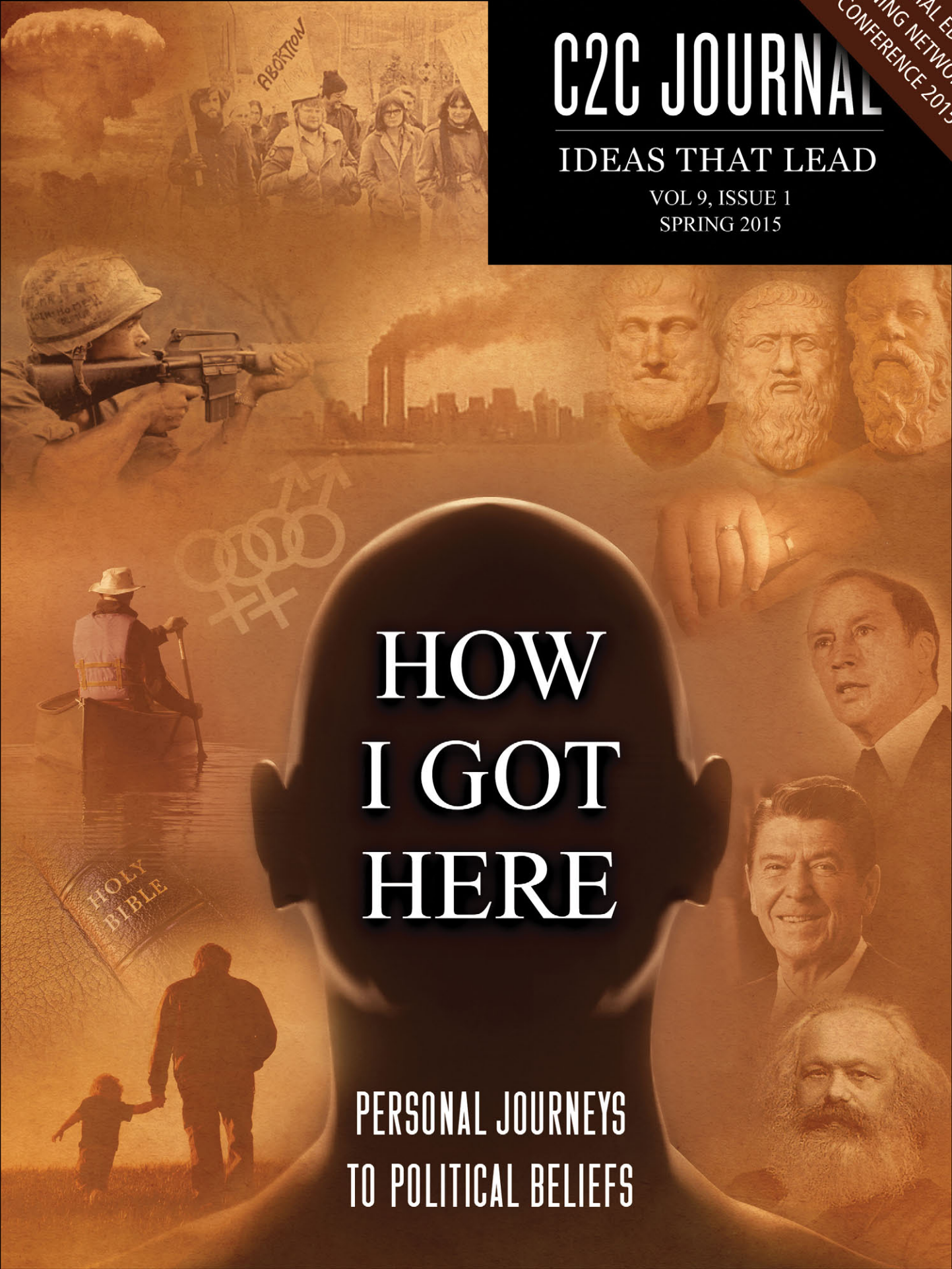


SPECIAL EDITION
MANNING NETWORKING
CONFERENCE 2015

C2C JOURNAL

IDEAS THAT LEAD

VOL 9, ISSUE 1
SPRING 2015



HOW I GOT HERE

PERSONAL JOURNEYS
TO POLITICAL BELIEFS

In praise of examined lives

"The unexamined life is not worth living." - Socrates



Whenever I meet a new or aspiring politician – and I meet a few of them as a journalist and speechwriter – one of the first questions I ask is, “Why are you running?” Many of them, I’m sorry to say, don’t appear to have given it much thought. Usually they get around to saying something about a “desire to serve,” and “to make our [city/province/country] a better place.” These are great – and hopefully sincere – motives, but they don’t really tell me enough to decide whether they’re worth voting or working for.

