

HAITI AFTER THE COUP: The Final Chapter Has Yet To Be Written

When *Hidden from the Headlines* was first published in August 2003, we wrote:

Since the election of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2000, the United States has moved to sabotage Haiti's fledgling democracy through an economic aid embargo, massive funding of elite opposition groups, support for paramilitary coup attempts, and a propaganda offensive against the Aristide government. Hidden from the headlines for years, this campaign has now become an open effort to destroy a popularly elected, progressive government.

We also pointed to the danger of another U.S.-orchestrated coup:

In the face of widespread popular support for Aristide and his Lavalas Party, anti-Aristide forces have turned to violent paramilitary attacks, leading many Haitians to fear another U.S.-backed coup d'etat.

Tragically, events have now borne out these fears. On February 29, 2004, the United States completed its criminal coup against the democratically elected Aristide government. The coup not only overthrew President Aristide, it overthrew a progressive economic and social agenda supported by the vast majority of Haiti's population. Literacy programs, health care centers, the fight for children's rights, a raise in the minimum wage, resistance to privatization, the struggle to bring human rights violators to justice and the effort to create an independent judiciary - these were the real targets of the coup.



The coup has created a grave human rights situation in Haiti. Assassination squads now roam the cities and countryside searching for Fanmi Lavalas supporters. Bodies appear daily with hands cuffed behind their backs and plastic bags over their heads. According to a March 24th Associated Press report from the northern city of Cap-Haitien, "dozens of bullet-ridden bodies have been taken to the morgue in the last month." A National Lawyer's Guild delegation reported that 1000 unidentified bodies were dumped and buried by morgues in the period between March 7th and March 24th. Thousands of Aristide

supporters remain in hiding, while other Haitians try to flee the country, only to be turned back by the U.S. Coast Guard.

THE COUP: MADE IN THE U.S.A.

The U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince had its fingerprints all over each stage of the coup - from the increasingly violent anti-Aristide demonstrations, to the "rebel" military assault on city after city, to the kidnapping of President Aristide. All the while, the international corporate media played its part, spreading unsubstantiated charges against the Aristide government and refusing to report pro-government mobilizations.

On January 1, Haiti commemorated the 200th anniversary of its independence from French rule. As Haitians celebrated, right-wing opposition groups escalated their demonstrations calling for Aristide's forced removal. The opposition received millions of dollars in funding from the European Union, led by France, and from the US Agency for International Development (USAID). The USAID money was funneled through the International Republican Institute, a Reagan Administration program to "promote international democracy." In the forefront of the opposition protests was Andre Apaid, a U.S. citizen, Duvalier supporter, sweatshop owner and leader of the so-called "Group of 184." The Group of 184 claimed to be a broad-based opposition coalition; in reality, it represented the traditional Haitian business elite who have always hated Aristide. Even with U.S. and French backing, the anti-Aristide forces proved unable to win popular support. Pro-Lavalas demonstrations dwarfed those of the opposition, as Aristide supporters surrounded the Presidential Palace day after day to protect their elected government.

The coup plotters turned to open warfare. In February, hundreds of former Haitian military and paramilitary thugs, trained by U.S. Special Forces operatives in the Dominican Republic and armed with U.S.-made M-16s and M-60s, launched attacks throughout the northern regions of the country. Targeting Lavalas activists and popular organizations, they burned down homes, murdered police officers and terrorized the population.

Heading the "rebel army" were criminals who had tormented Haiti for years. Louis-Jodel Chamblain is a convicted assassin and former leader of FRAPH, the paramilitary death squad responsible for the murder of thousands during the 1991-1994 coup against the first Aristide Administration. Guy Philippe, a major drug trafficker, fled Haiti in 2000 after being implicated in an abortive coup attempt. Trained by U.S. Special Forces in Ecuador, Philippe is a former police chief and member of the Haitian military cited by the UN International Civilian Mission for summary executions of suspects. Jean Tatoune is another convicted murderer, responsible for the infamous Raboteau massacre in 1994.

