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rebirth of powerful right-wing antialienism in contemporary America. They appeared in a nation still recovering from the setbacks of the 1970s, a country in which memories of Vietnam endure and fears of nuclear war are rife, in which survivalist magazines proliferate and a few lonely figures stockpile food and weapons and prepare for the collapse of civilization. They emerged in an age of conservative dominance, with its patriotic celebrations, military “rearmament,” and militant rhetoric about “standing tall” in a world of communist enemies. Although the Identity sects reviled the hated government, their brand of right-wing extremism appeared in the Reagan years even as left-wing extremists [the Weatherman underground and its “days of rage” and bomb factories, the Black Panthers and their verbal pyrotechnics] appeared as a minor feature in an era of liberal dominance—with its emphasis on social justice and racial equality—in the late 1960s.

But no real movement arose on the neo-Nazi Right, merely the fantasies and frustrations of a poorly educated group of outsiders, some with criminal records. They lived in areas far removed from the urban centers of power, angry loners from the mountainous Northwest, the Ozarks, and the upper Midwest. These racist sects provided a way of dealing with their anger and their fears. It is an old tradition in America, if now a stunted one.

But are there leaders and organizations that do not appeal only to such isolated outsiders which have made a significant mark? Here, too, the answer seems to be no. Neither Willis Carto’s Liberty Lobby nor Lyndon LaRouche’s multifaceted organization represented an emerging mass movement.

Carto created his Liberty Lobby, based in Washington, in the 1950s. In the 1970s, this right-wing assemblage turned to overt anti-Semitism, mixing it with traditionally hyperbolic anticommunism. It began supporting Nordic-racist books and newsletters. It lobbied against the appointment of Henry Kissinger as secretary of state: “As a Jew, Kissinger cannot help but feel a personal stake in the fortunes of Israel.” It referred to Israel as a “bastard state.” Through the Institute of Historical Review, the lobby supported “revisionist” writers who argued that the Holocaust was a myth. [In the early 1980s, the institute announced a $50,000 prize to the person who could prove the existence of gas chambers and death camps. It withdrew the offer after an Auschwitz survivor moved to collect the “reward” and brought suit against the institute.] The Liberty Lobby claimed a membership of 25,000 and a mailing list of 200,000 in the mid-1970s, its publication Spotlight claimed a readership of 145,000 in 1985. It raised millions of dollars after 1970 but still has received virtually no national visibility. Trying to appeal to a far more educated and sophisticated audience than those small violence-prone groups of racists in the West and South, it made almost no impact in America.

Unlike Carto, Lyndon LaRouche was not ignored by the press. Particularly after two La Rouchefollowers stunned Democrats in Illinois in April 1986 by winning primary contests to gain party nomination for lieutenant governor and secretary of state, the “La Rouchians” became the focus of widespread media attention. Now many Americans for the first time began to learn something about a man who had been trying to influence public policy for a generation.

La Rouchebad been on national television several times as an independent candidate for president in 1984. There were relatively few viewers, but those watching heard him accuse Walter Mondale, Gary Hart, and other Democrats of being “agents of Soviet influence.” He named many other “houseservants of the wealthy, liberal families” who decided to “turn over large areas of the world to Moscow for a few decades.” The Harrimans, the Rockefellers, and others “employ stooges like Kissinger,” who act under orders while Izvestia supports them from the sidelines. A key issue is the nuclear freeze effort in which Democrats, said La Rouché, “serve as the catspaw of the KGB.” In this characterization of the un-American activities of WASP elites and conservative as well as liberal political leaders, antialienism returned in yet another form.

The man who made this argument announced in 1986 that “I’m the best economist in the world today”; by a “large margin of advantage I am the leading economist of the twentieth century.” But this world’s best economist was also a man at risk. He told interviewers that a variety of forces were plotting to kill him. His enemies included the KGB, Colombian drug dealers, the British Secret Service, and Henry Kissinger, who had “run operations against me and these have ... involved assassination potentialities.” Other foes, named on other occasions, included the FBI, the CIA, the Anti-Defamation League, Israeli intelligence, and Murder, Inc.

