s case was all but entirely ignored by the CIDA-funded “NGOs” in Canada that were active in Haiti during the 2004-2006 coup-regime period. This is evidenced by an electronic scan of the entire contents of websites created by 70 such organizations. Only three of these “NGOs” have ever even mentioned Prime Minister Neptune.

Alternatives

On the entire Alternatives’ website there are only three documents mentioning Yvon Neptune. The first⁵ and second⁶ were published just before the first anniversary of Neptune’s arrest, while the third appeared one day after he had spent one year in jail.⁷ However, none of these articles even mentions that Neptune had been arrested, let alone that he was being held illegally without formal charges, or that no actual evidence was ever offered to justify his imprisonment. Instead, all three Alternatives’ articles promote an extremely partisan anti-Aristide slant—seemingly shared by all CIDA-funded “NGOs”—that ridiculously blames all of the violence during the coup-regime period on the ousted Lavalas government of Aristide and Neptune.

Entraide Missionaire

EMI published an unsourced chronology of Haitian events that included several terse references to the criminal case against Prime Minister Neptune.⁸ One of these brief notes says that Neptune was “accused of involvement in the murder...of about fifty opponents of Aristide.”⁹ This uncritical repetition of NCHR-Haiti’s baseless allegation was not balanced with judgements from the UN, international media or other sources revealing that there was, in fact, no such massacre.¹⁰

When mentioning, in passing, that Neptune had finally been released after more than two years in jail,¹¹ EMI did not bother to retract their earlier allegation that there was a massacre in which “fifty opponents of Aristide” had supposedly been murdered. Neither did EMI say that no evidence against Neptune had ever been produced or that he was widely recognized as Haiti’s most prominent political prisoner.

On the contrary, EMI seemed eager to support the biased contention that Neptune was *not* a political prisoner. With their March-May 2005 newsletter, EMI enclosed two documents from Haiti’s so-called “Council of the Wise,”¹² the handpicked, unconstitu-

tional clique that facilitated the 2004 coup process by selecting Gerard Latortue to replace Haiti’s real Prime Minister, Yvon Neptune. One of these documents, signed by “Council” member and longtime CIDA-beneficiary, Danièle Magloire,¹³ was said by EMI to explain that Neptune was “not jailed for political reasons” but for his role “in the massacre in la Scierie.”¹⁴

This same EMI newsletter uncritically summarized a CIDA news release about Canada’s provision of \$34 million “to improve the quality of life of the people of Haiti.”¹⁵ EMI did not mention however that \$18 million of that amount was to provide funding for the coup-installed regime itself, including presumably for its police and prisons,¹⁶ while the remainder was divided up into such efforts as a \$2-million media project run by CIDA-funded “NGOs” Réseau Liberté and Alternatives, which provided assistance to anti-Aristide newspapers, radio and TV stations in Haiti.¹⁷

Mennonite
Central Committee

Another organization that did not recognize the need for any proof that the “La Scierie massacre” had indeed ever happened, was the MCC. For it, and other CIDA-funded groups, the fact that NCHR-Haiti *said* there was a “massacre,” was proof enough.

The MCC published an article called “Seeds of Hope” by NCHR-Haiti’s executive director, Pierre Espérance. Although this article does not mention Prime Minister Neptune by name, it does discuss the supposed crime he was alleged by NCHR-Haiti to have committed. In the article—which is a self-congratulatory puff piece, published in MCC’s *Peace Office Newsletter*—Espérance decried the “La Scierie massacre” as

“the largest and most horrific of the mass murders that took place during Aristide’s presidency [with] several dozen dead or missing.”