As the violence in the North intensified, the people of Port-au-Prince rallied to defend their hard-won democracy. On February 7, one million people took to the streets in the capital to support the government, vowing to never give in to violence or intimidation. Marchers held up five fingers to signify their determination

that President Aristide complete his five-year term.

Appalled at the carnage, CARICOM (the association of Caribbean nations) and the Aristide government reached a compromise designed to end the bloodshed and preserve democratic institutions. But the U.S. State Department and France colluded with the anti-Aristide opposition to block these diplomatic efforts. The U.S. prevented any assistance—even tear gas—from reaching the Haitian police force. On February 9, a State Department spokesman stated, “We recognize that reaching a political settlement will require some fairly thorough changes in the way Haiti is governed...I think that could indeed involve changes in Aristide’s position.” The U.S. had given the green light for the coup.

Thousands of Aristide supporters in Port-au-Prince responded to the growing threat by building barricades and blocking all entrances to the city. Popular organizations mobilized to defend the government and resist any military invasion. At CARICOM’s request, a plane from South Africa headed for Port-au-Prince, carrying weapons for the beleaguered Haitian police. With resistance rising and international support on its way, the U.S. decided to take matters into its own hands.

THE ABDUCTION OF PRESIDENT ARISTIDE

On the night of February 28, US armed forces took over key sites in Port-au-Prince, including the Presidential Palace and the airport. U.S. military operatives then entered President Aristide’s home and threatened that he, his family, and thousands of others would be killed if he didn’t leave the country immediately. Against his will, the President



was taken to the airport, put on a plane and eventually placed under virtual house arrest in the Central African Republic. With the U.S. military in control of Port-au-Prince, the terrorist leaders could now enter. *The New York Times* reported that as Chamblain rode through Port-au-Prince, he leaned from the window of his truck and called out, “We are grateful to the United States.” Within hours, his military forces were murdering Lavalas supporters in the capital.

As a result of intense pressure from Caribbean nations and the Congressional Black Caucus, President Aristide was able to fly to Jamaica where he received temporary asylum. United States officials have made it clear, however, that they want Aristide out of the hemisphere, away from the people of Haiti. These events have a clear parallel in Haitian history. In 1802, French colonial authorities kidnapped

Toussaint L'Ouverture and imprisoned him in France. Convinced that Toussaint's presence in or near Haiti would spur further rebellion, General LeClerc, the French military leader and brother-in-law of Napoleon, wrote "You cannot hold Toussaint far enough from the ocean or put him in a prison that is too strong." Now, on the 200th anniversary of Haitian independence, history has repeated itself.

Today Haiti remains under U.S. occupation. 3,600 U.S., French, Canadian and Chilean troops preside over a systematic campaign of violence and intimidation against supporters of Lavalas. Gerard LaTortue, a businessman who has lived in Florida since 1988, heads the U.S.-appointed puppet government. In one of his first acts, LaTortue went to Gonaives, where he hailed the assassins Chamblain and Tatoune as "freedom fighters". LaTortue has announced his support for the rebuilding of Haiti's despised military, which President Aristide had disbanded.



While the United States and France try to legitimize the coup, CARICOM and the African Union have courageously refused to recognize the new regime. Despite the grave danger, popular organizations in Haiti remain active and mobilized. The people of Haiti have made it clear that the final chapter in this story has yet to be written. They need our solidarity and support more than ever.

The Haiti Action Committee is resolved to defend democracy in Haiti.

We call for:

- The unconditional and immediate return of President Aristide to Haiti to serve out his term of office until 2006. Respect the vote of the Haitian people.
- An immediate end to repression against Lavalas supporters and those demanding the return of President Aristide.
- A congressional investigation into the role of the U.S. government in the destabilization of the Haitian government and the implementation of the coup.
- Support for Haitian refugees, including Temporary Protective Services (TPS) to refugees from Haiti who are fleeing the terror of their home country.

**END THE OCCUPATION! STOP THE REPRESSION!
RETURN PRESIDENT ARISTIDE TO HAITI!**

Haiti Action Committee, April 2004

For more information, contact:

510-483-7481

www.haitiaction.net

haitiaction@yahoo.com

Photos: Haiti Information Project