
Political Paranoia

The Psychopolitics of Hatred

Robert S. Robins
Jerrold M. Post, M.D.

Yale University Press New Haven and London

Published with assistance from the foundation established in memory of Philip Hamilton McMillan of the Class of 1894, Yale College.

Copyright © 1997 by Yale University.

All rights reserved.

This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, including illustrations, in any form (beyond that copying permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law and except by reviewers for the public press), without written permission from the publishers.

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Robins, Robert S.

Political paranoia : the psychopolitics of hatred /
Robert S. Robins, Jerrold M. Post.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-300-07027-6 (alk. paper)

1. Right and left (Political science)—Psychological aspects.

2. Paranoia. I. Post, Jerrold M. II. Title.

JA74.5.R55 1997

302'.17—dc21 96-40336

CIP

ISBN 0-300-07027-6

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To our grandchildren

Katherine Simone Robins

Emily Post Keller

Rachel Post Gramlich

May you grow up in a world
that knows less of hatred and more of
understanding and tolerance

The difference in potential political attractiveness between the paranoid recognized as mentally ill and the unrecognized paranoid was dramatically illustrated by two men encountered by one of the authors (JMP) on opposite corners of a Washington, D.C., intersection. Their messages were similar, but they elicited quite different responses.

On one corner was a bearded man in his mid-forties, wearing a sandwich board warning against governmental mind control. He was handing out fliers expanding on this warning:

Are you being mind controlled by the subliminal radio? The government has developed a vast secret department involved in the study and advancement of mind control of individuals and groups by the silent radio.

Tyranny always rules first. The radio is often being used to trick persons into every crime, sin, and stupid decision possible. The mind controllers are government, medical, lawyers, businessmen, psychiatrists, religious and educational. . . . All nations are using this subliminal radio in experiments of mind control on their citizens. . . .

All are taught that a person who hears voices is automatically insane. As the advancement of the silent radio increases, more and more persons are hearing silent radio voices. It is common to place silent radio receivers in dental fillings, eye glass frames and earrings to insure communication. For group experiments, rooms and buildings are entirely wired. It is terrible that media covers this up as a national security issue.

Pedestrians studiously avoided this manifestly disturbed man. His delusional political tract contained two themes of paranoia: persecution and control, two ways of dealing with feelings of insignificance and helplessness. This man provides an example of a frequently encountered delusion, the "influencing machine" first described by Victor Tausk, a member of Freud's circle, in 1919.²⁷ Tausk observed that feelings of persecution begin with a sense of estrangement or alienation. The cause of this internal feeling is then projected externally upon a malevolent persecutory conspiracy that exercises control through the influencing

machine. (The nature of the machine has evolved in parallel with technological developments. Thus in the age of Freud, the machine sent electrical waves, later it sent radio waves and video signals, and now, in the age of Star Wars, space-based laser rays are often invoked as the source of control.) The man with the sandwich board, then, was denying his responsibility for his inner feeling of helplessness and projecting it upon a persecutory system.

On the opposite corner was an earnest young man handing out political tracts. The tracts described a widespread international conspiracy that already had powerful influence over the unwitting citizens and threatened increasing control over all our destinies. The nature of this evil conspiracy had been deciphered by Lyndon LaRouche, who, through his newspaper, books, and political pamphlets, was attempting to warn the world of the danger. He was also spreading the word through a legion of followers, of which this earnest young man was one.

The danger from the conspiracy LaRouche warned of was extreme. The language of his tract had striking resemblances to the pamphlets of the man with the sandwich board on the opposite corner:

Stamp Out the Aquarian Conspiracy Lyndon LaRouche

The population of the United States of America is being brainwashed. This brainwashing is being done methodically, patiently by a large group of experts, the swarm of social psychologists deployed by their research institutes, employed in government, business, labor and the media, and controlled by a powerful combination of business and financial leaders who run the high-technology areas of our economy, especially communications, electronics and cybernetics . . . The social-psychiatrists and social-engineers . . . decided [in 1963-1965] to launch a massive, long-term brainwashing campaign in order to shift the underlying values and moral outlook of Americans away from rationalism, science and technology.

