



A man walks amid
the debris of the 2010
earthquake in Haiti.



On a Mission

Canada has a long history of extending aid to this troubled Caribbean country. *by Kate Jaimet*

At the Royal Hair Salon in Ottawa, Haitian expatriates gather to get a trim, wire money home, and talk about current events back in Haiti. Since the earthquake in January 2010, there's been a lot on their minds: friends and relatives left homeless, politicians fighting over power, and the rebuilding of their country, including the role of foreign aid. Yvon Villarceau, an artist who emigrated to Canada from Haiti in 1971, is one of the barbershop's more outspoken patrons. Villarceau spends a lot of time in Haiti, where he owns land, plants trees and medicinal herbs, and recently built a school for twenty young children.

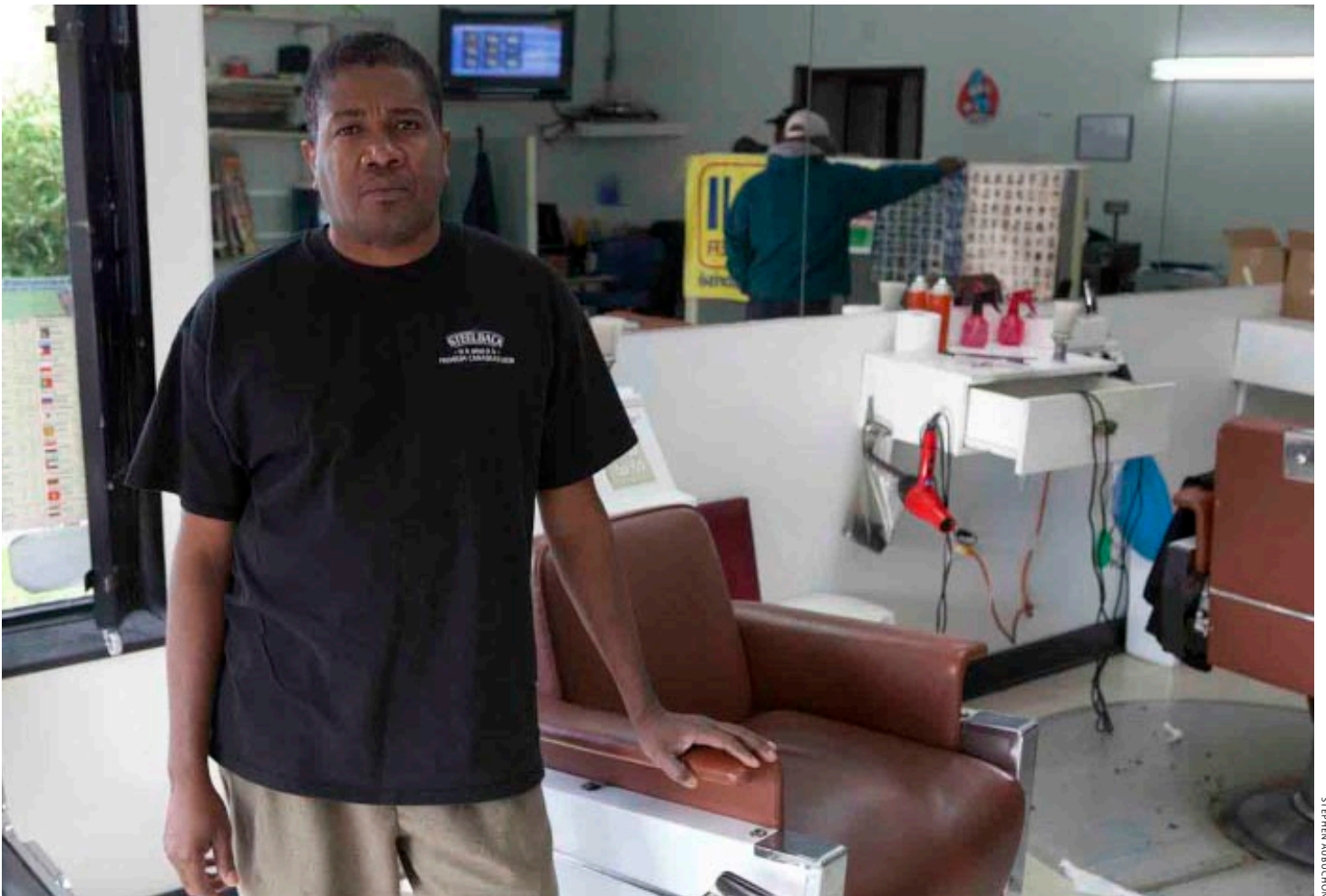
Deeply critical of the role that foreign states, including Canada, have played in his country, he dreams of a better future built by Haitians themselves.