The ones who really stand out as having thought about their political convictions are the storytellers. They describe momentous events in their lives, books or people who influenced them, and other transformative experiences which shaped their beliefs and inspired them to set their careers and families aside and start knocking on strangers’ doors, begging for money, giving speeches euthanized by party hacks, taking cheap shots from Internet trolls, and suffering all the other indignities that politicians endure.

The elementary idea that democracy is best served by people who believe in something is the inspiration for this edition of *C2C Journal*. When we put out the call for submissions a couple months ago it prompted a huge response. That should be no surprise, someone sarcastically observed, when you ask writers to write about themselves. What we got, however, was not a riot of narcissism, but a collection of thoughtful, honest, humble and

interesting biographies that mirror the journeys we all take to political conviction and engagement.

As well as being posted online at C2CJournal.ca, this special, expanded edition of C2C will be distributed to each of the 1,000-odd delegates attending the annual Manning Networking conference in Ottawa March 5-7. Several of the writers will be joining me at a session where everyone will be encouraged to tell a story about “How I Got Here.” Since the conference is populated by political activists, journalists and academics from across Canada, it promises to be a lively, stimulating discussion. If you’re a delegate, we hope you’ll stop by our session on Saturday morning and join in.

Included among the contributors is Rainer Knopff, the political scientist and member of the “Calgary School” of conservative academics. His story is a delight to read, a tale of love and Plato, of philosophical evolution from left to right, and of providential happenstances that determined his destiny. Also at the Conference will be former federal Conservative cabinet minister Monte Solberg, whose essay in this edition evinces his gift for humour and reveals how his father, a can of Gold Water beer, and William F. Buckley, rescued him from Saskatchewan socialism at a very young age.

Ottawa journalist Brigitte Pellerin will share her story about her journey from political activism to political ennui, a sad tale of disenchantment with our contemporary democratic choices. More hopeful, at least for conservatives, will be lawyer Paul Baudry’s countercultural narrative about a lonely right-wing francophone flourishing in a sea of Quebec leftism.

Not on hand, regrettably (but perhaps understandably), will be

lawyer and former Prime Minister Jean Chretien advisor Warren Kinsella, whose provocative essay in this edition answers the vexing question about how someone from Calgary can become a Liberal.

Other contributors to this edition include Bernd Schmidt, whose political beliefs were forged in the ruins of post-war Germany and the revolutionary cauldron of the Sixties; Jeremy Cherlet, a Millennial whose political consciousness begins with 9-11 and lies entirely within the Internet age; Elizabeth Nickson, whose political biography is a breathtaking romp through New York, London, South Africa, and 400 years of North American colonial history; and Colby Cosh, the *Maclean’s* columnist whose story about getting bitten by the libertarian bug at a young age also illuminates why he has become such a uniquely interesting voice in Canadian journalism.

If there’s a constant running through these narratives it is the profound influence of literature on political evolution. With that in mind, as well as the Manning Foundation’s mandate to stimulate more a greater political engagement among Canadians, we invite readers to pass on this edition of C2C to others – especially young people – in hope that some of these stories will ignite their interest and involvement in the political process. With any luck, some of them will go on to become politicians who know why they’re running.

Paul Bunner is editor of C2C Journal. His political journey ranged from writing press releases for a peace group at 25 to writing speeches for a Conservative prime minister at 50.

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During a backpacking tour of Europe in 1971-72, Rainer Knopff very nearly missed the train carrying his personal and political destinies. Things might have turned out very differently for the future political scientist and member of the "Calgary School" of conservative academics if the train had not returned to the station, thereby reuniting him with the woman he would marry and his (then unread) copy of Plato's *Republic*.



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Former federal Conservative cabinet minister Monte Solberg understood from a young age that there was something different about his family. It was unusual enough to have a father who read widely, cared passionately and participated actively in politics. But this was Rosetown, Saskatchewan, in the 1960s, where socialists had ruled for decades, and his father's politics were conservative. Like father, like son: when the Reform Party was born 20 years later, Solberg caught the wave that carried it to Ottawa.



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Elizabeth Nickson's story reads like a Hollywood bio pic: a Westmount exile, who rebels against power and privilege, becomes a globe-trotting leftist journalist chronicling the great revolutionary narratives of her time. Then she sets out to discover the awful truth about her patriarchal 400-year-old colonist clan and everything changes. But Hollywood won't touch her script because what she finds are eternal truths, about love, charity, sacrifice, Christianity and genuine freedom.



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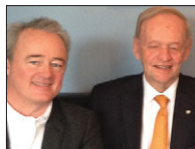
As a young man Fred Litwin was as progressive as they come, a passionate advocate for gay rights, justice for Palestinians, and the peace movement, among others. At the turn of the millennium, he started to have doubts, particularly after reading David Horowitz's book about his communist-to-conservative conversion. Then came 9-11, and the chorus of America-bashing by the Left in its wake. It was the last straw, and Litwin decided to come out as a gay conservative.