Citing it as an example of what he called “The Noose of Impu-

nity” that has been “strangling” Haiti “for many years,” this CIDA-funded “human rights” darling in Haiti, described the supposed “massacre” as one of the “high profile” “savage crimes....that are well documented” involving “government officials....and Lavalas Party affiliates.” He used his MCC platform to demand that the “cycle of impunity” be broken by “judging and holding people accountable.”¹⁸

This rhetorical flight of fancy by Espérance, however, was still not balanced with any actual evidence. Unfortunately, even when Neptune and others were eventually released, the MCC never saw fit to revisit the phoney accusations raised concerning Lavalas government officials and their supposed responsibility for this non-existent massacre.

Development and Peace

The only document on the D&P website that mentions Prime Minister Neptune¹⁹ is a 13-page anti-Aristide diatribe containing two paragraphs about “Illegal Detentions and the Judicial System.”

This report was published by D&P after the coup-installed dictatorship was finally ousted by elections in 2006.

The second paragraph of this section discusses two incidents: (1) the 1994 massacre of Aristide supporters at Raboteau by a ruthless, death squad leader named Jodel Chamblain, and (2) the “much cited case of La Scierie in St. Marc” for which D&P notes that “former PM Yvon Neptune” had been “accused of violence.”²⁰ D&P neglects to mention not only that there was no evidence to back up these accusations against Neptune but also that no evidence existed of the alleged “massacre” itself. However, the effect created by equating Chamblain and Raboteau with Neptune and La Scierie seems to have been carefully calculated to guide readers into making unfounded assumptions about the latter’s guilt.

D&P concludes with some other mischievous suggestions. For one thing, D&P actually blames the Aristide/Neptune government for the travesty of justice inflicted on Neptune by the coup-installed regime by saying “we must recognise that the dysfunctionality of the judicial system is in part a legacy left by Lavalas Family and other previous governments.”²¹ D&P then delivers a mild critique of the Latortue dictatorship saying that

“the Interim [i.e., coup-empowered] government has been less than even handed in its prosecution of those implicated in politically motivated violence.”²²

This blame-the-victim approach—typical of CIDA’s anti-Aristide partners—followed by a mild slap on the wrist to the naughty “Interim government” for its “less than even handed” efforts, was capped with a final reminder to D&P readers that Neptune was, after all, “implicated in politically motivated violence.” Considering the fact that this was supposed to be a critique of the outgoing coup



Julie Maas / Gerald and Maas with Night’s Lantern

www.nightslantern.ca

“No Political Prisoners”

regime for persecuting innocent Lavalas victims, it is remarkable how often D&P managed to continue to play its ongoing blame-game against Aristide.

Later, in a June 2007 report on its 2005-2006 activities, D&P referred obliquely to the Neptune file. Although all charges against those accused of violence at La Scierie had been dropped as unconstitutional, and due to lack of evidence, D&P actually cited the case as the prime example of “symbolic human rights cases, like the many murders and killers that enjoyed immunity (e.g. the Scierie massacre...).”²³ All charges against Neptune had been dropped only weeks before the publication of this D&P report.

Like the Undead, Lies are hard to Kill

In July 2007, NCHR-Haiti published an article called “Frustration of the Victims of the La Scierie Massacre,”²⁴ which—mentioning the word “massacre” five times—vented the same concerns about “immunity” that were expressed in D&P’s report of a month earlier. Stating that although the “Aristide/Neptune government repulsively orchestrated a massacre,” and that there were “clues and sufficient charges brought against approximately 30 people,” NCHR-Haiti bemoaned the “charade of justice” that allowed “the silent backers and perpetrators of this massacre” to go free.²⁵ Despite its bluster, NCHR-Haiti did not seem to realise that “clues and sufficient charges” are no substitute for facts and evidence.

But, despite this wholesale lack of evidence, NCHR-Haiti—like D&P, MCC, EMI and CIDA—still found it useful to perpetuate the politically-valuable myth of a “massacre,” complete with more than fifty victims, that no one could ever find, and high-ranking Lavalas politicians who, though innocent, were none-the-less imprisoned. Such stories are simply too good to be true and CIDA-funded groups in both Haiti and Canada were undaunted by the

complete dearth of evidence. Fortunately for them, the truth is not required when producing effective propaganda. The idea that a “massacre” had occurred still lives on, as do the fifty non-existent ghosts that, like the mythical “undead,” can be called upon to carry out political character assassinations.

