

DAVID EDWARDS



BRINGING



**HELL
TO HAITI**

ColdType

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PART ONE

ANYONE HERE FEELING STUPID?

HAVE you noticed how stupid you feel when you watch the news? Hands up anybody who understands what's going on in Haiti? The media is good at repeatedly broadcasting footage of armed gangs roaming in trucks, and at quoting senior officials. But the absence of meaningful context and informed analysis – and above all the unwillingness to question the official version of events – means that it is often literally impossible for viewers to make sense of what is happening. For all their satellite communications and computer-generated studios, the news media often do not give us news at all – they give us noise.

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and the fourth poorest country in the world – 50% per cent of the country's wealth is owned by 1% of the population. Life expectancy is 52 years for women and 48 for men. Unemployment is about 70%. Some 85% of Haitians live on less than \$1 US per day. (Source: Yifat Susskind, 'Haiti – Insurrection in the Making', www.zmag.org,

February 25, 2004)

The United States is Haiti's main commercial 'partner' accounting for about 60% of the flows of exports and imports. Along with the manufacture of baseballs, textiles, cheap electronics, and toys, Haiti's sugar, bauxite and sisal are all controlled by American corporations. Disney, for example, has used Haitian sweatshops to produce Pocahontas pyjamas, among other items, at the rate of 11 cents per hour. Most Haitians are willing to work for almost nothing.

The US Network For Economic Justice reports: "Whereas corporations receive vast incentives to set up plants in Haiti... returns to the Haitian economy are minimal, and working and living standards of Haitian people, whose wages are generally below the minimum of thirty cents an hour, steadily decline... Decades of public investments and policy manipulation by the World Bank, the IMF, and the US government have deliberately created an environment where the exploitation of workers is hailed as an incentive to invest in Haiti." (*50 years is enough: Corporate Welfare in Haiti*, <http://www.50years.org>)

The US, in other words, is *not* a disinterested spectator of events in Haiti.

Cruelty Never Seen Before – Conquering Paradise

When Cristobal Colon (Columbus) first arrived on Hispaniola – today's Haiti and Dominican Republic – in October 1492, he found something close to an earthly paradise. Of the Taino people he encountered, he said: "They are the best people in the world and above all the gentlest... All the people show the most singular loving behaviour and they speak pleasantly... They love their neighbours as themselves, and they have the sweetest talk in the world, and are gentle and always laughing." (*Quoted, Kirkpatrick Sale, The Conquest of Paradise, Papermac, 1992, pp.99-100*)

Colon did not allow sentiment to stand in his way for long. Formal instructions for the second voyage to Hispaniola in May 1493 were significant, historian Kirkpatrick Sale writes, in that they constituted "the first statement of the

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colonial strategies and policies of empire that were eventually to carry Europe to every cranny of the earth”. Colon’s plans were almost entirely concerned with “establishing the means of exploitation and trade, providing no suggestion of any other purpose for settlement or any other function of government”. (*Ibid*, p.127)

The rights of the Taino people were not an issue – the concern was simply to steal their gold.

Las Casas, a Spanish eyewitness, described how the invaders were motivated by “insatiable greed and ambition,” attacking the Tainos “like ravening wild beasts... killing, terrorizing, afflicting, torturing, and destroying the native peoples” with “the strangest and most varied new methods of cruelty, never seen or heard of before”. (*Quoted Noam Chomsky, Year 501, Verso, 1993, p.198*)

The idea seems to have been to utterly crush the spirit of the Tainos. Las Casas comments: “As they saw themselves each day perishing by the cruel and inhuman treatment of the Spaniards, crushed to the earth by the horses, cut in pieces by swords, eaten and torn by dogs, many buried alive and suffering all kinds of exquisite tortures...[they] decided to abandon themselves to their unhappy fate with no further struggles, placing themselves in the hands of their enemies that they might do with them as they liked.” (*Ibid*, pp.198-9).

