



*Canada in Haiti:
Waging War on the
Poor Majority.* Yves
Engler and Anthony
Fenton.
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The story of Haiti is one of resistance, of a spirit that exists inside us all, to assert our essential humanity.

The Canadian government often portrays itself as something of a humanitarian agency, and the posting of five hundred Canadian soldiers in Haiti in 2004 has been depicted as such by the nation's mainstream media. Combining extensive historical research with an account of the causes of Haiti's most recent political and social unrest, *Canada in Haiti: Waging War on the Poor Majority* critiques Canada's role in quashing an act of democracy. The democratically elected government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, while the clear choice of the Haitian people, was unpopular amongst Haiti's moneyed minority and nations that supported Haiti financially, including Canada, France and the United States. As Engler and Fenton's central argument makes clear, those who opposed the Aristide government feared a shift in power from one of colonial domination to one which sought to represent the needs of the poor majority.

Engler and Fenton masterfully situate current investigative journalism within the context of Haitian history, swiftly exposing continuing attitudes of colonial hegemony on the part of Canada, the United States and France towards the Western hemisphere's poorest nation. The removal of democratically elected Jean-Bertrand Aristide from Haiti on February 29, 2004 by American forces while Canadian soldiers guarded the airport in Port-au-Prince calls into question Canada's role in the domestic politics of other nations. To the majority of Haitians, the overthrow of the Aristide government was not an act of benevolence, but was rather, the central act in a covert campaign of destabilization "waged by foreign powers" troubled by a government that sought a better life for the downtrodden (12).

The work raises the spectre of Neo-colonialist attitudes which seemingly continue from the early sixteenth century when the Spanish first captured Africans to work as slaves in the island's plantations. "We are angry," write Engler and

Fenton, "that our tax dollars have been spent to overthrow a fledgling democracy and to promote an illegal government that engages in massive human rights violations; We demand that the Canadian government be a force for good...by leaving Haitians to shape their own political, social, and economic realities" (10).

Although intent on drawing attention to the political upheaval encouraged by First World nations masquerading as peacekeepers, Engler and Fenton acknowledge that there were considerable problems in Haiti prior to the overthrow of the Aristide government. They then illustrate that Aristide's Lavalas party was in part responsible for these ills: "Haiti was neither without violence nor poverty prior to the coup...Most institutions that existed were fragile and prone to mismanagement...Haiti's justice system was weak, corrupt and repressive" (82). While these troubles were serious, Engler and Fenton make clear that Haitian peace activists regard Canada's role in reducing the unrest in their country to be nothing short of a fiasco, expressing "deep disappointment about Canadian involvement in the undermining of Haitian democracy"(86). Further, Engler and Fenton report that the deposing of the Lavalas government was followed in short succession by the violent destruction of the mass transportation system and other social programs which it had initiated.

Canada in Haiti is then, a work of interest to a wide audience, to anyone apprehensive of the failings of both the Canadian government and the national media in keeping the Canadian public apprised of the genuine progress of democracy in Haiti. As such, this book is a valuable addition to post-colonial discourse.