

PAPDA:

CIDA's "Alternative Development" includes Coups and Political Repression

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

A coalition of Haitian development groups called Plateforme Haitienne de Plaidoyer pour un Developpement Alternatif (PAPDA) — Platform to Advocate for Alternative Development — is “one of the generously-funded NGO’s in Haiti.”¹ PAPDA says that it “collaborates closely”² with Haitian organizations like the National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR). PAPDA, like NCHR, was among the strongest supporters of the coup and the brutal regime that it empowered.

PAPDA has close collaborators in Canada as well. It is listed as one of the two “partner” organizations in Haiti of an influential Montreal-based group called Alternatives. During the lead up to the 2004 coup, this largely CIDA-funded group also distinguished itself in the eyes of Canada’s government by strongly supporting efforts to rid Haiti of its elected government. Then, following the 2004 coup, Alternatives did extensive public relations work which covered up the human rights disaster that resulted. The Alternatives’ website lists Camille Chalmers, the president of PAPDA, as the only foreign member of their board of directors.³

Prior to the 2004 coup, PAPDA was among the Haitian organizations that helped mobilize Haitian opposition to President Aristide’s Lavalas government. As Haiti’s powerful, elite-led “civil society” groups gathered steam, PAPDA increased the hyperbole of its public statements. For example, by late January 2004, just weeks before Haiti’s president was kidnapped by U.S. Marines, a media release from PAPDA referred to Aristide’s government as a “dictatorship” and repeatedly “demanded” his “immediate resignation.”⁴

This PAPDA statement was signed by two of its top representatives, Yves André Wainright and Camille Chalmers. When Aristide was deposed in 2004, the regime that took power quickly handpicked Wainright as its Environment Minister.⁵ The fact that the regime would select Wainright for this



Camille Chalmers, Executive Secretary of PAPDA

role, and that he would accept a cabinet position in this unconstitutional government, sheds light on PAPDA’s complicity in the illegal regime change.

When Chalmers made “a lengthy presentation” at the 2006 World Social Forum in Venezuela, he expressed his opposition to Aristide, and offered “a general but vague criticism of neoliberalism.” However, Chalmers “made no mention of the human rights situation,” the persecution of Lavalas supporters by the coup government or the many political prisoners in the country.⁶ For this whitewash of the crisis in Haiti, Chalmers was then confronted by Canadian activists from the Canada Haiti Action Network (CHAN). Chalmers denied their statements that PAPDA had received funds from the Canadian government. In fact, he

claimed that PAPDA does not “receive any funding from any foreign governments. CHAN activists reiterated the connection between CIDA funds that go to Canadian NGOs that are specifically earmarked for organizations like his. He would not concede the point, even though, as it was pointed out, he was flown to Canada by one of these organizations to legitimize Canada’s role in the occupation which he claims to be opposed to.”⁷

However, Chalmers’ denials don’t necessarily mean very much. As CHAN pointed out, he could not acknowledge “the actual nature of the military occupation,” or “bring himself to denounce the repression.” Nor could he “affirm the high number of Lavalas political prisoners.”⁸



The 2004 coup-installed regime amply rewarded Yves André Wainright for his hard work within PAPDA where he had denounced the elected Lavalas government as a “dictatorship” and demanded President Aristide’s “immediate resignation.” Once the Lavalas government was illegally ousted and replaced in 2004, Wainright was made Minister of the Environment.



Marguerite Laurent, founder and chair of the Haitian Lawyers Leadership Network, is a playwright, poet and entertainment-business attorney. She has described PAPDA as one of the key "so-called progressives" that "so maligned the Aristide government it is not an exaggeration to say they actively participated in bringing on the coup d'etat." Laurent says PAPDA "was bought" and "should be made accountable for the great suffering of the Haitian people."

PAPDA's diligent pre-coup propaganda work led CHAN activist and journalist Anthony Fenton to contend that PAPDA "contribute[d] greatly to the demonization of Aristide, which culminated in his removal."⁹

Similarly, Marguerite Laurent, the founder and chair of the Haitian Lawyers Leadership Network, has described PAPDA as one of the key "so-called progressives" that "so maligned the Aristide government, it is not an exaggeration to say they actively participated in bringing on the Coup D'etat." She argues that PAPDA "should be made accountable for the great suffering of the Haitian people" under the 2004 coup regime. And, referring to PAPDA's foreign funding, Laurent has asserted: "They were bought. Their constituencies are mainly foreigners, not Haitians... They are still playing to their foreign constituency."¹⁰

PAPDA's foreign funding base and its foreign constituency were also raised in "Talk Left, Funded Right," an article that noted PAPDA's corresponding lack of popular support within Haiti: "[M]ost 'well-educated' critics of Aristide and Lavalas share similar values and priorities, and suffer from similar limitations. Their lack of any popular appeal, their reluctance to work in the neighbourhoods where most people live, their contempt for what they call 'populism,' deprives them of any significant political strength. The left-leaning critics of

Aristide and Lavalas who work for media-friendly and foreign donor-friendly groups like PAPDA...are now regularly cited as 'alternative' voices in the international press, but when they hold a sit-in or demonstration..., perhaps fifty to a hundred people are likely to attend."¹⁰

To such meagre but well-funded protests—organized by Canadian-supported groups like PAPDA—we must compare the peaceful rallies attended by tens of thousands of pro-democracy supporters. The groups that have organized such mass protests—demanding the return of their president from forced exile—would, of course, never receive a cent from the Canadian government, which after all played a central role in the illegal removal of Aristide and his entire, legitimate government.

So, the elite-run, anti-Aristide movement received millions in CIDA-

funding, but could never draw huge crowds to their marches, or to the ballot boxes. On the other hand, pro-Aristide voters have organized themselves and won two landslide elections without foreign funding. They are the Western-hemisphere's poorest of the poor. What's more, at their pro-democracy protests during the coup period, these brave souls repeatedly faced deadly hails of bullets fired by Haiti's RCMP-trained, CIDA-funded police.

Such is the difference between Haiti's pro- and anti-Aristide forces. They are worlds apart.

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