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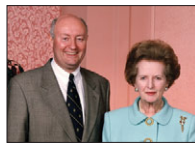
Philip Cross was a third-generation civil servant who became renowned for his brilliant data analysis and scrupulous objectivity as Chief Economic Analyst at Statistics Canada. Then he traded the velvet coffin of government for the shark-infested pool of the private sector, becoming a self-employed economic policy analyst and pundit. His former colleagues at Statcan wondered if he "had fallen on his head." But for Cross, liberation from government was a natural expression of his conservative philosophical convictions – and an experience he recommends to anyone trapped in the drudgery of the civil service.



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You could hardly be the daughter of a refugee from Communism without being predisposed to free market conservatism. So it was for Lydia Miljan, but what really cemented her right-wing political convictions was the classes she took from the classical liberal scholars at the University of Calgary, and the people and ideas she encountered later at the Michael Walker-led Fraser Institute. Now teaching at a southern Ontario university, Miljan is passing on those ideas to a new generation.



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Bernd Schmidt grew up in the ruins of post-war Germany and the rubble of its ideology. He was actively involved in the political upheavals of the Sixties, but never a blind follower of movements that subjugated means to ends. Then he moved to Canada's Yukon, far removed from the hurly burly of the world. From that calm distance, Schmidt has settled into no political home but his own, where individual freedom reigns in harmony with commitment to the public good..



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Jeremy Cherlet is just 24. His political beliefs are still evolving, but unlike many of his peers, he is actively engaged in political life. He credits five seminal experiences with shaping his worldview: 9-11, the Internet, trips to Germany and Israel, and working as an intern for a conservative Christian politician. Some of these reinforced his biases; some reversed them. All fuelled his passion for political involvement.



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Brigitte Pellerin became an ardent capitalist the day she got her first \$11 pay cheque from McDonald's. She went on to fight for a wide range of right-wing causes as a journalist and political activist. Today, however, she can hardly muster the enthusiasm to vote. Years of disappointments from conservative politicians and parties have left her politically homeless. Pellerin is still on Team Liberty, but as she surveys the Canadian political landscape today, she fears she may be its last remaining member.



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Colby Cosh grew up in small-town Alberta in the Seventies and Eighties reading Ayn Rand while government presided over runaway inflation and ruination of the oil industry. University taught him almost nothing, and *Alberta Report's* rabble-raising newsroom became his grad school. In another time he might have taken up arms against the state in the American Revolution or Western Canada's Rebellions. But in today's fights for liberty, his pen is mightier than any sword.



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The language and culture barriers between Quebec and the rest of Canada fuel the proliferation of shallow stereotypes. Looking at La Belle Province from Halifax or Vancouver or Toronto, it's easy to imagine legions of leftists in a sea of sovereigntists. The political reality is much more complex, of course, and Paul Beaudry proves the point. A natural born contrarian, he grew up francophone, federalist and conservative in Montreal. Then he discovered libertarianism, which further antagonized his teachers and inhibited his social life. Today, though, with separatist and socialist fortunes ebbing in Quebec, Beaudry no longer feels like a lonely right-wing counter-revolutionary.

How love and Plato changed my life

by Rainer Knopff



The train was gone! Thinking I had plenty of time, I had disembarked to buy a soft drink from a platform vendor. I waited in line, paid for my soda, turned around, and – my heart sank. The train that was to take Robin and me from Milan to Spain had left.

Robin was on the train, along with the two backpacks containing all our possessions. The woman I loved and hoped to marry was headed off without me! So was a book (as yet unread and hence unloved) tucked into one of the packs.

As luck would have it, I would soon be reunited with both the woman and the book. Together, they would change my life immeasurably for the better. Robin became my wife and the mother of our two wonderful sons; the book transformed my intellectual horizon and academic trajectory. At that moment on the platform, of course, I knew none of this.

Nowadays, a call or text between cellphones would have solved the problem. But this was 1971, when travelling students still picked up hardcopy letters at American Express offices.

Worse, even if I could somehow figure out where to find her among the several Spanish destinations and intermediate stops we were considering – we had to decide to “play it by ear” – my eurail pass was safely stowed in Robin’s money-belt. So were my passport and travellers cheques (remember those pre-ATM curiosities?). I stood on the platform with only the clothes on my back and perhaps enough change to buy a biscuit to go with the soft drink.

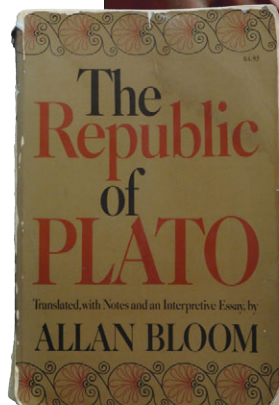
Panicking, I randomly approached people for help, using all the languages at my disposal – English, of course, but also my rusty childhood German,

my rudimentary high school French, and the even more rudimentary Spanish I had picked up the previous summer at Ivan Illich’s left-wing centre in Cuernavaca Mexico. I neither spoke nor understood Italian.