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The Coup-Regime's Top Five Political Prisoners

Yvon Neptune (Prime Minister)
Imprisoned: June 27, 2004 - July 28, 2006

Jocelerme Privert (Interior Minister)
Imprisoned: April 4, 2004 - June 15, 2006

Amanus Mayette (Member of Parliament)
Imprisoned: March 19, 2004 - April 26, 2007

Jacques Mathelier (Rep., Exec. Branch)
Imprisoned: June 26, 2004 - July 3, 2006

So Anne Auguste (Activist, folk singer)
Imprisoned: May 9, 2004 - Aug 14, 2006

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Why was Sò Anne Imprisoned for 27 Months?

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

On Mothers’ Day in May 2004—two months after the coup that ousted her friend President Aristide—Annette Auguste, widely known as “Sò Anne” (Sister Anne), was recuperating from surgery. In “the middle of the night...a squadron of around twenty U.S. Marines in full combat gear”¹ “used a plastic explosive grenade to blow off the lock on Sò Anne’s gate, decapitating her barking dog.”² After firing shots,³ American troops “ransacked the house”⁴ looking for weapons. Although there were no weapons to be found and they had no “judicial warrant,”⁵ they arrested Sò Anne and ten family members.

Among those taken away were her “five-year-old grandson and four other children, aged 9, 12 and 15, [who] were handcuffed.”⁶ Other family members had “black plastic bags put over their heads.”⁷ Sò Anne later recounted that this “brutal invasion caused a 12 year old to jump from a balcony onto a rooftop nearby resulting in a serious leg injury.”⁸

All were taken to the university campus of the Aristide Foundation for Democracy for interrogation.⁹ (The university had been illegally expropriated by the U.S.-led Multinational Interim Forces, which included 550 Canadian troops.¹⁰)

Sò Anne remained in custody for more than 27 months, the entire period of the Canadian-backed coup regime. Why? During her illegal detention, coup-regime authorities changed their excuses in a “bewildering series of shifting charges, none of them legally documented.”¹¹

For Arming Terrorists?

At first, U.S. authorities fabricated the notion that Sò Anne was arming violent gangs of Aristide terrorists, known as *chimère*. (See pp.14-15.) In a statement from jail, Sò Anne later said she had been arrested

“under the pretext that there were assault weapons in my house.... American military authorities said that I represented a threat to them,



Photo: Colin O'Connor 12/21/05

Sò Anne, a prominent Haitian folk singer and friend of President Aristide is a Lavalas party activist, organizer and community leader. Illegally arrested based on bogus charges concocted by NCHR-Haiti—a CIDA-funded Haitian group—she was held for 27 months and released for lack of evidence.

that I was part of a plot to attack them in collusion with Muslims from a mosque in my neighborhood.”¹²

Haiti’s corporate media supported these allegations, saying she “controlled violent factions associated with the Aristide government.” Radio Metropole, one of several elitist Group-of-184 member stations supported by a CIDA-funded project run by Quebec-based Réseau Liberté and Alternatives,¹³ accused her of

“organizing a clandestine operation aimed at launching armed assaults against U.S. military personnel in Haiti. As per usual with the elite-controlled media, no corroboration or factual evidence was ever given to back up these claims.”¹⁴

For “incitement to violence”?

Sò Anne was later “held on suspicion of ‘incitement to violence’”¹⁵ in relation to the pretext incident known as “Black Friday.” (See pp.21-22.) As she said in an interview while in jail:

“Government prosecutor, Daniel Audain, started criminal prosecution against me because the organization NCHR [National Coalition for Haitian Rights] stated that I was among

the people who on December 5, 2003, beat up the rector of the State University.”¹⁶

However within a few days, a judge wisely

“recognized that there was no evidence to back up this accusation either, but the government’s prosecutor justified her detention with the explanation that ‘more charges were coming.’”¹⁷

Although no witnesses or evidence ever materialized showing that Sò Anne was present at the university that day, the spurious charges levelled by NCHR were enough for Haiti’s CIDA-funded Department of Justice to keep her in jail.

