

DRY ROT: The Far Right Targets the Left

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DRY ROT:

The Far Right Targets the Left



by Will Offley
illustration by Kevin Matthews

Like most huge events in history, the fall of the Berlin Wall shook our world. In doing so it also changed the ground rules of politics.

Whether you call it paradigm shift or merely the temporary triumph of neoliberalism, the dust from the Wall's collapse has clouded our vision for nearly a decade. Without exception, currents of the Left around the world have found themselves disoriented and scrambling to create a new vision and a new political framework within which to organize and to fight. This has not only been true for the traditional Communist parties, but for the non-Stalinist and anti-Stalinist Left as well.

The left has not yet been able to reconstitute a coherent vision of the new world we want to see issue from the ashes of the old, nor have we articulated the strategy or programme or organizations necessary to make that happen. As a result, radical left politics have remained largely confined to "anti" politics for a decade or more: anticorporate, anti-globalization, anticapitalist. We have remained locked down behind the relatively easy bulwark of what we're against, rather than venturing out into the exposed and more dangerous terrain of defining what we're for. In addition, in some sectors there have been marked tendencies to view the capitalist system through the lens of conspiracism and irrationality, where plots and conspiracies replace class interests and mass politics as the motor forces of human society.

This weakening of its culture, institutions and politics have rendered some sectors of the broad left vulnerable to the conscious and organized predation being carried out in Canada by a specific current of the far right. In the U.S. this dates back as far as the Gulf War, where neo-fascist currents like the Larouche organization and Spotlight sought to attach themselves to the movement against the war.

Is the Canadian left immune from this sort of targeting? No.

Is the situation any different now, a decade later? Yes and no.

Yes, because Seattle has led to Washington, and from there to Philadelphia and L.A. and Windsor and Prague. Quebec will be next, and it won't be the end. The rise of the struggle in the streets against globalization marks the end of ten years of demoralization and confusion.

There is a new dynamism and a new optimism, and if the path ahead is only partially visible, at least we're collectively underway again.

However, one has only to look at Seattle to see that the growth of far right currents within and alongside the left and progressive movements has increased visibly over the decade. There are also indicators that point to a change – during the Gulf War, the far right was active on the fringes, but by Seattle it seemed to be active at the very centre of things. While the young militants faced down the cops and the gas in downtown Seattle, on a leadership level elements of that movement were being increasingly compromised politically by a de facto convergence between Ralph Nader and the most important far-right leader in the United States, the semi-fascist Pat Buchanan. Five months later during the April 16th mobilizations in Washington, Buchanan shared a stage with Teamster leader Jimmy Hoffa Jr. as an invited guest of the AFL-CIO.

Antiglobalist politics are not the exclusive preserve of the left. Though it springs from different roots, Buchanan's opposition to globalization and free trade is as genuine as ours. He just takes it in a direction diametrically opposed to everything else we stand for – protectionism, racism, exclusion. Not only that, there have been plenty of examples this century to show the far right can be anti-corporate too.

Throughout the 1920's Hitler's Nazi Party contained a minority current led by Gregor and Otto Strasser that was inalterably opposed to the German trusts... as well as the Jews, the Communists, Social Democrats, gays and lesbians, unions, etc.

Nor is the far right confined solely to the hardcore neo-Nazism of the Heritage Front or the Northern Hammerskins. It's relatively easy to ward off the interventions of groups that put swastikas on their literature. It's considerably more difficult when the politics of the groups in question are cloaked in progressive rhetoric and hidden behind coded language. Between Wolfgang Droege and Stockwell Day there is a whole swamp of currents and organizations – conspiracist, anti-Semitic, some with hidden fascist agendas, some totalitarian, some merely far right.

Some of these are targeting the left. There is reason to be concerned.

Made for Each Other

Although they're based at different ends of the country, they seem to be made for each other.

The Radical is a monthly tabloid published in Quesnel, B.C. since June 1998 by Arthur Topham, a self-described anarchist who regards himself as “a natural, sovereign and unique critter who doesn't need any centralized forms of authority telling me how to run my life.”

Discourse and Disclosure is a more irregularly-published bimonthly, also a tabloid. It has been put out by editor Sue Potvin since May 1996. Potvin, formerly a resident of Ottawa, now resides in Greenwood, Nova Scotia. Potvin is considerably less forthcoming about herself than is Topham.

