

HAITI - Sovereignty and Justice in Haiti, An Interview with Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine (Part 1/2)

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February 18, 2007 - [Haiti Information Project / HaitiAction](#) - Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine is the coordinator of the Fondasyon Trant Septanm (September 30th Foundation) that works with the victims of the coup d'états of 1991 and 2004. As a young man, Pierre-Antoine worked on literacy projects with street children in his hometown of Port de Paix. After moving to Port au Prince and completing his training as a psychologist, he began creating organizations such as: Fondasyon Kore Timoun Yo (Foundation for the Support of Children) for young street children in Port au Prince ; FAM (Foyer pour Adolescentes Mère), a centre for teenage mothers ; and Map Vivre ("I Live"), a program designed to give psychological and medical aid to the victims of the first coup against Aristide in 1991.

Pierre-Antoine came to realize that the suffering of the victims of the coup d'états needed to be dealt with in more than just a psycho-medical manner. As a result the September 30th Foundation was founded, which began healing the scars of victims by addressing the social, economic, political and legal roots of their suffering. To this end, he began working extensively with the [Bureau des Avocats Internationaux \(BAI\)](#), the leading legal organization addressing human rights issues in Haiti today.

Darren Ell (DE): Why did you choose the name September 30th Foundation"?

Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine (LPA): It's a matter of working with memory, of preserving in a very vivid way the memory of the horrifying things the population experienced during the first coup d'état. We felt obligated to preserve this aspect of our history in the memory of the population. We chose the name "30th of September" because the first coup d'état against President Aristide took place on September 30th 1991.

DE: You fled Haiti in 2004. Explain the reasons.

LPA: I left Haiti not only because my organization was very politically active, but also because I had led a relentless campaign against the return of the former Haitian army with an exhibition of 200 photographs, a traveling exhibition that I took around the country to remind people of the horrors committed by the former military, and to show that we were against the return of this military. Since the US government - via the CIA - used this same former army to carry out murderous actions against the Haitian population in 2003, followed by the coup of February 29th 2004, they were looking for me. I had to hide for several days.

DE: In Port au Prince?

LPA: Yes. I was eventually able to leave the country, ironically with the help of the American Embassy. I have a home in the US but I've never really lived there. I only go from time to time. When I was looking for a way out, I found out there was a plane that was leaving, a flight organized by the US. I had a connection with a sister-in-law who lives in the US and who works in a travel agency and I was told I could leave. But they arrested me. The US marines arrested me.

DE: In Haiti or in the US?

LPA: In Haiti.

DE: They were waiting for you at the airport?

LPA: No, they had told me to go to the Pétionville Club where all people leaving for the US were to meet. When they saw me, they had me arrested and led me to the American Embassy. They threatened me. It was a real psychological torture session led by Luis Moreno, the same man who went to the residence of President Aristide to threaten and kidnap him. When they finally let me leave the embassy, they told Radio Kiskeya who then broadcast that I was leaving and that the soldiers in the streets of Port-au-Prince should go to the airport to arrest me. Fortunately, there were Canadian soldiers guarding the airport and it was them who stopped the former Haitian soldiers from taking me. This was how I left the country.

DE: I'm Canadian and we often condemn the Canadian military presence in Haiti at the time of the coup because they helped facilitate the departure of Jean-Bertrand Aristide. But they helped you leave.

LPA: Exactly. I found out later that it was them that blocked Guy Philippe's people, who were there with Buteur Métayer and other armed civilians and former soldiers who arrived in cars at the airport to intercept me. And as I learned later, the Canadian soldiers said it was a neutral zone and that no one was allowed in with weapons.

DE: How do you see the presence of Canadian troops on the ground at this moment, not prior to but only at the time of the coup? They weren't there to stop the coup d'état or help the democratic government in a time of crisis, but they were there at the time of the coup and after. How do you see this military presence?

LPA: It is important to understand that the Canadian, American and French forces that arrived were there because Guy Philippe's men, who were paid to carry out the coup d'état, were unable to finish the job. The population was there to defend the democratic process in place, which had its problems, but which was nonetheless in place with President Aristide. This multinational force that arrived, comprised in part of Canadian troops, this was an occupation force. They came to carry out a coup that others were incapable of carrying out themselves. I am very critical of the US, Canadian and French military presence.

