

Editorial

The War Criminals Stand Exposed

In May, just prior to the British elections, a number of top-secret July 23, 2002 British Cabinet Office documents were leaked to *The Sunday Times* newspaper. The leaked documents, which included a transcript of a meeting between Tony Blair and his most senior advisors, reveal that U.S. President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair had agreed to take military action to effect regime change in Iraq in the spring of 2002, a year before the actual invasion began. The documents also indicate that Blair and his advisors discussed the necessity of creating a legal pretext for such a blatantly illegal action, as well as the possibility that the intelligence on Iraq, particularly on the issue of so-called weapons of mass destruction, would have to be “fixed” to correspond to the political agenda of the Bush and Blair administrations.

In the following months leading up to the U.S.-British invasion of Iraq, not only were numerous intelligence reports “fixed” in Britain and the U.S., but both leaders lied to the legislative assemblies of their respective countries, presenting the manufactured “evidence” as genuine. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell repeated the same lies to the UN Security Council and General Assembly. These actions by the Bush and Blair administrations demonstrate complete contempt, not only for the people and legislative institutions in their own countries, but for the peoples of the world and every principle of international law.

Despite their public proclamations at the time, it is clear from the leaked documents that Bush, Blair and their closest advisors were acutely aware that any military action against Iraq would be in violation of

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Commentary

Canada's Support for Haiti's Dictatorship

Canadian Foreign Minister Pierre Pettigrew was speaking at the Montreal International Conference on Haiti on June 17 when an activist from the group Haiti Action Montreal splattered red paint at him chanting “Pettigrew Lies, Haitians Die!” The red paint, the young activist explained, symbolized the blood that Pettigrew and the other members of the Martin government have on their hands for the death of hundreds of Haitians under the Canadian, French and U.S.-backed dictatorship that currently rules the country. The activist was tackled and dragged away by RCMP (he is being charged with assault with a weapon), and the conference Pettigrew was addressing carried on. Representatives from Canada, the U.S., France and the so-called Haitian civil society – groups of wealthy businesspeople who

engineered the coup that overthrew the democratically elected government of Jean Bertrand Aristide – continued discussing what they could do to bring “stability” to the poverty-stricken country.

They reached largely foregone conclusions: Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, needs to do more to attract foreign investment, including privatizing sections of the country’s social infrastructure and creating more free trade zones from which foreign companies can operate. The conference, convened by Pettigrew, also dealt with the difficult question of the as yet unscheduled Haitian elections. The Council of Sages, an unelected body hand-picked by the Americans with input from Canada and France, has promised that elections will

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be held by the end of 2005. However, it is very likely that any open elections would be won by Aristide (or members of the Fanmi Lavalas (FL) political party he leads, if he is prevented from running).

This presents a challenge for the U.S., Canada and France which have all claimed repeatedly, despite massive evidence to the contrary, that Aristide was ousted through a popular rebellion. Aristide himself has been quite clear that U.S. agents removed him from Haiti against his will, from an airport secured by Canadian Joint Task Force 2 troops.

Aristide's kidnapping followed almost three years of international planning, led by the Canadian government, for his removal. An "Ottawa Initiative on Haiti" was established by Prime Minister Jean Chretien in 2000 and led by one of his Quebec lieutenants, Denis Paradis. Paradis declared that Haiti was a "failed state" and began pressuring the Aristide government to accept the economic conditions of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank – increased privatization and opening the country up to foreign investment – in exchange for economic aid. Aristide refused. Haitian opposition groups, led by the country's small but powerful wealthy elite, began to organize demonstrations against the Aristide government and money, and arms began to flow into the hands of paramilitary groups. These groups, which Aristide had tried unsuccessfully to disband, were made up of former members of the infamous FRAPH secret police (the Tontons Macoutes) that terrorized the Haitian people during the Papa Doc and Baby Doc Duvalier dictatorships. (After the fall of these dictatorships in 1986, FRAPH leaders formed separate paramilitary groups and hired themselves out to provide security to the Haitian elite and foreign businesspeople operating in the country.) However, their early attempts to try and foment a grassroots rebellion failed, with the majority of Haitians supporting Aristide.

This did not deter the Chretien government. Speaking to reporters in the Dominican Republic in 2003, Chretien suggested that the international community would prefer that Aristide not be in power by the Haitian bicentennial celebrations on January 1, 2004. When he became prime minister, Paul Martin appointed Denis Coderre as his special counsellor for Haiti and charged him with drawing up an exit plan for Aristide. In January 2004, Foreign Minister Pettigrew met with Paul Arcelin in Montreal; Arcelin, a self-styled representative of the Haitian opposition, was closely associated with the Haitian paramilitary

leader Guy Philippe. Within a month of Pettigrew's meeting, Guy Philippe had led the paramilitaries into Port au Prince, executing Aristide supporters along the way and declaring that the government had fallen.