Near-identical horrors are documented under the subsequent French rulers of Haiti, who shipped in hundreds of thousands of African slaves to work their plantations. From that time to this, the logic of Western exploitation of the Third World has remained fundamentally the same: dreams of a better life must be crushed by violence and grinding poverty so extreme that local people will accept any work at any rate, and abandon all notions of improving their lot.

This is why death squads, tyrants and torturers are such a standard feature of the Third World – hope is always being born and is always being killed by local thugs serving Western elites. This is also why weapons consistently flow from the rich West to the world’s worst human rights abusers. In the 1980s, the

leading academic scholar on human rights in Latin America, Lars Schoultz, found that US aid, including military aid, “has tended to flow disproportionately to Latin American governments which torture their citizens... to the hemisphere’s relatively egregious violators of fundamental human rights”. (*Schoultz, Comparative Politics, January 1981*)

Terror was required, Schoultz added, “to destroy permanently a perceived threat to the existing structure of socioeconomic privilege by eliminating the political participation of the numerical majority”. (*Schoultz, Human Rights and United States Policy toward Latin America, Princeton, 1981*)

Haiti And The Racketeers For Capitalism

Between 1849 and 1913, the US Navy entered Haitian waters 24 times to “protect American lives and property”. The US invasion of 1915 brought back slavery to Haiti in all but name and imposed a US-designed constitution giving US corporations free rein. After ruling for 19 years the US withdrew leaving its wealth in the safe hands of the murderous National Guard it had created. In November 1935, Major General Smedley D. Butler explained the logic of intervention: “I spent thirty-three years and four months in active service as a member of our country’s most agile military force – the Marine Corps... And during that period I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street, and for the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer for capitalism.

“Thus I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City boys to collect revenues in. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras ‘right’ for American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested.” (*Sidney Lens, The Forging of the American Empire, Pluto Press, 2003, pp. 270-271*)

In the 1950s, with firm US support, the Duvalier dictatorship took over. Anthropologist Robert Lawless comments: “The United States would support the continuation of the Duvalier dynasty, and Jean-Claude, when he came to power, would support a new economic programme guided by the United States, a programme featuring private investments from the United States that would be drawn to Haiti by such incentives as no customs taxes, a minimum wage kept very low, the suppression of labour unions, and the right of American companies to repatriate their profits... Largely because of its cheap labour force, extensive government repression, and denial of even minimal labour rights, Haiti is one of the most attractive countries for both the subcontractors and the maquilas.” (*Quoted, Paul Farmer, The Uses Of Haiti, Common Courage Press, 1994, p.114*)

This is the Guardian editors’ version of Haiti’s history: “The US ignored [Haiti’s] existence until 1862. Later, beginning in 1915, it occupied Haiti for 19 years and then abruptly left. Years of dictatorship and coups ensued.” (*‘From bad to worse’, Leader, The Guardian, February 14, 2004*)

Years of dictatorship merely “ensued” – no mention is made of the dictatorship *under* occupation. There is also no hint that the following years of dictatorship were imposed by the US in order to maximise returns on investments.

On the rare occasions when US support for terror is admitted, the motivation – maximised profits – is out of sight. Thus Lyonel Trouillot writes in the New York Times of how “the United States’s automatic backing of the Duvalier dictatorship because it was anti-Communist” resulted in terror. (*Trouillot, ‘In Haiti, All the Bridges Are Burned’, The New York Times, February 26, 2004*)

Haiti’s Big Surprise – Aristide

Terror-backed exploitation continued in an unbroken line until December 1990 when Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a Catholic priest, won national elections with 67.5% of the vote, beating the US candidate, former World Bank official Marc

Bazin, into second place with 14.2%. The grassroots movement that swept Aristide to power took the West completely by surprise. Aristide took office in February 1991 and was briefly the first democratically elected President in Haiti's history before being overthrown by a US-backed military coup on September 30, 1991. The Washington-based Council on Hemispheric Affairs observed after the coup: "Under Aristide, for the first time in the republic's tortured history, Haiti seemed to be on the verge of tearing free from the fabric of despotism and tyranny which had smothered all previous attempts at democratic expression and self-determination." His victory "represented more than a decade of civic engagement and education on his part," in "a textbook example of participatory, 'bottom-up' and democratic political development". (Quoted, *Chomsky, op.cit., p.209*)

