

that makes sense is that this is a diversion to help the government and the paramilitaries get on with suppressing the supporters of democracy, who refuse to go away or be silent.

For the clearest reports from the attack on the prison are that Neptune and Privert did not leave voluntarily. Three men told police that gunmen escorting a man they recognized as Neptune had forced them to hand over their car and had driven him away in it, Reuters reported.

"I saw Neptune with my own eyes," said Ketel Jacob, who was in the car. "He seemed to be taken by force."

Haiti's Top Political Prisoners Forced From Prison in Daylight Attack, Returned Next Day | 2 comments (2 topical, 0 hidden)

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Who Was Behind the Prison Break in Haiti? (4.00 / 2) (#1)

by Benjamin Melançon on Mon Feb 21st, 2005 at 06:23:34 AM EST
(User Info) <http://www.melanconent.com/>

While it is always possible that pro-Aristide gangs attacked the Haitian National Penitentiary to free jailed members – presumably with the help of guards or even former military to pull it off – this remains an unlikely explanation given the facts known. Yet it is the most common explanation presented in media reports of the attack and jail break. Establishment press accounts that don't directly offer an explanation usually prominently mention the "re-capture" of Prime Minister Yvon Neptune and Interior Minister Jocelerme Privert – top officials of the overthrown elected government – and let the clear implication be that supporters of exiled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide undertook the attack to free these leaders.

Associated Press reporter Peter Prengaman, alone in the press, denies that any third party removed Neptune and Privert from the prison. Instead, he continues to report that guards secreted the two top political prisoners to a secure location during the attack. Prengaman cites unnamed authorities. In contemporaneous reports a government source even less credible than anonymous officials, police spokeswoman Gessy Coicou, repeats the escape-and-capture line. "Yvon Neptune and Jocelerme Privert have been apprehended," she told Agence France Press. In conflict with the escape claims, Reuters reporter Joseph Guyler Delva quoted eyewitnesses in front of the prison who reported seeing Prime Minister Neptune taken from the prison at gunpoint. The witnesses identified the kidnappers as the attackers, not guards, though Delva's Reuters version is at least conceivably reconcilable with Prengaman AP report.

Agence France Press has proved the worst of the wire services in covering this event. While none have provided coherent explanations, critical analysis, or key context, AFP has been malevolent in its misrepresentations. Each AFP article ends with a stock summary that lists year-old allegations against Aristide, including corruption and human rights violations, while mentioning none of the proven crimes of the pro-coup forces and presenting as mutual the constant, one-sided violence against people suspected of supporting the popular president. AFP repeats government allegations against Neptune and Privert without saying they have not been charged or faced with evidence despite being in jail since June and April, respectively.

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Sanchez

AFP consistently claims that the prison attack freed the two Lavalas leaders who were then re-captured. Details and explanations vary or are left out. A notable version was a Sunday article titled "Haiti drug gang causes mass prison break-out, former ministers recaptured." One of AFP's claims in this article, that Neptune and Privert were captured after calling embassies seeking asylum – and presumably failing to find it, the same libel made against Aristide when he was removed from the presidency at gunpoint one year ago – has already been refuted by Prengaman. Chilean ambassador to Haiti Marcel Young met with the two Saturday and said "they were only concerned about their security. Once that was arranged, they asked to go back to the prison." Prengaman, remember, reported that Neptune and Privert never left government custody. They certainly have not been able to communicate with supporters; Privert's wife Ginette has not seen nor heard from him. "I've been waiting three hours, and they still won't let me in," she told Prengaman outside the prison on Sunday.

Independent journalist Reed Lindsay, in an article published by the Washington Times, reported from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, details of the prison break not yet recorded by any of the wire services. The additional information casts further doubt on suggestions, tentatively made by UN and Haitian officials, that Aristide supporters launched the attack.

One senior police official said on the condition of anonymity that he suspected former soldiers were behind the prison break.

It is not clear how such a massive prison break could have taken place in broad daylight just three blocks from the national palace and police headquarters in downtown Port-au-Prince, where 125 U.N. riot police and dozens of Haitian police officers stand guard.

Nor is it clear how the handful of assailants – witnesses in front of the penitentiary said they saw only one vehicle and several gunmen – managed to get past about 40 prison guards and free nearly 500 of the more than 1,200 prisoners in the penitentiary – all before the police and U.N. troops arrived.

Marie-Yolene Gilles, an observer for the National Coalition for Haitian Rights, who had access to the penitentiary yesterday, said six hooded gunmen dressed in black entered the prison. One off-duty prison guard was shot and killed outside the penitentiary, but no guards inside were killed or injured by the assailants.

Prison authorities refused to allow a reporter to visit the penitentiary yesterday and Claude Theodat, the chief of Haiti's prison system, did not return phone calls.

In the strongly pro-Aristide neighborhood of Bel Air, one man who claimed to have escaped from the penitentiary said the prison guards opened the cells and told the prisoners to leave.

Marguerite Laurent, in a February 19 e-mail to the Haitian Lawyers Leadership Network information list in which she passed on the conflicting Reuters and AP reports of the attack on the prison, hinted her suspicions that the prison break serves the interests of U.S.-installed interim president Gerard Latortue and U.S. Ambassador James Foley.