Aristide was whisked out of the country on February 29, 2004 and deposited in the Central African Republic. In the hours after the coup, the Americans claimed Aristide had resigned and asked for safe transport out of Haiti. Paul Martin accepted the resignation, showing none of the hesitation expressed by the leaders of the Caribbean Community (CariCom), who refused to accept a resignation from a democratically-elected leader of a sovereign country as presented by U.S. military forces. CariCom leaders managed to speak with Aristide, learned he had been kidnapped, and refused to recognize the new Haitian regime.

Reportedly embarrassed by the excesses of Guy Philippe, whose forces were openly looting, raping and stealing from some of the wealthy elite who had financed him in the first place, the Americans established the Council of Sages, with French and Canadian support, a few days after the coup. The Council is led by Gerard Latortue, a former Haitian foreign minister and business consultant, who was living in Boca Raton, Florida at the time of the coup. Latortue, who moved to the U.S. in the early 1990s, had advised the Bush administration on how to overthrow Aristide. In an interview with a Florida paper in early 2004, he acknowledged that paramilitary groups were using violence against civilians in their campaign to destabilize the Aristide government. But he described them as "freedom fighters", adding "they became violent in response to Aristide - I see it as a liberation movement."

Not a single member of CariCom has recognized Latortue. Nor have the member nations of the African Union or the government of Venezuela. All have pointed out that he has never been elected by the Haitian people. However, the Canadian government does not share these concerns and recognized him immediately. Martin and Pettigrew both met with Latortue during official visits to Haiti, and Martin held a joint news conference with him, at which Latortue claimed there were no human rights violations taking place in Haiti.

This is not the case according to the reports by dozens of human rights groups, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and monitors sent by the Organization of American States. There are an estimated 700 political prisoners being held without

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Haiti's Tortured History

The first Spanish colonizers arrived on the island of Hispanola at the end of the fifteenth century shortly after Columbus' maiden voyage. The Spanish were concentrated on the part of the island that is now the Dominican Republic, while the other half of the island – now the Haitian nation – was colonized by the French in the 1600s. The French colonizers killed most of the indigenous inhabitants, both through direct genocide and through the indirect genocide of smallpox and other diseases, and began bringing in slaves from Africa to work their sugarcane and coffee plantations.

These slaves led the second democratic revolution in the western hemisphere in 1791, rising up against the French colonial authority under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture, Jean Jacques Dessalines and Henri Christophe, and seizing control of the northern part of Haiti (at the time Saint-Domingue). They formed alliances with the mulatto population, whom the French used as an administrative class, and in 1804 defeated Napoleon's Army, officially declared independence from France and established the nation of Haiti.

After independence, the mulattos began to act as a national elite, working on behalf of American interests to buy up most of the land in the country and dominating the political system. This elite supported the rise to power of Guillaume Sam, a dictator who ruled the country for over a dozen years until he was overthrown in another popular uprising in 1915.

The Americans, concerned that plantations owned by American businesses would be expropriated by the nationalist movement that overthrew Sam, invaded Haiti in 1915. They dissolved the Haitian congress and dictated a constitution that vested sovereignty over Haiti in the American military occupiers while they "prepared" Haitians for self-government.

Two decades of national resistance to the U.S. occupation began, culminating in the expulsion of the Americans in 1934 under the leadership of Stenio Vincent, although the Americans continued to run the economy until 1947 under an agreement that gave them control over the issuing of customs receipts.

In 1957, Francois (Papa Doc) Duvalier was elected president with some financial support from American interests. Papa Doc moved quickly to establish control over Haiti, with the assistance of the CIA, by creating a paramilitary secret police force – the FRAPH, or tonton macoutes, as they were known. In 1964, Papa Doc declared himself

president for life. With his U.S.-armed and trained secret police force, he crushed all resistance to his regime and ruled Haiti until he died in 1971, when he was succeeded by his son, Jean-Claude (Baby Doc). Baby Doc also ruled Haiti with U.S. support, but the resistance movement against the dictatorship was growing, and he was finally overthrown by the Haitian people in 1986. Baby Doc fled to Miami, while a provisional government was established that drafted a new constitution, adopted in 1987. The Haitian constitution provides for an elected parliament, with the prime minister and cabinet elected by parliament, and an elected president as head of state.