NCHR was one of the most prominent foreign-backed Haitian “NGOs” helping to destabilize Aristide’s elected government. Within days of the 2004 coup, NCHR received \$100,000 from CIDA, and then worked closely with the illegally-empowered regime’s prosecutor to fabricate charges against prominent Haitian activists and leaders. (See pp.12-13.)

Even after 20 months of incarceration, Sò Anne had still “not been formally charged with a recognizable

“No Political Prisoners”

offence.”¹⁸ At that time, Amnesty International stated that

“Annette Auguste is being held arbitrarily since the Haitian authorities have failed to produce any evidence to charge her and have failed to release her within the normal terms. Amnesty International believes that Annette Auguste is being detained solely for her political views.”¹⁹

For a Vodoun Baby-Sacrifice?

When the coup regime’s “Black Friday” case was falling apart

“prosecutors changed tack again and accused her of the more eye-catching crime of child-sacrifice. This time the charge was based on testimony of a ‘friend’ who had left Haiti for a more comfortable life abroad, with help from [Haitian Justice] Minister Gousse. Her main piece of evidence was a HaiTel phone-number,...although the company itself didn’t exist at the time.”²⁰

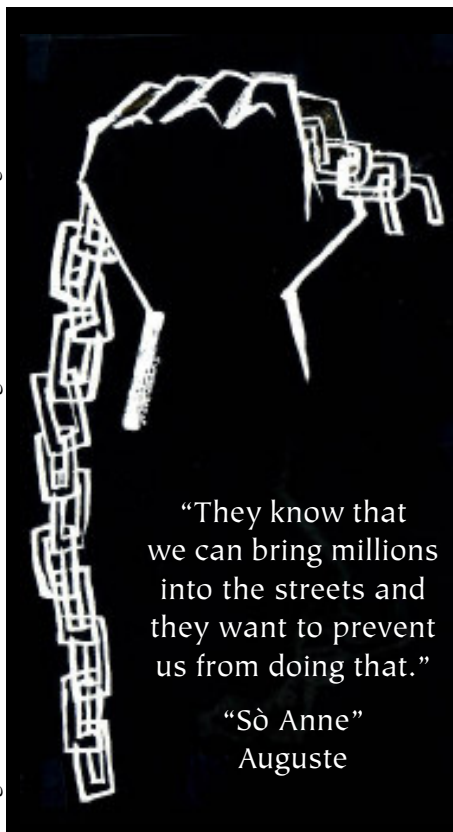
False accusations about this alleged Vodoun sacrifice were also made by Haiti’s rabidly anti-Aristide media. Sò Anne, who—like most Haitians—is a proud adherent of Vodoun (see pp.3-10), was said to have been the “voodoo priestess” who “bathed [Aristide] ...in the blood of a dead Haitian.”²¹ Incredibly, this preposterous tall tale was actually taken seriously by Haiti’s CIDA-funded “Department of Justice.” (See “Witch hunt by the Enemies of Democracy,” p.8.)

Hostile “NGOs”

When Haiti’s brutal dictatorship was ousted by the 2006 election, Sò Anne was finally freed. But NCHR-Haiti, which had furnished the initial rumours used as a pretext for her arrest, remained unrepentant and continued with impunity to libel Sò Anne and others. It even criticised her release, saying the trial was a “farce.” In an item called “The liberation of a series of presumed criminals,” the organization blasted the elected government for not having

“succeeded in any effort it has undertaken in the fight against impunity. To the contrary, immediately

Image: Julie Maas / Gerald and Maas with Night’s Lantern www.nightslantern.ca



“They know that we can bring millions into the streets and they want to prevent us from doing that.”