Lately, it would seem whenever high ranking U.S. official visit Haiti – there are currently three former U.S. ambassadors who are in Haiti right now looking at feasibility of election and assessing "security concerns" for said U.S. elections in Haiti; or,

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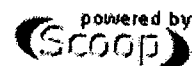
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as on Dec. 1, 2004 when Colin Powell was in Haiti - something horrible for the Haitian poor happens at the Latortue/Foley Haitian concentration camp, known as, the National Penitentiary.

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Let us never lose our focus. It is NOT Haitian infighting that has brought Haiti to this precipice, this death trap. But said same US high ranking officials and their policies to destroy democracy in Haiti at any cost, with any Haitian life, so that their corporatocracy may rule Haiti through Washington puppets like Latortue or Bazin, or Apaid, et al.

They will invent ANY storyline to keep us from focussing on that truth. But we shall not be distracted. The conflicts manufactured into Haiti has cost us way too much blood.

While the failure of law enforcement represented by an armed attack on the prison and the continued freedom of the perpetrators ought to increase scrutiny of the coup government and United Nations forces supporting it, successfully branding the political opposition with the crime could greatly benefit both paramilitaries and the illegitimate government. It all depends on how the media coverage comes down. Right now it is still up in the air.

At stake is the world continuing to look into, at long last, extreme and continuing human rights abuses inflicted on the Haitian people by the U.S., France, Canada, and UN-supported government and by the paramilitaries. A recent investigation by the Center for the Study of Human Rights at the University of Miami law school provides graphic and often horrifying proof of the state-sanctioned violence mostly against the poor majority in Haiti. More specifically at stake are UN investigations into the possible massacre at the same Haitian National Penitentiary on December 1 and a string of summary executions carried out by Haitian police.

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Haiti's real security problem isn't the prison (4.00 / 1) (#2)
by Benjamin Melançon on Tue Feb 22nd, 2005 at 06:45:05 PM EST
(User Info) <http://www.melanconent.com/>

"... investigators .. observed a boy lying on his back, naked and exposed on a cot in the middle of the emergency room," the report states. "He was shivering in a pool of his own blood, eyes closed. When he moved, blood splashed onto the floor."

The boy, Ginel Valbraun, 12, said he had been shot by police. The report includes pictures of a gaping wound on his right thigh.

"Doctors refused to treat him because he had no money," the report states, adding that investigators paid to get the child medical attention. "Investigators last saw him on Nov. 21, still alive, but still naked and in a

Some in the media are not letting the prison attack shake their focus. While the Miami *Herald* editorializes that the daylight attack shows the need for a "significant presence of U.S. Marines and soldiers," their own metro columnist detailed what the most recent significant U.S. military presence — to manage the coup against Aristide's elected government and install the present government — has wrought. (The *Herald* requires free registration to view articles, visit BugMeNot to borrow a registration.)

The *Herald* editorial, aside from ignoring the possibility that the "why worry?" attack was in part an inside job and the fact that few of the "vicious and lawless" prisoners have been convicted of anything, put the big lie in the form of a question: "So what will it take for the United States to step up to the plate? Another wave of boat people?"

If Haitians were able to seek refuge anywhere, thousands would be there now. The U.S. shut its borders, intercepting boats and sending the desperate refugees back to continued suffering and worse, even during the devastating floods of several months back: when Haitians deserved refugee status not just for economic plight and political persecution, but environmental disaster as well.

The excerpt that introduced this comment comes from today's opinion column by Jim DeFede in the Miami *Herald*. The atrocities he quotes come, in turn, from a 51-page report by attorney and human rights investigator Thomas Griffin and University of Miami Law School Center for the Study of Human Rights director Irwin Stotzky.

DeFede interviewed Griffin for his column, which I quote from again below. Griffin let DeFede know he was angry that the Miami Herald, one of the few media outlets that covered his report -- released a month ago -- used his political alignment to try to discredit it.

"What is happening in Haiti is wrong, no matter what anyone's politics is," Griffin said.

And he is right.

The pictures, the words, the statements by those who are both for and against the return of Aristide speak for themselves in this report, which can be found at www.law.miami.edu/news/368.html.

The United Nations, which has several thousand troops in Haiti, has done little to end the violence and may actually be exacerbating it.

While Lavalas supporters are not entirely innocent, this report suggests, rather convincingly, that there is an ongoing campaign to use the police, along with hired street gangs and former soldiers, to hunt down and kill members of Lavalas, particularly in the city's slums.

"There is a feeling of a truly repressive war against the

poor," Griffin said.

The most powerful sections of the report are those that tell individual stories. Griffin followed the police on a raid in the Bel Air neighborhood on Nov. 18. When the police pulled out, Griffin found bodies littering the street, including that of a middle-age woman the police left to die.

(Thanks to [Marguerite Laurent](#) of the Haitian Lawyers Leadership Network for passing on DeFede's article in real time-- she just caught Reed Lindsay's [article on the prison break](#) in *Newsday* now.)

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