

Dissecting CBC (As It Happens) report on “charter cities” in militarized HONDURAS

By Grahame Russell, September 11, 2012

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Dear friends,

Having listened to your report (September 6, 2012) on “charter cities” in Honduras, I urge you to take this reporting much further.

(To listen: <http://www.cbc.ca/asithappens/episode/2012/09/06/the-thursday-edition-44/>, part 3)

While the story about charter cities (also referred to as “privatized” or “model” cities) needs more attention, I was dismayed at the almost complete de-contextualization of the political situation in Honduras in which this global private sector economic experiment is taking place.

Since the June 28, 2009 military coup that ousted Honduras' last democratically elected government, Honduran society has been characterized by government repression, the highest levels of violence and murder in the world, and the impunity and corruption of the dominant political, economic and military/ police sectors. Here, a link to an article (“How Canada helped make Honduras the violence and impunity capital of the world”: <http://rabble.ca/news/2012/09/honduras-violence-and-impunity-capital-world>) that addresses this. (On request, I can send many more links.)

A DEPRESSING CHAPTER IN “THE SHOCK DOCTRINE”

As It Happens provided listeners with no understanding of the repressive, undemocratic context in which this very dubious economic experiment is able to take place. But for the 2009 military coup, and the ensuing repression, violence, impunity and corruption, the charter city experiment would not have been attempted in Honduras. This experiment would make for a perfectly depressing chapter in Naomi Klein's “The Shock Doctrine”.

LEGITIMIZING THE ILLEGITIMATE

A second point the CBC should have addressed (being an entity of the Canadian public and government) is the role of the Canadian

government. Since the 2009 coup, the Canadian government has denied and/or ignored the repression, violence and fundamental lack of democracy and rule of law, while maintaining strong political relations with the post-coup regime and aggressively promoting the expansion of Canadian mining, maquiladora (sweat shop textile factories) and tourism interests in Honduras.

In August 2011, Prime Minister Harper became the first foreign leader to visit Honduras since the coup. (Most Latin American governments still today do not have full political and economic relations with the military-backed regime). Leading a delegation of politicians and business executives, Harper signed a "free trade" agreement with the regime that aimed to legitimize the illegitimate regime and further entrench the rights of Canadian maquiladora, tourism and mining businesses and investors in Honduras.

The expansion of Canadian economic interests in Honduras is happening not despite, but rather because of the coup and the military-backed regime now in power.

"AVATAR"

A further point to understanding this "charter city" experiment and the incursion of global tourism businesses and investors (including those of Randy Jorgensen, the Canadian "porn king" that the Garifuna man interviewed did refer to) is that they are taking place along the northern shore of Honduras. This business venture is simply about owning and controlling Caribbean Sea beaches and waterfront, creating exclusive havens for global investors, businesses and tourists.

This is, in some ways, another "Avatar" story about the unjust global economic order works. In the Hollywood blockbuster film, mining investors and companies – supported by armies of men-with-guns – travel to a far off place to dig for a rare, valuable mineral ... and then 'have to deal with' the indigenous people already living there.

The African-descendant, indigenous Garifuna people have lived along the north Honduran shore (and south into Nicaragua and Costa Rica, north in Guatemala and Belize) since 1798, before Honduras was even a nation state. They are, for all intents and purposes, the first nations, the original peoples of this region, and they are being physically attacked now (including killings, repression, and whole-scale destruction of villages) because global investors in tourism, charter cities and African palm tree production – supported by men-with-guns (the Honduran military and police, as well as private paramilitary forces) - want their lands.

THE PURPOSE OF MILITARY COUPS

The “charter city” experiment aims to build an autonomous city state with its own laws, tax system, police forces and judiciary. One justification is that the laws, tax system, police forces and judiciary of Honduras don't work. While this is true in many ways, the reason Honduras today is characterized by corruption and impunity, repression and violence, is due to the military coup and the post-coup regime now in power.

Thus, global businesses and investors are partnering with the same sectors who planned, carried out and benefited from the coup. This is not coincidental.

MURDER CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

Honduras is now referred to as the murder capital of the world, as well as a lawyer, journalist, LGBT and prisoner killing capital of the world. The repression, violence, corruption and impunity could not be much worse. While the roots of these problems are historic and deep-seated, this situation has taken a drastic turn for the worse since the 2009 coup.

The media should focus on this harsh political context. From there, the media should look critically at the role the Canadian government has played in justifying the coup and legitimizing the post-coup regime, and the role and interests of global companies and investors – including the Canadian “porn king”, and others - who are doing business with the regime, benefiting from the repression, violence, corruption and impunity.

In Honduras, today, this is as it is happening.

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