Both publications share common positions on many different issues. Both are opposed to globalization, the WTO, the MAI, NAFTA, the World Bank, the IMF, and now to the FTAA. Both are opposed to the increasing corporate domination of the economy and most other sectors of everyday life. Both have editorially supported the mobilizations against globalization, from Seattle to Prague. Both have condemned NATO, and the West's aggression against Yugoslavia. Both oppose clearcutting and support many environmental causes. Both are strongly supportive of Canadian nationalism. Both have even run articles endorsing gay and lesbian rights, and have been outspoken in support of native struggles from Ipperwash to Gustafsen Lake. When you realize that each has survived hand-to-mouth for years, with very shaky finances, the announcement in the November 2000 issues of each publication that they were moving towards appearing as a joint publication makes a whole lot of sense. *The Radical* is distributed widely throughout the hinterland of B.C.; *Discourse and Disclosure* appears to have a broader national distribution. Both share a number of regular contributors. To move toward joint publication is a completely logical step in extending the reach of two papers which have essentially identical editorial approaches.

In fact, the similarities go far deeper, but this requires you to get out a fine-tooth comb and start a much closer examination of both publications. Both papers are riddled with conspiracy theorists. Both have supported the politics of David Icke, the new age anti-Semite who argues the world is being run by a conspiracy of blood-drinking lizards. Both regularly feature and support the activities of the far-right Detax movement. Both exhibit numerous links to various prominent anti-Semites, militia supporters and white supremacists. And because of these similarities both have become important vehicles in English Canada for the politics of the third position current of Canada's far right, third position because this current of the right rejects capitalism AND Marxism.

The Third Position

Although a definite current of the far right, the third position current is distinct and apart from the mainstream of the neo-Nazi movement, which has attacked it in vitriolic terms. D&D's editor has herself been directly criticized by a fascist web site in the following terms: "Sue Potvin publishes a Canadian tabloid titled *Discourse and Disclosure* ... [which] believes aboriginals (Native North Americans) are the planet's chief (no pun intended) victims and contains an enormous amount of White guilt and rants about not only what Whites have "done" to these sacred aboriginals, but to the world in general. There is also so much ranting about corporations that it's hardly distinguishable from your local Marxist/communist publication." Clearly it would be a misrepresentation to equate Potvin's publication with mainstream neofascism, as this is simply not the case. However, it's also undeniable that the political content of both *The Radical* and *Discourse and Disclosure* extensively overlaps the politics of neonazism, anti-Semitism and some of the most crazed conspiracy theorists on the planet. Judge for yourself:

- On more than one occasion D&D and Potvin herself have quoted extensively from the U.S. newspaper, *The Spotlight*, which has been described as "the most significant voice of the far right". It is published by the Liberty Lobby, itself described as "the major source of anti-Semitic propaganda in the United States", and whose leader, Willis Carto, has been publicly quoted as stating that "only a few Americans are concerned with the inevitable niggerification of America" and "the Jews came first and remain Public Enemy Number One."

- The December 1999 issue of *Discourse and Disclosure* appeared with a guest editor, Jim McKee. McKee has contributed frequently to the paper on numerous topics. Three months earlier a letter from him appeared, condemning immigration and stating that "in recent years, we have been bringing most of our immigrants from countries where the predominant religions are non-Christian, and the cultures are quite different from ours. Integrating these people into Canadian society poses problems that didn't exist for the British and European immigrants...Our heritage of Christian standards is being swept aside." McKee's racism assumes even sharper definition when it's recalled that on May 13, 1997 he held a public meeting in his Glenora, Ontario home which was addressed by Paul Fromm. Fromm, the head of several racist organizations, gained notoriety ten years ago when the *Toronto Sun* obtained a video of his appearance on stage at a December 8, 1990 meeting of the Heritage Front, flanked by a huge Nazi flag and giving a Nazi salute.

- D&D features a regular column on the activities of the Canadian Action Party written by Carla Marie Dancey, CAP's representative to Elections Canada. In 1997, Dancey was the Reform Party candidate in Ottawa South, where she immortalized herself on the topic of "ethnic" immigration. An article in the May 18, 1997 *Edmonton Journal* reported that "Canada's immigration system is racially driven to ensure at least 85 percent of people who come into the country aren't white, a Reform candidate said May 17. "If you look at the immigration system right now... they've got it divided according to racial lines," said Carla Dancey.... Eighty-five percent of the people coming into the country have to be ethnic and 15 percent white, because before they had 85 percent white and 15 percent ethnic and they decided that was racist." Paul Fromm's thoroughly racist Canadian Immigration Hotline liked this quote so much it was promptly republished on its web site.