The traditional values of this nation . . . are to be replaced by another set of values. This other set of values ranging from homosexuality and oriental mysticism to "cosmic consciousness"

and "religious fundamentalism" has been given the collective codename . . . "New Age" or "The Aquarian Conspiracy."

Every aspect of the mental and psychological life of the American people was profiled, recorded, and stored into computer memories. The institutions, personnel, and networks grew and penetrated deeply into every nook and cranny of federal, state, and local governments. . . .

Above this closely cooperating grouping of social psychologists, pollsters, and media manipulators, presides an elite of powerful patrons . . . Veteran intelligence officers refer to this awesome group . . . as the "Committee of Three Hundred." They prefer to be called "The Olympians." These are the real power in the land.²⁸

The conspiratorial notions portrayed in LaRouche's material were no less bizarre than those of the influencing machine conveyed by the man with the sandwich board. Yet the warnings of the man with the sandwich board were discounted (he was dismissed as mentally disturbed), while Lyndon LaRouche was able to gain and sustain a substantial following. What was the difference between the two?

LaRouche, rhetorically persuasive and not obviously mentally ill, has the interpersonal and political skills to build an organization and appeal to a particular constituency (see Chapter 7). The key point is that he does not display a florid mental disturbance and accordingly is not recognized as psychiatrically disturbed by his potential followers. Indeed, LaRouche may be quite sane and only opportunistically exploiting a paranoid message. It is not possible to say whether LaRouche is a seriously disturbed paranoid or simply an exploiter of the theme. What does matter is that he has attracted a considerable following who see him not as an emotionally disturbed paranoid but as a visionary. Through his mastery of detail and ability to marshal selected "facts," LaRouche provides the evidence, the "proof," of the existence of the international elitist conspiracy whose goal is to control the destiny of the masses.

Often the political paranoid's beliefs in conspiracy and hostility originate in reality. Being a leader in any organization is always somewhat paranoiagenic. Subordinates and rivals may praise the leader to his

face but plot against him behind his back. Leaders are rightly apt to be suspicious. As pressure mounts, the prudently alert leader may marginally overreact, going over the line into paranoia. Because his exaggerated fears have some basis, he may pull others along with him. As with hostility, there is a dynamic interaction between delusional suspicious thinking and the behavior of those surrounding the paranoid leader. The paranoid's behavior may in fact promote disaffection and conspiracies where there had been none. Fear of enemies can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

By the same token, the grandiose self-concept and associated behavior can produce grandeur. Dreams of glory can be fulfilled. All the major political paranoids had grandiose self-images—Hitler, the admirer of Nietzsche, envisioned himself as superman; Stalin, as the leader of the greatest force in history; Ruholla Khomeini, as the savior of Islam.

There is accordingly a problem in determining whether leaders with grandiose self-concepts are out of touch with reality. Some indeed became significant historical figures. They did have major effects on the lives of their peoples. They were met with cheering throngs. People were willing to die for them. Scholars and journalists, presidents and generals, waited upon their words. For them, fantasy was actualized, dreams of glory fulfilled. Just as the paranoid discovers genuine plots, so too the grandiose paranoid will, if successful, find genuine admirers and genuine power.

Belief in an adversary, a rival, or an opponent is central to political life. But where rivals become enemies, we are entering the territory of paranoia. In the United States, Democrats and Republicans are (for the most part) not enemies. They are rivals, adversaries, or opponents. But Hitler and Stalin's rivals and opponents were their enemies.

This distinction between enemies and adversaries is critical in understanding the paranoid. The person or group who is the center of the paranoid fantasy is not a fully psychopathological object. Rivals for power are a necessary and inevitable feature of political life, but to the psychologically healthy political actor, their role is that of competitors. To the paranoid, they are pitiless foes who must be destroyed lest they destroy.

Welch's belief system. It was not an evident military threat, however, that inspired our next example. It was an obsession with a fantasy built of distorted reason.

Lyndon LaRouche: The Extremity of Reason

LaRouche was a man with a coherent program, subtle tactics, and . . . a long range plan of how to get from here to there. He was a serious ideologue.