I am all the more critical because this intervention came at a time when we in Haiti were celebrating the 200th anniversary of our independence. It was literally a slap in the face to the people of Haiti. What's more, it was exactly the same situation when we celebrated the 100th anniversary of our independence under President Nord Alexis in 1904. The neocolonial powers had organized the same conspiracy to sabotage the first commemoration of the independence of Haiti. For the Bicentenary, it was the same conspiracy. It's as though they wanted to downplay the achievement of 1804, as though they wanted to say to the world that Haiti had attained independence too early, as though they wanted to display it as a failure, and they contributed all they could to this failure. This is why I am critical of the intervention of the Canadian military alongside the American and French troops.

DE: Talk to us about the notion of occupation. Your organization has made parallels between the repressive techniques of the regime of Gérard Latortue - the Prime Minister installed by foreign powers after the departure of Jean-Bertrand Aristide - and the brutality of the US occupation of 1915-1934. In particular, you have spoken of the fate of Charlemagne Peralte. Can you talk about Charlemagne Peralte and the parallels you make between the way he was treated and the way the Latortue Regime treated the population of Haiti between 2004 and 2006.

LPA: First of all, it's important to point out that Charlemagne Peralte is a national hero. He took up arms to defend the national territory, to defend the country against the US military occupation of 1915. He had his army, the Cacos. The Caco army was made up of poor people. At the same time part of the intellectual class had been co-opted by the occupiers and the bourgeois elite, the poor were fighting for national sovereignty with Charlemagne Peralte.

The parallel with 2004 is that after the coup d'état of 2004 and the occupation of our national territory by the multinational force, which was transformed later by the mandate of the UN Security Council - the creation of MINUSTAH - there was a group within the population, people from the poor neighborhoods,

that took up arms to defend our sovereignty. It was them who stopped Guy Philippe and Buteur Métayer's men [who were paid] by the CIA, it was them who stopped them from carrying out the coup d'état. After the US government, the American, Canadian and French governments intervened to consummate the coup, to kidnap President Aristide and take him into exile, the comrades in the poor neighborhoods of Cité Soleil, Bel Air and other areas continued to fight for national sovereignty and an end to the occupation. The regime of Gérard Latortue and the media, the coup media, the media that collaborated with the occupiers and that continue to collaborate with the occupiers, they called the inhabitants of the poor neighborhoods "Chimères," "bandits" and "criminals." They wanted to stain the reputation of Fanmi Lavalas because the people in Fanmi Lavalas struggle against the occupation. They were after all the victims of the coup d'état of February 29th 2004.

It's the same category of the population who were with Jean-Jacques Dessalines at the time of our independence. They were called the "va-nu-pieds" army (the barefoot army), an indigenous army. This indigenous army had no uniforms. They were slaves. In 1915, it was the same thing. It was the poor from the poor regions that followed Charlemagne Péralte. They were called the Cacos. During the two years of the de facto regime of Latortue, it was the same situation again. It's always the poor who rise up to defend national sovereignty.

That is why in the eyes of the Bourgeoisie, in the eyes of the intellectual elites, these people are no different than the "va-nou-pieds," nothing but criminals, whereas in my opinion these people are the protectors of our sovereignty. They are people engaged in a political struggle, a revolutionary struggle. They aren't criminals. They aren't killers. They aren't kidnapers. But they are given this image. This hat is placed on their head, but they are in fact combatants.

DE: And Charlemagne Péralte, what happened to him is in fact what happened to thousands of people in Haiti for two years, from 2004 to 2006.

LPA: Absolutely!

DE: It was a campaign of terror. Are there parallels between the way this man was treated and the way thousand of people were treated between 2004 and 2006? Is it the same strategy, drag bodies in front of everyone?

LPA: It's the same strategy. Don't forget that Charlemagne Péralte was betrayed just as today our Haitian intellectuals are betraying the people by collaborating with the occupiers. Charlemagne Péralte was betrayed. He was arrested by the US marines, killed and place on a door, his body exposed to the entire population.

In the poor neighborhoods of Port au Prince and in other regions of the country, it's the same thing. The current occupiers, the troops of MINUSTAH, are doing the same thing to the poor. We could take the example of Dred Wilme. We can take the example of Dred Mackenzie. These were community leaders in these neighborhoods. Today in the poor neighborhoods of Cité Soleil the occupation forces continue to massacre the poor. They dangle the specter of insecurity or kidnapping in order to conduct deadly aggressions in these neighborhoods. And the entire population is taken hostage and targeted. People are killed every day in Cite Soleil in the same way Charlemagne Péralte was killed.

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[Darren Ell](#) is an independent journalist and photographer currently in Haiti to explore the ongoing consequences of the Canada-backed coup d'état of 2004. He has collaborated in the past as a visiting

photojournalist with the Haiti Information Project and we are proud to present his current work.

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