From Paul Fromm to David Icke to Wiebo Ludwig

- Almost every recent issue of *Discourse and Disclosure* features at least one article by Tom J. Kennedy, the Ottawa tour organizer for David Icke in 1999. Kennedy's main area of activity centres around the Detax movement. He has published material on the Internet that he has reprinted from neo-Nazi and Holocaust Denial websites, and he has also publicly admitted to a friendship with Ernst Zundel that goes back nearly twenty years. Currently, Kennedy has a brief tribute on the web naming his friends, mentors and leaders; this list includes not only Sue Potvin, but also Paul Fromm, Ernst Zundel, David Icke, David Irving, Glen Kealey and no less than ten leaders of the Detax movement.

- Potvin herself has editorially promoted the Detax movement, an ultra-right tax denial movement that is in many respects the Canadian equivalent of the *Posse Comitatus*, the U.S. current in the 1980's that was one of the key predecessors to today's militia movement. Writing in a front-page article in the May/June 1997 issue of her paper entitled "Canadian Challenges The Illegal Income Tax System", Potvin extensively profiled David Butterfield's B.C.-based "Shareholders of Canada" and echoed its claim that no one need pay income tax, since "it's illegal". However, Potvin's editorials have rarely been as overtly far right as those of her other regular contributors. On occasion she has even publicly distanced herself from some of her most extreme contributors.

- Other D&D articles continually harp on the same conspiracist themes, whether it's on the New World Order plot that murdered Princess Diana (Sydney White, September-October 1999), or the New World Order plot to take away our guns (John Welham, Sept/Oct. 1998), or the conspiracy of the Illuminati to control the world economy (Fred Kirkman, August 1998). And as for Canadian nationalism, contributor Ed Benson gave a flavor of D&D's politics in the August 1997 issue when he wrote that Canada has been "reduced to being the major financial and atomic benefactor of Red Communism; a country which condones the jailing of people for displaying a sign in English; a country that allows democratic vote fraud and military sedition; and a country that permits bare-breasted women on the streets."

Discourse and Disclosure functions as the public voice of a far right current that first came clearly into sight during the 1993 campaign of the National Party of Canada. Since the National Party's demise, many D&D supporters have remained active in its successor organization, the Canadian Action Party, particularly in CAP's leadership. Regular contributors to *Discourse and Disclosure* include party leader Paul Hellyer, CAP's national president Connie Fogal, at least three CAP regional directors, and more than 10% of CAP's candidates in both the 1997 and 2000 federal elections. D&D supporters have also been visibly active in and around numerous other organizations since then, including several PIRG organizations, Concerned Citizens Against Free Trade, David Orchard's campaign for the leadership of the Progressive Conservatives, the Council of Canadians, various anti-globalization groups and others.

The Radical appears to have taken a completely different trajectory, only to wind up at the same spot. Where the D&D current appears to have set out to penetrate various sectors of the left, *The Radical* appears to have engaged in a process of political evolution away from anarcho/green politics towards those of the far right. Both papers share both a common editorial approach and a common pool of writers. David Icke has appeared repeatedly in both papers, and has been listed on the masthead of both as a contributor. (The May/June 2000 issue of *Canadian Dimension* features an assessment of Icke and his backers in greater depth than is possible here). Numerous other writers besides Icke appear regularly in both *The Radical* and *Discourse and Disclosure*.

including Bev Collins, Joseph Duggan, Robert Rodvik, John Welham, Eva Lyman, Pat Bennett, Kevin Annett, and Connie Fogal, among others. Joseph Duggan is David Icke's main Vancouver organizer, whose speakers' bureau Strong Eagles Productions organizes tours in Vancouver and B.C. for much of the conspiracist right.

Bev Collins made the cryptic comment in the April 1999 issue of *The Radical*, "are you prepared for an American military officer under United Nations command to enter your home and remove you and your family because of Y2K?", and went on to hint darkly about a battalion of British troops on "training exercises" at the time outside Rossland, B.C. This has been one of her main preoccupations for a long time. In August 1996 she authored a long piece in D&D entitled "U.S. Militia Victim Of Negative Image Makers", which stated that "more than three million patriots in the U.S. today have joined with law enforcement and a cross-nation militia organization network". She went on to add that "the militia is not, as those in power would have you believe, some extremist band of thugs." On the contrary, she wrote, "militia members are said to be everyday, ordinary American citizens who care enough to take steps to protect their country against corrupt government." She pooh-poohed the armed Freeman standoff taking place in Montana by simply declaring the Freemen were not really militia, after all, which probably came as news to them.