Lyndon La Rouché’s extraordinary view of his own intellectual eminence and political importance makes him a figure not easily
categorized in the chronicles of political extremism in American history. Indeed, this balding, graying, bespectacled man, born in Rochester, New Hampshire, of “evangelical Quaker” parents in 1922, had a unique journey to the leadership of a right-wing organization in the United States.

La Rouche first made a reputation as a left-wing political activist. Known then as Lyn Marcus or L. Marcus, he was a Marxist theoretician active in the Socialist Workers party, a Trotskyist organization, from 1948 to 1963. Building a reputation as a formidable debater in leftist circles, a Greenwich Village lecturer who could integrate the works of political philosophers, economists, poets, classical composers, and physicists into his discourse, he attracted a following. In the late 1960s he organized the National Caucus of Labor Committee (NCLC), and some of his young followers were briefly, if marginally, involved in the clashes at Columbia University. Investigative reporters, interviewing defectors from the La Rouche camp, painted a picture of a small number of “upper middle class” colleagues who were the core of his following of perhaps a thousand by 1972. Then a striking change took place in what had been a leftist sect. Some writers have suggested that it was after he was left by one of his disciples (a woman with whom he had been living), who went to England with another young defector, that he suddenly became more remote, autocratic, abusive, and insulting, intolerant of any dissent within his circle and persuaded that he needed armed bodyguards because he was being stalked by assassins.

It was at this time that La Roucheans moved dramatically to the Right. The leader ordered “Operation Mop Up,” an attack on Communist party and other left-wing groups, in 1973. Bands of his followers brandishing clubs and wearing motorcycle helmets assailed these new enemies. “Brainwashing sessions” were held, according to some defectors; members who had resisted militant activity were accused of being infantile, impotent, and sexually deviant.

La Rouche now appeared to be creating a new political cult. One defector called it “the great freak-out of ’74,” with the leader “de-programming” recalcitrant followers. A former member, in the group for a decade, described the result: “If you don’t apply the word cult to La Rouche, it has no meaning. The people in it are totally dominated by the whims of one man. They break up their marriages at his suggestion or they come back together.” Another dropout characterized it as “total immersion... he demands sycophantic obedience... he repeatedly tells [us] he is in total control... it is pure psychological terror.” Why do many stay? It is suggested that for some members who have abandoned friends and family, who have dropped out of school or have no other careers, leaving La Rouche would be leaving the only community they have known. The movement gives meaning to their lives. Lyndon La Rouche’s response to this view is that it is all “garbage... I don’t have any control.” There is “no such thing as a La Rouche organization.” Members of his group also deny the very concept of a La Rouche cult.25

In any event, the movement did not decline after its turn to the Right. In 1976, La Rouche made his first race for president. By 1979, he retained some one thousand members with thirty-seven offices in North America and in 1980, he raised over $2 million for his campaign. In 1984 he raised $6.1 million, received almost $500,000 in matching federal funds, and attracted seventy-eight thousand votes on election day. During these years, the La Rouche establishment was reshaped and new elements added to it. Under the umbrella of the NCLC, the National Democratic Policy Committee (NDPC) was created to contest primary elections within the Democratic party. The Fusion Energy Foundation was organized to promote La Rouche’s growing interest in nuclear power and his endorsement of President Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), which he claimed partial credit for conceiving. Newspapers, magazines, and the Executive Intelligence Review were established. Through the Review and the New Solidarity International Press Service, La Rouche supplied “intelligence” reports on political, economic, and military matters to subscribers and clients, apparently including a few foreign governments.

Clearly, La Rouche had attracted at least a small number of disciplined and well-educated followers. Unlike the neo-Nazi cults of the West, this right-wing movement appeals to people with a taste for high culture. Lyndon La Rouche sponsors poetry readings and classical concerts at his Schiller Institute. He describes his philosophy as “neo-Platonic Humanism” and continues to impress followers with his ability to manipulate concepts from disparate disciplines. A few leading aides even won access to members of the National Security Council and to certain key players in cabinet
departments early in the Reagan years, some of these presidential appointees praised the La Roucheans for their mastery of the details of military and political questions.