—Dennis King, *Lyndon LaRouche and the New American Facism*

Recall that the image of the enemy that the paranoid creates is often a projection of his own feelings.²⁹ The paranoid sees his own actions as reactions required by the enemy. If the enemy is seen as deceiving through writings, the paranoid will make use of the most detailed and elaborate pseudoscholarship. Conspiracy must be fought with conspiracy, organization with organization. The paranoid's motivations, fears, anxieties, and desires are ascribed to his opponents, some real, some phantom. The relationship with the enemy is thus one beginning in fantasy and externalization, but then, if the adversary is drawn into responding, what began as fantasy can be transformed into reality.

We have found no person who has developed a more complex, or more ingenious, paranoid theory than Lyndon Hermyle LaRouche, Jr. LaRouche was born in 1922 in Rochester, New Hampshire, to Quaker parents. His parents were truly "fighting Quakers," although the object of their battles was not a bellicose or oppressive government but other Quakers. They were constantly accusing their co-religionists of leftist sympathies and misappropriation of funds.

The young Lyndon was forced to swear never to fight, in school or out, and he suffered greatly at the hands of bullies. Though not a studious child, he had a strong desire to read and was called Big Head by his classmates. At the outbreak of World War II, LaRouche, aged nineteen, volunteered as a noncombatant and served in the China-Burma-India theater. Somewhere along the way, perhaps during a brief period at North-eastern University, LaRouche acquired an allegiance to Marxism. On leave in Calcutta, he offered the Indian Communist leader P. C. Joshi his

services to organize GIs. Rebuffed by this mainstream Communist, LaRouche decided to become a Trotskyite.

After the war, LaRouche returned to Boston and soon became an organizer at the General Electric plant in Lynn, Massachusetts. By 1954 he had abandoned organizing activity and was hiring himself out as a management consultant on labor problems. He did well, earning as much as a thousand dollars a week. One of his management principles, which foreshadowed his later paranoid politics, was, "If management tells you to stay out of any area, that is where you should go." Another foreshadowing of his later political ideology was an interest in the new field of computer technology.

By 1963, LaRouche had become a successful businessman but had maintained his association with the Trotskyist movement. As political radicalism and disorder grew in the 1960s, LaRouche, now in his early forties, became increasingly involved. His efforts on behalf of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party were unsuccessful, however. By 1974 LaRouche had abandoned Marxism and developed his own view of history, on which he built his political empire. His movement prospered into the 1980s, but in 1988 he was sentenced to fifteen years in a federal penitentiary for fraud and tax evasion. He was released on parole on January 26, 1994.

LaRouche proposed a view of history and society built on the belief in an ancient conspiracy, which purportedly grew out of a philosophical disagreement about the nature of truth. According to LaRouche, all history can be understood as a conflict between Platonists and Aristotelians. The Platonists believe in pure truth and hence, in worldly terms, in standards. The Aristotelians, in contrast, believe that truth is uncertain and relative and thus are opponents of standards. To LaRouche, if people do not believe in at least the possibility of certainty, there can be no progress, and humanity will slip into self-destructive hedonism. LaRouche argues that Aristotelians, aiming to distract people from the truth and to retain their own power and wealth, have entered into a conspiracy to fool the public with spurious doctrines (such as moral relativism), pseudomedicine (such as psychotherapy), drugs (heroin, marijuana, and so on), and degraded entertainment (pornography, acid rock).

The Platonists, according to LaRouche, are creators and builders, in favor of truth, standards, technology, and man's conquest of nature. Their members purportedly include Jesus, Johann Sebastian Bach, William Shakespeare, Gottfried Leibniz, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Aristotelians attempt to frustrate this desire for human control over the environment. Among this group, LaRouche lists Adam Smith (who described capitalism in order to encourage hedonism), Jeremy Bentham (who developed the hedonistic doctrine of utilitarianism), and the entire English empirical tradition associated with Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume.

This novel way of classifying all the political leaders, scientists, and artists who have ever lived creates strange alliances. Those believed by others to be adversaries (indeed, those who believe themselves to be adversaries) are seen as allies. And those generally believed to be allies are considered adversaries. The American Civil Liberties Union is part of the malign Aristotelian conspiracy, for example, but so are the FBI, the CIA, and their masters, the British Intelligence Services, MI5 and MI6. The Socialist International and the free-market-advocating Heritage Society are both Aristotelians under the skin; the Anti-Defamation League is part of the conspiracy, but so too is the John Birch Society. In fact, according to LaRouche, all these organizations are controlled by the same dark Aristotelian forces. Their apparent differences are just a smoke screen.