Aristide's balancing of the budget and "trimming of a bloated bureaucracy" led to a "stunning success" that made White House planners "extremely uncomfortable". The view of a US official "with extensive experience of Haiti" summed up the reality beneath US rhetoric: "Aristide – slum priest, grassroots activist, exponent of Liberation Theology – 'represents everything that CIA, DOD and FBI think they have been trying to protect this country against for the past 50 years,'" he said. (Quoted, *Paul Quinn-Judge, Boston Globe, September 8, 1994*)

Before deciding to run for office, Aristide had observed: "Of course, the US has its own agenda here", namely: maximising its returns on investments. "This is normal, capitalist behaviour, and I don't care if the US wants to do it at home... But it is monstrous to come down here and impose your will on another people... I cannot accept that Haiti should be whatever the United States wants it to be." (*Chomsky, op.cit., p.211*)

A Haitian businessman told a reporter shortly before the September 1991 coup: "Everyone who is anyone is against Aristide. Except the people." (Quoted, *Farmer, op., cit, p.178*)

Following the fall of Aristide, the Haitian army "embarked on a systematic

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and continuing campaign to stamp out the vibrant civil society that has taken root in Haiti since the fall of the Duvalier dictatorship,” Americas Watch noted. At least 1,000 people were killed in the first two weeks of the coup and hundreds more by December. The paramilitary forces were led by former CIA employees Emmanuel Constant and Raoul Cedras – Aristide was forced into exile from 1991-94.

In response to the coup, the Organisation of American States announced an embargo and sanctions. The US immediately declared 800 of its firms “exempt”. As a result levels of US trade increased by around 50% under the embargo. Noam Chomsky summarises the situation: “Well, as this was going on, the Haitian generals in effect were being told [by Washington]: ‘Look, murder the leaders of the popular organisations, intimidate the whole population, destroy anyone who looks like they might get in the way after you’re gone.’... And that’s exactly what Cedras and those guys did, that’s precisely what happened – and of course they were given total amnesty when they finally did agree to step down.” (*Chomsky, Understanding Power, The New Press, 2002, p.157*)

Writing in *The Nation* in October 1994, US journalist Allan Nairn quoted paramilitary leader Emmanuel Constant as saying that he had been contacted by a US Military officer, Colonel Patrick Collins, who served as defence attaché at the United States Embassy in the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince. Constant said Collins pressed him to set up a group to “balance the Aristide movement” and to do “intelligence” work against it. Constant admitted that, at the time, he was working with CIA operatives in Haiti. Constant and other paramilitary leaders were trained in Ecuador by US Special Forces between 1991-1994.

One phone call from Washington would have been enough to stop the generals, Howard French noted in the *New York Times*. But “Washington’s deep-seated ambivalence about a leftward-tilting nationalist” prevented action. “Despite much blood on the army’s hands, United States diplomats consider

it a vital counterweight to Father Aristide, whose class-struggle rhetoric... threatened or antagonized traditional power centres at home and abroad.” (*French, New York Times, September 27, 1992*)

In 1994, the US returned Aristide in the company of 20,000 troops after the coup leaders had slaughtered much of the popular movement that had brought him to power. The title of a 1994 article by Douglas Farah in the *International Herald Tribune* summed up the horror: “Grass roots of democracy in Haiti: all but dead.” (*May 10, 1994*)