Although there had been complaints about allegedly unethical fund-raising practices (including the illegal use of credit cards), the La Rouche groups were able to raise over $30 million yearly by the mid-1980s. As the leader embraced various mainstream conservative causes including SDI, the anticommunist effort in Central America, and a “war on drug pushers,” some critics feared that he was achieving a limited measure of influence in policy-making circles. But the aura of hostility, the rhetoric of violence, and the armed guards that are all part of the La Rouchian style have linked his movement to an uglier brand of right-wing militancy, making it impossible for his organization to gain real respectability.

In the late 1970s, his followers received paramilitary guerrilla training under the guidance of Mitchell Wer Bell III, formerly of the OSS. After he moved his headquarters to an elaborate $2.3 million estate near Leesburg, Virginia, in 1983, neighbors complained about excessive security arrangements, and one who had criticized La Rouche told reporters that she had been subsequently harassed and threatened. La Rouchian defectors and investigative writers also have had problems. Dropouts said they were called thieves, liars, psychotics, and KGB pawns. Reporters, columnists, and television producers who had written critical accounts about La Rouche told tales of late-night threatening phone calls, dead cats on porches, and leaflets inviting neighbors to their “gay coming out party.” La Rouche denied such charges, but his newspaper called one critical journalist a “noted drug lobbyist” and said that the “Wall Street Journal joins drug lobby attack on La Rouche.” He sued many detractors, including NBC. His $150 million suit was dismissed and his organization was fined $200,000 in a countersuit brought by the network. He explained that the verdict was “rigged,” that “they somehow got to the judge.” When he refused to pay NBC in September 1986, claiming that he had no money or income, federal magistrates further fined him $200 a day until he told the court who paid for his estate and other heavy personal expenses. La Rouche’s followers, on station at major airports where much of his printed material is sold, have been involved in violent confrontations with celebrities, including television star Phil Donahue and former Secretary of State Kissinger. Other La Rouchians have disrupted news conferences and speeches of those officials Lyndon La Rouche dislikes. Richard Burt, then an assistant secretary of state, was interrupted with shouts that “you’re a Soviet agent... an enemy agent... a traitor to the United States.”

These activities and La Rouche’s left-wing history made him anathema in conservative circles. He was characterized by the Heritage Foundation as a possible “asset... for the KGB disinformation effort.” He was dismissed by Richard A. Viguerie as “no conservative,” indeed as an enemy of the New Right. Viguerie quoted him as attacking evangelist Marion G. “Pat” Robertson as “a peddler of snake oil for the KGB.” Of course, he was much harder on liberals: headlines in New Solidarity announced, “Liberals Plot Crises to Hand Russia World Power,” “Gary Hart’s New Yalta Policy Selling Out to Soviets.”

La Rouche, assailed by liberals and conservatives when they took him seriously enough to comment, also was accused of anti-Semitism. Critics quoted him as having once referred to Judaism as a “cult founded by Babylonians,” of implying that the Holocaust was largely a myth. In response, he pointed to several of his Jewish aides and insisted he was “anti-Zionist” not anti-Semitic. But there is no question that he sees conspirators almost everywhere. He called the queen of England the figure at the “head of the world drug lobby.” He characterized the International Monetary Fund as “engaged in mass murder on a larger scale than the Nazis” and as having created the AIDS epidemic. For years, back to his leftist era, he railed against the Trilateral Commission as a Rockefeller-led cabal out to deindustrialize the West: “The Trilateral Commission functions as part of the Trust,’ the East-West joint stock company that put the Bolsheviks and Nazis into power earlier in this century, and which now seeks to co-manage a new fascistic world order with Soviet Russia.” His aides called the State Department a “hot bed of treason,” and he “jokingly” suggested a “necktie party” for Secretary of State George Schultz. Views such as these led many analysts to conclude that the publicity following La Rouchean victories in the Illinois primary in 1986 would hurt not help his cause, as more people became aware of the world according to La Rouche, there would be virtually no support left.