The conspiracy goes well beyond politics. Werner Heisenberg's development of the uncertainty principle, for example, which states that in the realm of very small units of matter movement cannot be predicted, was an effort to undermine belief in standards, virtue, and truth. Heisenberg and his followers, then, are part of the Aristotelian conspiracy. Jazz, rock and roll, and dissonance as an integral part of much twentieth-century music can be traced to the unsuccessful battle of the (Platonist) sixteenth-century musician Gioseffo Zarlino to maintain the tempered order of the keyboard in face of the disruptive efforts of (the Aristotelian) Claudio Monteverdi.

LaRouche or his followers offer an explanation for each of these examples. Some of the explanations are rather complex:

Because LaRouche includes Zionists and Jewish bankers such as the Rothschilds and Warburgs as agents of the British plot, the Anti-Defamation League has accused him of being an anti-Semite—even though a number of his closest followers are Jewish. An article LaRouche wrote in 1978 mentions the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, but he gives the legend one of his typically bizarre twists. "The fallacy of the *Protocols of Zion* is that it misattributes the alleged conspiracy to Jews generally," LaRouche wrote, rather than to a few select Jewish conspirators. Actually, he explained, Oxford University invented Zionism and "Israel is ruled from London as a zombie-nation."

LaRouche's position on the Holocaust is even more confusing. As an agent of Britain, Hitler killed 1.5 million—but not 6 million—Jews, LaRouche wrote. But now the British supposedly exaggerate the Holocaust, using it as a psywar technique to brainwash Jews into becoming Zionists. Zionism is part of the Dark Ages plot, LaRouche wrote, because the British, by signing the Balfour Declaration, helped establish Israel. LaRouche claims that neo-Nazis working with networks of Freemasons are responsible for Palestinian terrorism and that both Nazis and Zionists are British controlled. To him, the Middle East crisis is a British operation to destabilize the region, furthering the oligarchs' attempts to take over the world.³⁰

What these Aristotelian forces are attempting to disrupt is progress, which, LaRouche argues, occurs as new technologies create new social relations. He draws an explicit correspondence between modern technology and the doctrine of neo-Platonism, which greatly influenced Christian thought in the Middle Ages and also influenced such early modern scientists and mathematicians as Johannes Kepler and Gottfried Leibniz. The neo-Platonic ascending spheres, leading to God in the early versions, are given an economic and social character by LaRouche. These spheres are technological or economic stages through which mankind rises toward perfection.

What is the nature of this perfection according to LaRouche? In accordance with his Platonism, it is elitist and authoritarian. But LaRouche

adds a major non-Platonist twist. Human life, he says, is the greatest good. Therefore, the world must be made as efficient as possible to accommodate the largest number of people. Nuclear energy is necessary for this end. (Of course, the Aristotelian environmentalists, who are spiritual and intellectual descendants of the sun-worshipping devotees of Isis, oppose it.) The gradual elimination of Aristotelian influences combined with technology will eventually bring about the millennium. Millions of human beings, uncorrupted by Aristotelian influences, will then be able to enjoy Shakespeare undistracted by Ken Kesey, to relish Beethoven undisturbed by the Grateful Dead.

LaRouche has been called "a kind of Allan Bloom gone mad," supported by followers who, "like crazed graduate students, . . . crank out dissertations on who is in and who is out of the conspiracy."³¹ LaRouche's argument certainly shows no lack of "theory" or "facts." His organization has had vigorous leadership and, at least at times, has been well funded. To those who are not attracted to his theory, it appears to be simply screwy. To the susceptible, however, its novelty is seductive. Yet despite the theory's conceptual inventiveness, its elaborate system of supporting "evidence," and its organization's strong funding and consistent leadership, it has had little success.