The day before US troops landed, the *Associated Press* reported that American oil companies had been supplying oil directly to the Haitian coup leaders in violation of the embargo with the authorisation of the Clinton and Bush administrations at the highest level. Although the world’s media were intensely focused on Haiti at the time, the revelations were met with near-total silence in the US press. Human Rights Watch describes “disappointing” aspects of the US military intervention: “The United States, notably, showed little enthusiasm for the prosecution of past abuses. Indeed, it even impeded accountability by removing to the US thousands of documents from military and paramilitary headquarters, allowing notorious abusers to flee Haiti, and giving safe haven to paramilitary leader Emmanuel ‘Toto’ Constant.” (*‘Recycled soldiers and paramilitaries on the march’, Human Rights Watch, February 27, 2004*)

Kenneth Roth, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, wrote about the documents seized by the US in a letter to the *New York Times*: “The Clinton Administration refuses to return these documents without first removing the names of Americans. The Administration’s apparent motive is to avoid embarrassing revelations about the involvement of American intelligence agents with the military regime that ruled Haiti.” (*‘US Must Release Evidence on Haitian Abuses,’ New York Times, April 12, 1997*)

Crucially, Aristide’s return was permitted only when he accepted both the US military occupation and Washington’s harsh neoliberal agenda. His gov-

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ernment was to implement a standard “structural adjustment” package, with foreign funds devoted primarily to debt repayment and the needs of the business sectors, and with an “open foreign investment policy”.

The plans for the economy were set out in a document submitted to the Paris Club of international donors at the World Bank in August 1994. The Haiti desk officer of the World Bank, Axel Peuker, described the plan as beneficial to the “more open, enlightened, business class” and foreign investors. The Haitian Minister in charge of rural development and agrarian reform was not even told about the plan. (*Quoted Noam Chomsky, ‘Democracy Restored’, Z Magazine, November 1994*)

Aristide also agreed to dismiss his prime minister and to replace him with a businessman from the traditional elite who was “known to be opposed to the populist policies during Aristide’s seven months in power” and was “generally well regarded by the business community.” (*Boston Globe, July 27, 1993*)

Now consider the ‘free press’ version of these events:

First, the Times: “Mr Aristide, a former Roman Catholic priest, won Haiti’s first free elections in 1990, promising to end the country’s relentless cycle of corruption, poverty and demagoguery. Ousted in a coup the following year, he was restored to power with the help of 20,000 US troops in 1994.” (*‘Barricades go up as city braces for attack’, Tim Reid, The Times, February 26, 2004*)

Not a word about the long, documented history of US support for mass murderers attacking a democratic government and killing its supporters. No mention of the limits imposed on Aristide’s range of options by the superpower protecting its business interests.

The Guardian writes: “To a degree, history repeated itself when the US intervened again in 1994 to restore Mr Aristide. Bill Clinton halted the influx of Haitian boat people that had become politically awkward in Florida. Then he moved on. Although the US has pumped in about \$900m in the past decade, consistency and vision have been lacking.” (*‘From bad to worse’, Leader, The Guardian, February 14, 2004*)

In reality there has been great consistency and vision in exploiting the people of Haiti for Western gain. Ignoring mountains of evidence, the Guardian reports: “The US [was] at one time a staunch ally” of Aristide. (*Haitian rebels continue advance on capital*, *Agencies, Guardian Unlimited, February 27, 2004*)

Ross Benson writes of the Haitian boat people in the Daily Mail: “It was to stem that flow and keep what the former American presidential candidate, Pat Buchanan, colourfully if disgracefully called ‘the Zulus off Miami Beach’ that, three years later, 20,000 US Marines invaded and restored Aristide to his white-domed palace that looks as if it might have been built for Saddam Hussein...” (*Benson, ‘The Land of voodoo’, The Daily Mail, February 28, 2004*)

No mention of Aristide’s achievements or of the US determination to destroy them. We note that Buchanan’s “colourful” language was disgraceful enough to merit repetition.

The BBC reports: “Months later [Aristide] was overthrown in a bloody military coup, but returned to power in 1994 after the new rulers were forced to step down under international pressure and with the help of US troops.” (*‘Country profile: Haiti’, 14 February, 2004; http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/country_profiles/1202772.stm*)

Again, not a word about the double game being played by the US at the expense of the Haitian people and their democracy. Indeed in the mainstream reports we have seen we have found almost no mention of US commercial interests in Haiti.