In December 1990, Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected president of Haiti, with almost 70 per cent of the vote, on a mandate of increasing social spending and improving the standard of living of the majority of Haitians. He took office in February 1991, but was overthrown in a coup led by members of the army (mainly former members of FRAPH) in September 1991. Hundreds of Haitians were killed following the 1991 coup, and another 50,000 Haitians fled within a year of Aristide's overthrow.

From October 1991 to June 1992, Joseph Nerette ruled as president in violation of the Haitian constitution but with the support of the armed forces and FRAPH. After the international community refused to recognize his rule, he resigned and Parliament appointed Marc Bazin as prime minister, leaving the position of president vacant. Bazin tried to negotiate for Aristide's return, but the military and FRAPH forces refused. Bazin resigned in June 1993, the UN imposed an oil and arms embargo on Haiti, and the Haitian military and paramilitary agreed to negotiate for Aristide's return. However, the military refused to abide by the terms of any agreements it signed, and in July 1994, the UN adopted Resolution 940 authorizing member states to use all necessary means to facilitate the departure of Haiti's military leadership and restore constitutional rule and Aristide's presidency.

Aristide entered into negotiations with the Clinton Administration in the U.S. and agreed to a U.S.-backed multinational force returning him to power, in exchange for significant concessions on his plans for social and economic reforms, including supporting privatization and opening up free trade zones. With U.S. troops prepared to invade Haiti, Aristide returned to power on October 15, 1994. However, he lost popular support after implementing the neo-

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charge in Haitian jails, including at least one Canadian citizen – all members of the Fanmi Lavalas. Hundreds more have been killed or have disappeared, and police opening fire on peaceful demonstrations is a common occurrence. Amnesty International's report on Haiti describes a "a pattern of repression" by the Haitian National Police (HNP) against "those close, or perceived to have been close, to ... Fanmi Lavalas (FL)," and the group documents over 200 killings of FL supporters by the police in the months after the coup.

The Canadian government's response to the reports of police brutality has been to send 100 RCMP officers to participate in the UN mission that is training and arming the HNP. The HNP is made up, primarily, of former FRAPH and paramilitary members, the very same individuals who are committing the beatings and murders of Aristide sympathizers.

There has been a lot of speculation about why the Canadian government is participating in these crimes against the Haitian people. Some claim that it was a gesture of support for the Bush administration by the Martin Liberals in order to prove its loyalty despite its refusal to send troops to Iraq. Others claim that various Canadian corporations stand to profit from the super exploitation of Haitian labour. Whatever the reason, there is no possible moral justification for Canada's participation in the continuing occupation of Haiti. The Canadian government should immediately withdraw all of its forces from Haiti, stop interfering in Haiti's internal affairs and join the many other countries which have condemned the removal of President Aristide as illegal. Only such a principled stand can contribute to the realization of the aspiration of the Haitian people for democracy and sovereignty.

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liberal policies he had agreed to in exchange for power.

In 2000, vowing that he had learned from his mistakes, Aristide was re-elected on a platform of national economic and social reform. He began implementing his election promises, including increasing taxes on the wealthy and imposing taxes on foreign multinationals operating in Haiti, using the revenue to fund healthcare, education and literacy programs. He also took initial steps to disband the paramilitary groups that were operating throughout the country.

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international law. It is also clear that, again contrary to their public declarations at the time, they did not really want the UN Security Council to present Saddam Hussein with an ultimatum on weapons inspections because if he accepted such an ultimatum any pretext for war would disappear. Therefore, the strategy adopted by Bush and Blair was to continue to lie to the UN Security Council about the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, while deliberately blocking any attempts to reach a compromise within the Security Council. This is why the Bush administration was so furious with Jean Chretien's proposal to delay the invasion for two weeks and present Saddam Hussein with a final Security Council ultimatum.

In other words, the U.S. and Britain were determined to launch an illegal and unjustifiable invasion of Iraq because it served their imperialist interests to do so, and the position taken by the UN Security Council was considered completely irrelevant. In the end, the vast majority of the members of the UN Security Council rejected the U.S.-British "evidence" and explicitly opposed any military action against Iraq, but the U.S.-British invasion proceeded regardless. In doing so, the U.S. and Britain acted as outlaws and rogue states. Bush, Blair and their advisors are guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The leaked British documents have not revealed anything that the vast majority of the world's people did not already know, but they have proven every U.S.-British justification for the invasion and continuing occupation of Iraq to be bald-faced lies.

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