“Sò Anne”
Auguste

after being installed, this government took it upon itself to liberate dangerous detainees without judgment.”²²

Despite all this, NCHR (now called RNDDH) is still highly regarded as a reputable source by CIDA and several recipients of its financial largesse in Canada. Following NCHR-Haiti’s lead, Canada’s quasi-government agencies ostensibly dedicated to human rights, development and democracy in Haiti, were completely mum about Sò Anne’s entire ordeal.

Only two CIDA-funded groups ever made even passing reference to Sò Anne on their websites. Both are Quebec-based Catholic organizations, namely Development and Peace (D&P) and Entraide Missionnaire (EMI).

D&P’s brief mention of Sò Anne said absolutely nothing of her mistreatment, the illegality of her arrest or prolonged detention, the multiple bogus charges or the absence of any evidence against her. It did however manage to disparagingly label her a “Lavalas Family militant.”²³ D&P also cast aspersions against her, and other well-known prisoners of the “interim government,” by saying that

“most were strongly associated with the Aristide government and are believed to be implicated in violent crimes, even if this has never been

proven by prosecutors in a dysfunctional judicial system. It is difficult to classify most of these as non-violent prisoners of conscience imprisoned for the peaceful expression of their beliefs.”²⁴

EMI’s passing reference to Sò Anne came in late 2006 when they announced that she and another “Lavalas militant” accused of participation in the infamous events of December 5, 2003, had been released from prison.²⁵ (See pp.21-22.) EMI’s readers may well have received the mistaken impression that Sò Anne and other “militants” had served their jail time after having being found guilty. EMI neglected to mention that she and the other Lavalas activists were jailed for more than two years even though no evidence was ever presented against them.

The Real Reasons

To understand the real reasons for Sò Anne’s illegal incarceration it is useful to know that she is the leader of “a popular Lavalas organization,” called *Pouvwa Rassembleman Organizasyon Popile*.²⁶ Moreover, Sò Anne was “a key organizer for the upcoming Flag Day demonstrations against the coup and occupation,”²⁷ held on May 18, 2004, a week after her arrest. That rally of 30,000 to 50,000 people demanded

“a stop to the slaughter of Lavalas voters, a stop to the witch hunt and arbitrary arrests and tortures, the return of President Aristide and the removal of the U.S. Marines, other foreign troops and the rebel, ex-soldier police ...terrorizing them.”²⁸

At least nine peaceful protesters were shot and killed at the protest by Haiti’s police in the presence of U.S.-led international forces which actually shot at independent media who were filming the police atrocities.²⁹

As explained by the Haiti Information Project, “whose reporters risk their lives daily to tell the truth about life in Haiti”:

“Annette Auguste was active in supporting the Aristide government, and in helping to build Lavalas’ base of support among the poor majority in Haiti. Many Lavalas activists see the attack against Ms. Auguste as a preemptive strike against their party by the Bush administration – a con-

tinuation of the destabilization campaign hatched in the U.S. State Department by Otto Reich and Roger Noriega, that eventually led to the forced departure of President Aristide.”³⁰

All this was of course no secret to Sò Anne who described the “political justification” for her imprisonment from her jail cell, saying:

“I am in jail for no other reason than that I am perceived as a leader and member of Fanmi Lavalas. I am in jail because I was defending the vote the people of Haiti gave to Jean Bertrand Aristide in the elections of November 26, 2000.”³¹

In another jail interview, Sò Anne summed it up saying her arrest “aimed at discouraging protest and dissent in Haiti. She points out that she was arrested in the days preceding the mass mobilization on May 18th, when the Latortue government unleashed a wave of repression designed to intimidate people from openly demonstrating support for President Aristide. So Anne stated, ‘They’re doing this to me because I am an organizer and I stand with the people. They know that we can bring millions into the streets and they want to prevent us from doing that.’”³²

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