"If all the individual efforts could be put together with a leader who has focus and direction, we could get there," he says. "But other countries have to stop intervening — all of the other countries should get out."

Others, like salon co-owner Irvelt Toussaint, are less extreme in their opinions.

"We need the international community, it's true. Their help is important," said Toussaint. "But everyone has to leave their self-interest behind, to bring about real change."

Even Haitians who welcome foreign aid have criticisms about the way aid has been delivered over the past half-century. Development assistance has often gone hand-in-



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Irvelt Toussaint at his hair salon in Montreal. Toussaint sends money to relatives and friends in Haiti.

hand with political, economic, and even military interference. Historically, the involvement in Haiti by Canada and other donor countries, although often helpful and well-meaning, has also been complicated.

Efforts by Canadians to help the Haitian people go back to at least the early 1940s, when Jean-Louis Collignon, bishop of the Haitian diocese of Les Cayes, travelled to Quebec to recruit missionaries. At the time, the Haitian state did little to educate the country's children. Church-run schools emerged to fill the gap.

Connected to Haiti by a common language and religion, nuns, monks and priests of several Catholic religious orders in Quebec answered the bishop's call.

"The Canadian brothers arrived in Haiti, they founded schools, they recruited people. There were young Haitians interested in this vocation, to teach, and the brothers also founded normal schools, to prepare these monks and others as well, other young laypeople, to become teachers," said Jean-Paul Labrecque, a member of the Order of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart, based in Victoriaville, Quebec.

Missionaries represented the beginning of development aid and the beginning of a personal link between Canada and Haiti — a link that would grow larger and stronger over the coming decades.

Tensions between church and state arose after François Duvalier came to power in 1957. With a rallying cry of black power, Duvalier tried to set the people of Haiti against the "foreign" Roman Catholic church. Because men of the church were held in high regard by the devout Haitian people, they usually escaped government persecution — as long as they kept their heads down, said Labrecque. But those who were

outspoken faced punishment. In 1964, Duvalier expelled the entire Jesuit order from the country.

Although Duvalier wasn't as hostile towards Protestant missionaries, they too faced difficulties as the regime became more oppressive.

"There was pressure to stay silent in the face of abuses, pressure not to criticize," said Jim Hodgson, program coordinator for South America and the Caribbean of the United Church of Canada, which has close ties to the Haitian Methodist Church. "They made choices about how to survive under a dictatorship."

In 1968, the Canadian government created the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Since Haiti was the poorest country in the western hemisphere, and the only other francophone country besides Canada, it naturally attracted the attention of the newly formed agency.

At first, CIDA directed its aid to existing Canadian religious missions in Haiti, helping to fund schools and medical clinics. Perhaps the most famous school is the Canado Technique (also known as the Centre de Formation Professionnelle d'Haiti) in Port au Prince, which was founded by the Brothers of the Sacred Heart with CIDA support in 1973. Today, 1,200 students attend the school annually, and it still relies on CIDA funding.

Roberto Carr-Ribeiro, a former manager with CIDA, worked in Haiti in the early years.

"I started working with Haiti in 1971, and that's at what they used to call in CIDA the NGO division, the non-governmental organization division, which was the only part of CIDA which provided aid to Haiti at that point," said Carr-Ribeiro. "There was no bilateral official aid from government to government."

In 1973, Canada signed an official cooperation agreement with Haiti, which was then ruled by Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier, who had succeeded “Papa Doc” as dictator in 1971. While many Canadian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) objected to Canada’s agreement with Haiti on ethical grounds, such agreements were not unusual at the time. During the Cold War, Western countries and the Soviet Union manoeuvred for global influence by giving development money to dictatorships. Also, the younger Duvalier seemed less brutal than his father and more interested in improving the country.

CIDA aid to Haiti in the 1970s and 1980s took two forms. First, CIDA continued to support NGOs and, to a lesser extent as time went on, missionary projects. Second, CIDA established lines of credit, which the Haitian government could use to purchase Canadian-made vehicles.

Canada and many other donor countries had extended this latter type of aid for decades, but the practice was open to criticism. Tying aid to the purchase of Canadian goods served the interests of Canadian manufacturers but did not help Haiti to create its own manufacturing sector.