Collins' links to militia activity do not seem to be confined to ideological support alone, either. According to David Lethbridge of the Salmon Arm Coalition Against Racism, "not long before the 1997 federal election, Collins attended and spoke at a secret meeting of the Texas Light Infantry, one of the earliest militias to be set up after the [1992] Estes Park gathering which founded the contemporary militia movement." Bob Holloway, one of the key organizers of the Texas Light Infantry, is an associate of Louis Beam, Grand Dragon of the Texas Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

John Welham has written for both papers as well. He authored a piece in the July 1998 issue of *The Radical* entitled "Why Federal Income Tax Is Illegal" which stated in part "Revenue Canada has done a fantastic job of brainwashing Canadians into believing that federal income tax is legal. Nothing could be further from the truth....No one has to pay income tax to the federal government. It's illegal..." The following month his article was picked up by *Discourse and Disclosure* and reprinted verbatim.

And not least, both papers have given extensive publicity to the various leaders of the Detax movement, including Eldon Warman, Tom J. Kennedy, Byron Fox, Hans Krampe, David Butterfield and others. On more than one occasion *Discourse and Disclosure* has published four-page supplements on Butterfield's group, and *The Radical* has also repeatedly run ads for various Detax seminars and public events.

The Radical: You Can't Judge This Book by its Cover

If you judge a book by its cover, you'd have to conclude that *The Radical* is radical – after all, every issue is festooned with peace symbols, anarchist A's, hemp plants and (cruellest joke of all) little pictures of Che. It would be much more accurate to say that while the layout may be radical, the editorial content's been taken so far to the right that it's off the page. And it's not like Arthur Topham is the first, either. Throughout the last century, every single current in the broad left has seen defectors from its ranks crossing over to the far right. Benito Mussolini left the Socialist Party to lead the Italian fascist movement. Many sections of the Comintern experienced

losses to fascism during the 1930's, like the split of the Jacques Doriot wing from the French Communist Party. Lyndon Larouche came out of the Trotskyist SWP. Why should we expect hippie anarchism to be any different?

The problem is, *The Radical*, like D&D, has connections and it has influence. The current November issue demonstrates this clearly. It contains articles by militia supporter Bev Collins, Detax activist Tom Kennedy and Wiebo Ludwig supporter Allan Johnston. It has a column by Hans Krampe stating that this federal election "may very well be our last chance to deal with despotic and treasonous systems in a democratic and relatively peaceful manner. After that, who knows what will happen.", accompanied by an editorial calling on readers to refuse to register their guns. But others are present as well. There is an article by the Prince George Green Party. There is an article by Vancouver Parks Board commissioner Roz Cassels, elected on the Green Party slate. There is a letter from 72-year-old Betty Krawczyk, currently serving a one-year prison sentence for her participation in the logging blockades in the Elaho Valley.

This is where we find the danger from this current. They have a hearing within our ranks, and it looks like a pretty big one. Both papers have systematically courted sectors of the left, the greens and anarchist currents, most spectacularly in the case of *The Radical*. Over the last year Topham's paper has featured front-page articles on the Elaho blockades, Toronto Green mayoralty candidate Tooker Gomberg, the Vancouver Mayworks Festival and the David Suzuki Foundation. The March issue featured a full-page ad on the back cover placed by the World March of Women for International Women's Day. Articles and letters have been printed from and about the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, Friends of the Earth, the Cariboo Green Party, Vicki Husband of the Sierra Club of B.C., Veterans Against Nuclear Arms, the Valhalla Wilderness Society, the Council of Canadians, Amnesty International, SPEC, Check Your Head, the *New Internationalist*, Greenpeace, Leonard Peltier, the Sierra Legal Defence Fund and others. Articles by Noam Chomsky appear regularly. And the paper continues to be distributed not only by the progressive Magpie Magazines, but by the leftie Peoples' Coop and Spartacus bookstores.

What is at Stake?

Third-position politics are a threat to the left, the green movement and progressive organizations in general. To counter them, first and above all we need to expose them to the light of day. Many of the cases above have a very simple explanation, that Potvin's and Topham's politics are largely concealed from public view, and therefore neither known or understood by many who associate with these papers. This is pretty common with crypto-right currents.. But there will undoubtedly be those who defend *The Radical* and *Discourse and Disclosure*, just as there are at least some who appear prepared to accept Wiebo Ludwig as an ally, and David Icke as a guru. This will require not only exposure, but political struggle as well.

In the final analysis, the rejection and marginalization of third position politics require many of the same political discussions that will be integral to any process of rebuilding the left. What is at stake? A rejection of irrationalism, of conspiracy theories, of scapegoating. Repudiating Canadian nationalism. Moving beyond a reflexive anti-capitalist politics to begin to develop a broad vision of the world we want to be able to leave to our children. Articulating what we're for, and how we intend to get there. Redefining socialism. And reconstructing the left.

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