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PART TWO

KILLING HOPE

JEAN-BERTRAND Aristide told the Associated Press on March 1 that he was forced to leave Haiti by US military forces. Asked if he left on his own, Aristide answered: “No. I was forced to leave. Agents were telling me that if I don’t leave they would start shooting and killing in a matter of time.” (Elliott C. McLaughlin, Associated Press, March 1, 2004)

“Haiti, again, is ablaze”, Jeffrey Sachs, professor of economics at Columbia University, writes: “Almost nobody, however, understands that today’s chaos was made in Washington – deliberately, cynically, and steadfastly. History will bear this out.” (Sachs, ‘Fanning the flames of political chaos in Haiti’, *The Nation*, February 28, 2004)

As Sachs argues, the Bush Administration has been pursuing policies likely to topple Aristide since 2001: “I visited President Aristide in Port-au-Prince in early 2001. He impressed me as intelligent and intent on good relations with Haiti’s private sector and the US.

“Haiti was clearly desperate: the most impoverished country in the Western Hemisphere, with a standard of living comparable to sub-Saharan Africa despite being only a few hours by air from Miami. Life expectancy was 52 years. Children were chronically hungry.”

When he returned to Washington, Sachs spoke to senior officials in the IMF, World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, and Organisation of American States. He describes how he expected to hear that these organisations would be rushing to help Haiti. Not so: “Instead, I was shocked to learn that they would all be suspending aid, under vague ‘instructions’ from the US. America, it seemed, was unwilling to release aid to Haiti because of irregularities in the 2000 legislative elections, and was insisting that Aristide make peace with the political opposition before releasing any aid.

“The US position was a travesty. Aristide had been elected President in an indisputable landslide [in 1990]... Nor were the results of the legislative elections in 2000 in doubt: Aristide’s party had also won in a landslide.”

Two elections took place in 2000. A range of political parties, including Aristide’s Lavalas party, contested elections in May. As a result, Aristide dominated the new parliament, holding 19 of the 27 Senate seats and 72 of the 82 lower house seats – 200 international observers assessed the elections as satisfactory. Peter Hallward of King’s College London comments in the Guardian:

“An exhaustive and convincing report by the International Coalition of Independent Observers concluded that ‘fair and peaceful elections were held’ in 2000, and by the standard of the presidential elections held in the US that same year they were positively exemplary.”

Why then were the elections criticised as “flawed” by the Organisation of American States (OAS)? “It was because, after Aristide’s Lavalas party had won 16 out of 17 senate seats, the OAS contested the methodology used to calculate the voting percentages. Curiously, neither the US nor the OAS judged this methodology problematic in the run-up to the elections.” (*Hallward, ‘Why they had to crush Aristide’, The Guardian, March 2, 2004*)

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Methodology was contested in the election of eight senators out of a total of 7,500 posts filled. President Aristide persuaded seven of the eight senators to resign. He also agreed to OAS proposals for new elections. The opposition Democratic Convergence, however, did not, demanding instead that Aristide immediately vacate the presidency. Analyst Yifat Susskind explains: “Members of Haiti’s elite, long hostile to Aristide’s progressive economic agenda, saw the controversy as an opportunity to derail his government.” (Susskind, ‘Haiti – Insurrection in the Making, A MADRE Background’, www.zmag.org, February 25, 2004)

On November 26, 2000, Aristide was nevertheless re-elected president with his Lavalas Party winning 90% of the vote. Haiti’s elections may have been imperfect but, given Haiti’s history of appalling dictatorships and violence, they marked a major step forward in democracy. It made no sense for the US to react so aggressively by cutting off vital aid, just as it has made no sense for the West to insist that Haiti should, yet again, submit to military violence now.