Students of Illinois politics attributed La Rouche’s success not to his program but to Democratic organizational overconfidence, mischievous Republican crossover voting, and the ignorance of many
voters who may have pulled levers for the anglicized names of the unknown La Roucheians because they rejected the ethnic names of the regular candidates. But in addition to this mildly nativist reaction, it was clear that La Roucheians shrewdly exploited some of the themes being used by the Posse Comitatus: in agricultural downstate areas they pointed to the villainy of bankers, the need to protect family farms, the dangers of drug traffic in big cities. The results would not be easily replicated. In primaries later that spring and in the general election in November, La Roucheians were swamped by alert party machines; their legislative initiative in California calling for the quarantining of AIDS patients was overwhelmingly rejected. Lyndon La Rouche had enjoyed his moment in the spotlight, insisting after Illinois that he represented the “forgotten majority,” and that like “the Wallace phenomenon some years ago,” voters “want me to stick it to Washington,” to confront “the sneering face of the eastern liberal establishment.” But his political organization, despite recruiting many candidates (some of whom were unaware of his history or program), did not represent the cutting edge of a mass movement. Although he claimed almost thirty thousand members of his NDPC in more than forty states, observers argued that his hard-core following in the mid-1980s remained very small, numbering at most a few thousand. By October 1986, his movement was under growing pressure, the subject of a sweeping federal fraud investigation. A 117-count indictment named ten La Rouche subordinates and five of his affiliated campaign committees and corporations with unauthorized use of credit cards, a plot to defraud a thousand people out of $1 million during his 1984 presidential campaign. La Rouche was not indicted (in April 1987, assets of his organization would be seized by federal marshals), but he warned that “any attempt to arrest me would be an attempt to kill me,” and he did not “preclude” use of violence against law enforcement officials.  

Lyndon La Rouche was a charismatic leader for a coterie of the devoted. He built a small political cult of personality, attracting and retaining a following that apparently included sad and dependent people who could respond to his peculiar vision of his own historic importance and accept his self-inflating tales of murderous enemies. It is a different form of antialienism, as befits a man who made the long leap from the radical Left. But like Robert Welch in the days of his assault on Dwight Eisenhower, La Rouche’s right-wing vision of an America led by traitors, of famous Democrats and Republicans who are “agents of Soviet influence,” has no chance of finding a real following.

The activities of La Rouche and Carto, of Rivera and the neo-Nazi sects, of the Klans and their front groups, remind us only that the far reaches of the antialien tradition will endure, no matter how small the movements, how counterproductive their attempts to publicize their views or to impose their will on others.

But what of more substantial efforts to organize against religious, ethnic, or ideological enemies within?

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Immigration Reform and the Fear of a Neo-Nativist Revival

In August 1984, a riot exploded through a ten-square-block area of Lawrence, Massachusetts. The community was torn by racial strife in a blue-collar neighborhood housing Hispanics and whites. Reminiscent of intergroup violence in other Massachusetts towns 150 years before, when Catholics were met by convent raiders and fire companies representing “natives” and Irish fought pitched battles in the streets, did the Lawrence strife suggest a neonativist upheaval in process? With the Simpson-Mazzoli bill before Congress, some Americans saw the emergence of a new assault on ethnic outsiders, this time an effort to restrict access by Hispanics—particularly Mexicans—who had come north to America to build a better life. Henry B. Gonzalez [D.-Texas], a leading member of the Hispanic caucus in the House of Representatives, reached back to the past to condemn the proposed legislation: “Simpson-Mazzoli is, sadly, the latest in a long history of immigration laws that springs from the heart of the Know Nothings, those who feared and loathed all foreigners.”

But was it? Did the emerging concern with a new alien influx represent a return to the un-American crusades of yesterday?

Immigration had been rising since major changes in the laws from 1965 to 1980. In 1965, the national origins quota system finally was abolished. It could not survive in a new age of egalitarianism, the years of the Great Society and the passage of the great Civil Rights Acts. There would be no more overt discrimination