The reason is that the doctrine does not ally itself with the great engines of human conflict: race, economic exploitation, and religion. LaRouchism's followers must abandon at least most of their previous racial, economic, and religious commitments and even prejudices. Anti-Semites and racists of all hues would have to renounce Hitler; anti-leftists would have to give up their faith in capitalism and even turn against bankers; those who hate religion would have to accept *both* Muhammad and Jesus as great leaders; and those of a literal bent in religion would have to forsake sympathy for fundamentalism of any sort. Although LaRouche appears regularly on public access television channels and sought the Democratic nomination for the presidency in 1996, LaRouchism has declined greatly in influence and is now marginal to American politics—ironically, because of its being too paranoid.³² It is pure cultural paranoia. All it emphasizes is conspiracy. Not only does LaRouchism not associate itself with the great breeders of paranoid fears—race, religion, and ma-

terial desire—it denies them. Ideas alone are too thin a diet for a paranoid movement.

The paranoid theories we have looked at are based on racism, religion, and the distortion of logic. Each of them appeals both to emotion and to reason—that is, to base emotion and to deformed reason. The effectiveness of these doctrines, however, depends as much on their presentation in the marketplace of ideas as on their substance.

in "the outside world, he saw no friends, only potential adversaries who might oppose his ambitions or frustrate his will."⁵⁴

When McCarthy ultimately was confronted by the system that had acquiesced in his ride to glory, the rapidity of his fall was stunning. After he was censured by the Senate, the press did not report his speeches, and his colleagues in the Senate ignored him whenever possible, even drifting away from him at social occasions. Given his need for recognition and public acclaim, the silence and isolation must have been devastating. But McCarthy did not move in an increasingly paranoid direction; he did not begin to see himself as surrounded by enemies. Rather, he anesthetized himself with alcohol. According to an anecdote related by one of McCarthy's biographers, drinking was not simply a form of escape but a method of suicide: "Back in Washington, Joe ambled into the office of the Secretary of the Senate where two colleagues were having a drink. He filled a drinking glass to the brim with liquor and downed the contents in several uninterrupted gulps. He told his astonished observers that he had been to Bethesda Naval Hospital several times to 'dry out' and that on the last occasion his doctor had said he would die if he had one more drop. He then proceeded to refill the glass and drink it dry."⁵⁵

Joseph McCarthy's reckless political opportunism and manipulation of a paranoid style coincided with a transient receptivity in the American polity to a paranoid message. As the system and the public awakened to the dangerous nature of the messenger, the society rejected him, and McCarthy died largely alone and embittered.

The McCarthy affair demonstrates the crucial nature of the relations among the political context, the political actor, and the message. In this case, the paranoid nature of the message and the erratic nature of the messenger initially went unrecognized. The phenomenon of McCarthyism emphasizes that paranoids do not have exclusive rights to the espousal of paranoid ideas.

9

Paranoia's Organizers and Propagandists

It was a maxim with Foxy: . . . "Always suspect everybody."

—Charles Dickens, *Old Curiosity Shop*

Superabundance of suspicion is a kind of political madness.

—Francis Bacon, *De augmentis scientiarum*

All political theorists are suitors. Each must attract a consort who will create an organization around his worldview. Every Moses must have his Aaron, every Jesus his Peter, every Marx his Lenin. The failure of LaRouchism and the John Birch Society as mass movements can to a substantial extent be attributed to these movements' lack of a brilliant organizer. La-Rouche himself might have been such an organizer, but he lacked the resources to be both theorist and organizer. Welch was more a political hobbyist than a fire-in-the-belly organizer. To some extent, a skillful fomenter—agitator, organizer, promoter—is the most precious asset a movement can have. Many people have paranoid ideologies, but few have the organizational ability to bring that ideology into the mainstream political world.