US Congresswoman, Barbara Lee, challenged Colin Powell in a February 12 letter: “It appears that the US is aiding and abetting the attempt to violently topple the Aristide government. With all due respect, this looks like ‘regime change’... Our actions – or inaction – may be making things worse.” (Quoted Anthony Fenton, ‘Media vs. reality in Haiti’, http://zmag.org/content/show_article.cfm?SectionID=11&ItemID=4977 February 13, 2004)

Consider the Times’ version of these events: “Mr Aristide will doubtless protest that a democratically elected figure such as himself should never be asked to submit to the will of self-appointed rebels. He has a point, but, in his case, it is a limited one. Mr Aristide won a second term in office four years ago in a manner that suggested fraud on a substantial scale. The resentment left by his flawed victory, his increasingly despotic and erratic rule and the wholesale collapse of the local economy inspired the rebellion against him.” (*The Times, Editorial, March 1, 2004*)

This is the same Times which, in response to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in

1990, called for “a worldwide expression of anger at a small nation’s sovereignty rudely shattered by brute force”. (*Iraq’s naked villainy*, Editorial, *The Times*, August 3, 1990)

The cause in Kuwait was “simple on a world scale”, the Times wrote grandly, “the defence of the weak against aggression by the strong”. (*No mock heroics*, Editorial, *The Times*, January 18, 1991)

Structurally Adjusted Rebels

Since 2001, human rights activists and humanitarian workers in Haiti have documented numerous opposition killings of government officials and bystanders in attacks on health clinics, police stations and government vehicles. None of these killings were condemned by the US government. Susskind notes that, according to a 2000 poll, Haiti’s opposition represents only 8 percent of the population. The rebel gangs are linked to two groups financed by the Bush Administration: the right-wing Convergence for Democracy and the pro-business Group of 184. The Convergence is supported by the US Republican Party through the National Endowment for Democracy and the International Republican Institute. The Group of 184 is represented by Andy Apaid, a supporter of the former Duvalier dictatorship and a US citizen. The Council on Hemispheric Affairs reports that the opposition’s “only policy goal seems to be reconstituting the army and the implementation of rigorous Structural Adjustment Programs”. (*Quoted, Susskind, op.,cit*) Hence its lack of popularity.

In an article titled, ‘The little priest who became a bloody dictator like the one he once despised’, the Independent’s Andrew Gumbel writes of Aristide: “Then in 1994, undaunted, he returned, messianic again, backed by 20,000 US troops and disbanded the Haitian military. He had the goodwill of the world, the overwhelming support of his electorate and plentiful funds from international aid agencies to breathe life into Haiti’s moribund economy.” (*Gumbel, ‘The little priest who became a bloody dictator like the one he once despised’, The*

Independent, February 21, 2004)

As I described earlier, the “goodwill of the world” was expressed by supporting the massacre of the grassroots movement that had brought Aristide to power.

Aristide has presided over human rights abuses, including corruption and attempts to suppress dissent and intimidate opponents. However, journalist Tom Reeves puts the title of Gumbel’s article into perspective: “Whatever Aristide’s mistakes and weaknesses have been (and they are many), they pale when compared to the extreme brutality of those who are today implicated in the violence in Gonaives and elsewhere in Haiti.” (Tom Reeves, ‘The US double game in Haiti’, Znet, www.zmag.org, February 16, 2004) In 2003, Reeves asked a group of Haitians in Cap-Haïtien about Aristide’s performance. One responded: “We don’t think Aristide is doing a good job, but at least now we can talk, we are free to come and go. The Macoute must not come back... Yes, there is corruption and police brutality. But to compare our government with dictators is a hypocritical lie!” (Reeves, ‘Haiti and the US game’, Znet, March 27, 2003, http://www.zmag.org/content/print_article.cfm?itemID=3337§ionID=2)

The US lawyer representing the government of Haiti has accused the US government of direct involvement in the planned military coup against Aristide. Ira Kurzban, the Miami-based attorney who has served as General Counsel to the Haitian government since 1991, said that the paramilitaries who overthrew Aristide are backed by Washington: “I believe that this is a group that is armed by, trained by, and employed by the intelligence services of the United States. This is clearly a military operation, and it’s a military coup.” (‘Haiti’s Lawyer: US Is Arming Anti-Aristide Paramilitaries, Calls For UN Peacekeepers’, Amy Goodman and Jeremy Scahil, *Democracynow.org*, February 26, 2004)

Kurzban added: “There’s enough indications from our point of view, at least from my point of view, that the United States certainly knew what was com-

ing about two weeks before this military operation started. The United States made contingency plans for Guantanamo.”