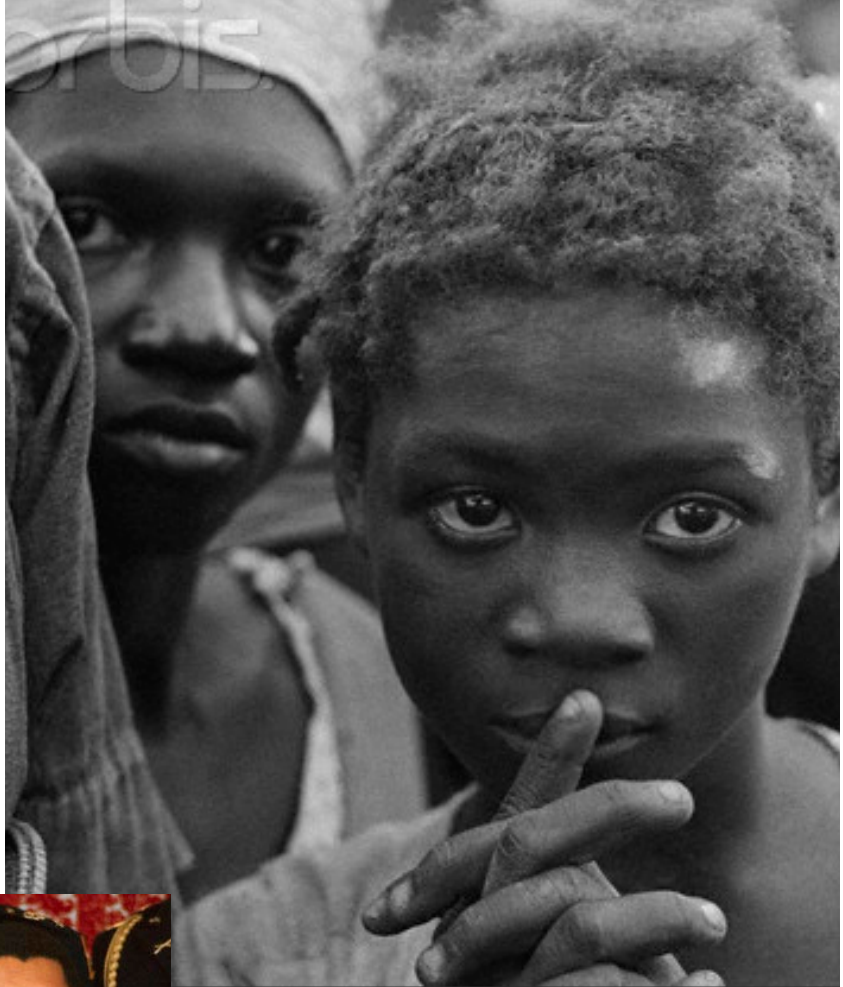
There was also the problem of government ministers sometimes appropriating goods for personal use, said Carr-Ribeiro.

“At one point there was a kind of jeep made in Canada called the Scout,” he said. “There were a hundred Scout jeeps (bought by the Haitian government); they were all the same brand and the same colour. It was easy to see the ones being used for public works, and the ones being used to go to the shopping mall.”

If Jean-Claude Duvalier’s reign began as relatively benign, it later deteriorated. “Baby Doc” and his entourage became more and more corrupt, incompetent, dishonest, and oppressive. The dictatorship was finally overthrown in 1986, ending nearly three decades of Duvalier rule.

Under the Duvalier dictatorship, thousands of educated Haitians had left the country, many of them settling in Canada.

“Some left because they were persecuted. Some left because they foresaw a society where you could not have a different idea or opinion than Duvalier. And they were right,” said Royal Salon co-owner Irvelt Toussaint.



More than 15,000 Haitians came to Canada in the 1970s, followed by another 14,000 in the 1980s. Another 15,000 came in the 1990s, mainly for economic reasons. As of the 2006 census, there were just over 100,000 people of Haitian origin living in Canada; nearly 86,000 of these resided in Montreal, forming a large, concentrated, and active expatriate community.

Above: People suffering the effects of the 1959 drought in Haiti. The country depended heavily on food aid from other countries, such as Canada.

Centre: Haiti President Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier in 1975.

From 1990 to 2000, Canada gave \$400 million in aid to Haiti, according to officials at CIDA. Some individual projects succeeded. For instance, in the late 1990s, residents of eleven Port-au-Prince neighbourhoods were shown how to grow vegetables on small plots. The project, supported by the International Development Research Centre and led by CARE Canada, resulted in improved diets and health and strengthened community bonds. Despite these small victories, other large and complex forces have prevented Haiti from rising out of poverty.

Below left: Baptist missionary Reverend Wallace Turnbull distributes emergency food aid in Haiti in March 1959.



KAREN THACKER/MAC

Aristide from power and forced him into exile in the United States. Three years of rule by a brutal military junta followed.

In an effort to pressure the junta, the Organization of American States slapped trade sanctions on Haiti — but the sanctions ended up hurting the poor the most. Despite the difficulties of sanctions and a repressive regime, aid organizations like the Montreal-based Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI) continued their work on the ground.

“Because we were already working with farmers, we did a lot of food aid based on local production,” said CECI’s executive director Mario Renaud. “We helped to stock and distribute milk and food (by local producers) through school canteens.”