50. Greenberg 1995, p. A3.
51. Schmemmann, November 11, 1995.
52. D. Williams 1995, p. A35.
53. Paris 1995, p. 127. Some of the conversos had genuinely become Christian, although many continued to practice Judaism in secret.
54. Lewis 1952, pp. 50–51.
55. Keppel 1994, pp. 117–118.
56. Among the best sources on the anti-abortion movement are the following works by Kaplan: 1993; "Right-Wing Violence," 1995; "Absolute Rescue," 1995; "Politics of Rage," 1996; *Religion in America*, 1996.
57. Melton 1989, p. 53. Also see Chu and Clary 1994, pp. A1, A19.
58. C. Allen 1994, p. 12.
59. Blanchard and Prewitt 1993, p. 51.
60. Blanchard and Prewitt 1993, pp. 39, 46, 60.
61. Hed, Bowermaster, and Headden 1994, p. 55.
62. C. Allen 1994, p. 14.
63. Niebuhr, "Church's Dismay," 1995, p. A12.
64. Niebuhr, "Church's Dismay," 1995, p. A12. Also see C. Allen 1994, pp. 16, 17, 76, for other examples.
65. Waelder 1960.
66. This section draws on Brass 1974; Daljeet Singh 1984; Fox 1985; McLeod 1989; and Tully and Jacob 1985.
67. Brass 1974, p. 286.
68. The Sikh radicals elevated a "temporal struggle to the level of the cosmic, [bypassing] the usual moral restrictions on killing . . . By clothing their actions in the moral garb of religion, they have given their actions legitimacy. Because their actions are morally sanctioned by religion, they are fundamentally political actions: they break the state's monopoly on morally sanctioned killing." Juergensmeyer 1988, pp. 182–183.
69. Excerpts from speeches of Bhindranwale, cited in Juergensmeyer 1988, pp. 175–176.
70. Juergensmeyer 1988, pp. 185–190.
71. Ostow 1994, pp. 228–229.
72. On the equilibrium of the group, see Lax 1994, p. 253.

7

Paranoia's Theorists

1. This section draws largely on Barkun 1994.
2. Cited in Barkun 1994, p. 131.
3. Barkun 1994, p. ix.
4. Barkun 1994, pp. 154–155.
5. Langer 1990. While many Anglo-Israelites embraced the pre-Adamite theory, most of the important pre-Adamite writers were not themselves Anglo-Israelites. Michael Barkun, personal communication, 1995.
6. Hiss 1978, cited in Barkun 1994.

7. Barkun 1994, p. 23.
8. Sawyer 1921, cited in Barkun 1994, p. 25.
9. Barkun 1994, pp. 150–151.
10. Barkun 1994, pp. 136–137.
11. This section draws heavily on Goldman 1974; Lincoln 1961; Malcolm X 1964; and Perry 1991. Perry's work is both valuable and problematic. His was the first biography to check facts in Malcolm X's autobiography. His psychological orientation is also helpful. We do not, however, accept the book uncritically. See Decaro (1996), who focuses on Malcolm X's religious life, for an invaluable perspective.
12. Perry 1991, p. 143.
13. Goldman 1974, p. 36.
14. Lincoln 1961, p. 73.
15. Lincoln 1961, p. 77.
16. Broyles 1964, p. 27.
17. Lyons 1937.
18. Welch 1952, p. 61.
19. Welch 1964, p. xxxv; Welch 1961, pp. 30–31.
20. Welch 1961.
21. Broyles 1964, p. 7.
22. R. Rose 1991.
23. Welch 1961, p. 181.
24. R. Rose 1991.
25. R. Rose 1991.
26. Grupp 1972.
27. Grupp 1972.
28. Baeyer-Kaette, Classens, Feiger, and Neihardt 1982.
29. This section owes a substantial debt to Johnson 1983 and King 1989.
30. Johnson 1983, p. 200.
31. Johnson 1989, p. 7.
32. Paranoid movements and paranoid ideologies do not disappear easily. We doubt but do not dismiss the possibility of a LaRouche revival. His organization continues to advertise on national television, carries on substantial direct mailing, publishes a newspaper, and has local meetings. Furthermore, LaRouche himself contested 1996 Democratic primaries.

8

Paranoia's Agitators and Activists

1. This chapter benefits from a number of excellent publications on right-wing extremism: Aho 1990, 1995; Barkun 1994; Lake 1985; Merkl and Weinberg 1993; Sargent 1995; Sederberg 1994; and Wood 1996. Also see the following works by Kaplan: 1993; "Right-Wing Violence," 1995; "Absolute Rescue," 1995; "Politics of Rage," 1996; *Religion in America*, 1996.
2. R. Wood, interview with JMP, Fargo, N.Dak., August 16, 1995; Wood 1996, p. 219.