Writing of the rebels in the Daily Mail, Ross Benson buries the known facts past and present: “One of their commanders is Louis Jodel Chamberlain, leader of the army death squads before and after the 1991 coup, who is held to be responsible for the death of 5,000 men, women and children. He is not, to put it mildly, the kind of man that any American administration would wish to deal with.” (Benson, ‘The land of voodoo, The Daily Mail, February 28, 2004)

For the Independent’s Adrian Hamilton, the US’s worst crime is inaction: “It is quite wrong to wash our hands of Haiti’s future as we are now doing. It doesn’t mean instant invasion, but it does mean making clear that we will not accept a military regime without democratic legitimacy.” (*‘Why it is wrong to wash our hands of Haiti’, Adrian Hamilton, The Independent, February 26, 2004*)

Once again we find ourselves asking the question posed by dissident playwright Harold Pinter: “When they said ‘We had to do something’, I said: ‘Who is this ‘we’ exactly that you’re talking about? First of all: Who is the ‘we’? Under what heading do ‘we’ act, under what law? And also, the notion that this ‘we’ has the right to act,’ I said, ‘presupposes a moral authority of which this ‘we’ possesses not a jot! It doesn’t exist!’” (*Interview with David Edwards, 1999. See Interviews: www.medialens.org*)

It is a standard response of the liberal press to concoct a false, lesser Western misdemeanour – here, ‘washing our hands of Haiti’ – and then to rage at that invention. This promotes the liberal media’s ‘dissident’ credentials, without harming, or calling down the wrath of, power.

The BBC writes: “Haiti’s political opposition has rejected a US-backed power-sharing plan aimed at ending the country’s crisis.” (*‘Haiti power-sharing plan rejected’, 25 February, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/3517837.stm>*)

Once again, the US is depicted as an ‘honest broker’, as though Haiti had no history. The BBC is happy to report without comment the proposal that a

democratically elected government might share power with a gang of killers with a history of gross human rights abuses.

In similar vein, prior to Aristide's departure, ITN's Bill Neely talked of George Bush "losing patience" with the Haitian president – Bush as the benevolent father-figure in the wings. (*ITN, 10:15 News, February 28, 2004*).

Reversing the truth on BBC1 News, Kathy Kay reports: "Long-term stability in Haiti isn't likely without a long-term American commitment." (*Kay, BBC 10:00 News, February 29, 2004*)

Krishnan Guru-Murthy of Channel 4 News writes: "The democratically elected leader finally gave in to the rebels saying he wanted to avoid bloodshed while the international community stood by and did nothing. Sometimes it seems, it isn't worth waiting for elections. The US had helped Aristide before, restoring him to power years ago, but they were not going to do it again and said his resignation was in the interests of the Haitian people." (*Snowmail bulletin, February 29, 2004*)

The level of analysis is hardly worthy of a high-school student, or comment. The Guardian writes: "Despite what Mr Aristide says, Haiti has no terrorists, no al-Qaida cells, as in Afghanistan." (*'Failure of will', Leader, The Guardian, February 28, 2004*)

This is technically correct – for the media, terrorists are by definition people who use terror and violence to threaten Western interests. People who use terror and violence to *promote* Western interests are therefore not terrorists. The Guardian continues: "Yet what, at this moment of dire need, have the powers done about it? Nothing much is the answer. For all their doctrines and declarations, they have dithered and debated, ducked and dodged, and danced that old, slow diplomatic shuffle." (*Ibid*)

No question, then, that "the powers" might have been doing something other than wringing their hands behind the scenes.