But for every program that helped local farmers, it seems that larger forces came to crush them down.

In 1994, U.S. President Bill Clinton used the threat of military invasion to restore Aristide to the Haitian presidency. But the intervention came with strings attached: a demand that the Haitian government liberalize trade, including cutting the import tariff on rice to just three percent (it had been fifty percent under the Duvaliers).

The result was a disaster. Cheap American-grown rice poured into the country. Farmers, unable to compete, went broke. Many left their land and moved to the slums of Port-au-Prince. The country lost the ability to feed itself. Clinton, who later became the UN special envoy to Haiti, admitted in March 2010 that the policy was a “mistake.”

Although the rice-tariff policy was not a Canadian initiative, the example shows why Haitians are often skeptical of foreign aid by wealthy, capitalist countries — and of the conditions attached to it.

Political instability, natural disasters, ruinous trade liberalization policies, and an invasion of criminals and narcotic traffickers in the late 1990s and early 2000s, have all combined to plague Haiti over the past two decades.

Yet many experts also identify the weakness of the Haitian state as a reason that development has not occurred. Though the rulers of Haiti have often been successful at enriching themselves and shutting down their opponents, successive governments have proven inept at providing the most basic services for the public good.

Faced with this situation, Canada has historically channeled large portions of its aid budget through NGOs. This had the advantage of making sure that aid money didn’t simply end up in the pockets of corrupt officials. On the other hand, with so many foreign NGOs running basic services, Haiti did not develop a normal, functioning government.

In the 2004, the international community stepped in to provide police and other security through the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). Canada has provided police and soldiers to that mission, which as been useful in fighting gangs and in developing local police.

However, MINUSTAH’s mission has been tarnished by allegations of rape by Sri Lankan soldiers in 2007 and by a deadly cholera outbreak traced to a contingent of Nepalese soldiers in 2010.

“You may resent all the NGOs that come in, and they run your education system and they run your health system and they distribute your food. But without the ‘republic of NGOs,’ not much would happen,” says Jim Hodgson of the United Church.

“And that’s very unfortunate.”

In 2004, a rebellion within Haiti ousted Aristide and sent him into exile. A UN-backed, U.S.-led force that included Canada and France went to Haiti to restore order. But it was controversial — as any armed intervention by foreign powers is bound to be.

Since the 2004 coup, Canada has focused much of its aid on supporting national elections and strengthening the Haitian state. Alongside CIDA’s longstanding support for schools and medical clinics, Canada has invested millions of dollars in areas such as training the Haitian National Police force; building police and prison infrastructure; strengthening the Haitian border control agency; registering voters; and supporting the Haitian Ministry of Health in initiatives including vaccination programs.

CIDA’s figures show that from 2004 to 2009, Canada spent an average of about \$135 million a year in development assistance to Haiti.

Then, on January 12, 2010, the earthquake hit.

The devastation caused by the earthquake has been well-documented: Port-au-Prince was destroyed. An estimated 230,000 people died. Hundreds of thousands lost their homes. Humanitarian aid poured in: Canadian citizens donated \$220 million, and the government pledged another \$400 million over two years. The international community as a whole pledged \$1.7 billion. Haiti became the largest recipient of Canadian foreign aid, superceding even Afghanistan. Canadian emergency aid helped feed 4.3 million people and provide potable water for 1.3 million.

But beyond providing help in the crisis, lay the larger task of rebuilding Haiti — ideally, building it better.

For the rebuilding to have legitimacy, it had to be led by the Haitians themselves. But the Haitian government, already weak, had been dealt a further blow by the natural catastrophe. One out of every six civil servants died in the quake. Many government buildings were destroyed. Elections that were supposed to have been held February 28, 2010, were delayed. The situation made working with the Haitian government difficult.

Even the question of where to dump debris from the earthquake was complicated, largely because of the lack of a land registry in Haiti and the disputed ownership of potential dumping grounds. By October 2011, only half of the rubble had been removed.

While politicians deal with their problems, ordinary people are getting on with their lives. Development organizations with longstanding projects in Haiti are resuming their work, many funded by CIDA. Haitian-Canadians like Irvell Toussaint are sending money home to relatives and friends, to help them rebuild.

Toussaint’s family in Haiti has taken in two young cousins who were orphaned in the quake. The money he sends them from Canada helps them to survive.

“It’s not the best way, but there are people who are so destitute, so dependent, that you don’t have a choice but to help individually,” he says.

Toussaint said he is neither optimistic nor pessimistic about Haiti’s future, but instead is waiting and hoping.

“We need a leader,” he says. “Someone who takes the best interests of the country to heart. Someone who has a communal vision. And it has to start with the Haitians themselves.”

Kate Jaimet is an Ottawa-based journalist, novelist, and freelance writer.