On February 11, US Congresswoman Maxine Waters issued a press release calling on the Bush administration to condemn the "so-called opposition"

that was “attempting to instigate a bloodbath in Haiti and then blame the government for the resulting disaster in the belief that the US will aid the so-called protestors against President Aristide.” (Quoted, Fenton, op., cit) Waters pointed out: “Under his leadership, the Haitian government has made major investments in agriculture, public transportation and infrastructure... The government [recently] doubled the minimum wage from 36 to 70 gourdes per day, despite strong opposition from the business community... President Aristide has also made health care and education national priorities. More schools were built in Haiti between 1994 and 2000 than between 1804 and 1994. The government expanded school lunch and school bus programs and provides a 70% subsidy for schoolbooks and uniforms.”

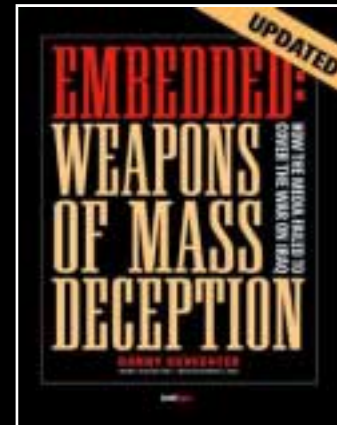
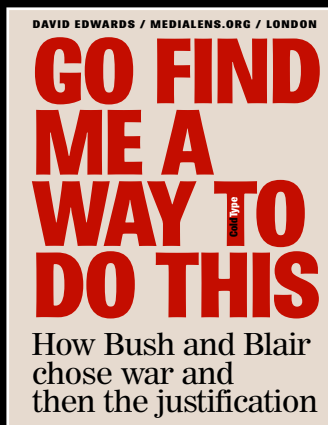
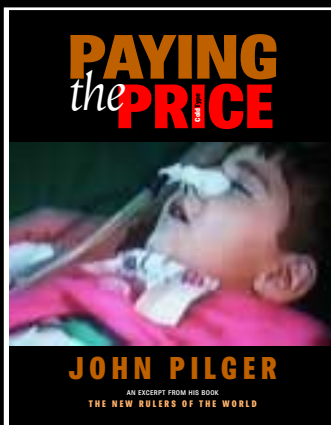
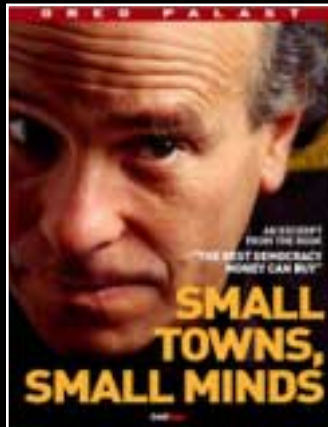
But for Ross Benson of the Daily Mail, Aristide is the problem with no redeeming achievements worth mentioning: “Instead of enacting a programme of social and economic reform ‘to give the people what is rightfully theirs’, Aristide allowed his cronies to plunder the national till, as so many have done before in this lush island paradise with its turbulent past of bloodshed, greed and endless tyrannies.” (*Benson, ‘The Land of voodoo’, The Daily Mail, February 28, 2004*)

Some time in the future when Western interests are under attack, the media will once again obediently rise up in outrage as the forces of violence and terror threaten some distant democracy (real or imagined). But, for now, our journalists and editors are happy to accept that Aristide “had to go”, that he had “lost the support of his people and of the international community”.

Forget the democratic process. Forget the landslide victories that make a mockery of the popularity of Bush and Blair. Forget the tidal waves of blood that preceded the first, imperfect sign that Haiti might at last be waking from the nightmare of history – of endless dictatorships, endless poverty, endless military coups bringing torture and death to the suffering people. None of that matters. What matters to the media is power. What power says goes.

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