Eventually a woman explained to me – in which language I cannot now remember – that the train had probably pulled out temporarily to change its departure track. She thought that might be it at the other end of the station.

I hustled over to find that the woman was right – and to be reunited with a tearful Robin, perched with our backpacks at a rail-car doorway, where she had been poised to jump off had the train not stopped and returned.

And so, our journey resumed. With stops in southern France, Robin and I made our way to Cullera, Spain, where I settled down to read the book.



“Robin became my wife and the mother of our two wonderful sons; the *Republic* transformed my intellectual horizon and academic trajectory.”

Some background is needed to appreciate the story of the book. In the spring of 1971, Robin and I had both graduated from McMaster University’s department of sociology. There we had encountered Howard Brotz. Soon after receiving his PhD in sociology from the London School of Economics, Brotz had an epiphany when he chanced upon an essay by Leo Strauss. Concluding that he had been “translating banalities into jargon,” he quit his job in New York City and headed to Chicago to learn directly from Strauss. Later, he would come to McMaster, where his sociology courses focused on political philosophy.

Brotz seemed, by turns, to be an Aristotelian, a Lockean, a Rousseauan, a Marxist, a Nietzschean – always adopting the perspective of whichever thinker he happened to be teaching. I found it much easier to pin down the political perspectives of other professors in the department, and although I was interested enough in Brotz’s courses to take all of them, some charismatic leftists had a stronger immediate influence on me – which explains my post-graduation visit to the Illich centre in Cuernavaca.

Upon returning from Mexico, I decided to do graduate work at

McMaster. I planned to write an MA thesis demonstrating the superiority of Marx to Aristotle on the issue of property, a topic influenced by both my leftist leanings and the philosophical interests I had picked up from Howard Brotz. Somewhat perversely, for both of us, Brotz agreed to supervise the thesis.

Robin had no intention of sticking around Hamilton. She had been saving for a year of travel and was itching to go. As I began graduate studies, Robin headed off to Europe, leaving me with plenty of spare time to campaign for Stephen Lewis's NDP in that autumn's Ontario elections.

Well, that didn't last long. Lovesickness got the better of me, and by December, I had quit the graduate program and chased Robin to Milan. Howard Brotz did not try to dissuade me. He merely recommended that I take to Europe a book we had not yet read together: Plato's *Republic*. "Get Allan Bloom's translation," he said, "it has a good interpretive essay."

Smiling politely but noncommittally, I headed home, taking my usual route through the university's bookstore, where – providentially – Bloom's translation of the *Republic* immediately caught my eye. I bought it, slipped it into my backpack, and didn't give it another thought until Robin and I rented a flat for a month in Cullera.

Must an epiphany occur in a blinding flash or can it develop slowly over the course of a month? The latter happened in my case. The sneering marginal notes near the beginning of my now dog-eared *Republic* show how little I thought of it initially. But such notes petered out as, thinking back on Brotz's courses, I found dots starting to connect.

My youthful Marxist heart leapt when Socrates and his interlocutors concluded that a kind of communism was necessary to perfect justice, and that private interest must be overcome to achieve natural meritocracy. But they demanded a steep price. Communal childrearing could overcome the unjust advantages or disadvantages conferred by parents on their differently talented children, but only if the natural preference of parents for their own children could be disrupted. For example, mothers could not be allowed to recognize their biological offspring. Simply put, the biological family, a primary source of unjust private interest, had to be destroyed.

My skepticism was aroused, and, like the dialogue's participants, I wondered how this remarkable state of affairs could actually come about. Only through lies, it turned out, both "noble" and otherwise. Moreover, when Socrates asked how these whoppers could be sold, Glaucon replied that they would persuade only children and subsequent generations,

not current adults. Somewhat enigmatically, Socrates dropped the issue, but later in the dialogue he proposed getting rid of everyone over the age of ten in order to ensure the necessary socialization. Despite Socrates's hilarious suggestion that the adults could be persuaded to decamp voluntarily, this proposal clearly anticipated the more serious purges of modern communism.

Purges and family destruction! Were these abhorrent features of modern communism the logical flip side of its idealism – *my* idealism? As I would later read in one of Strauss' books, "the *Republic* conveys the broadest and deepest analysis of political idealism ever made." Perhaps, I thought, some moderation – some realism – was in order.

My intellectual and political reorientation was underway – but barely underway. Knowing I still had much to learn, I applied for graduate studies in political science at the University of Toronto, where Allan Bloom had gone when Cornell University (his previous employer) caved to the demands of gun-toting student radicals in 1969.

I learned much from Bloom, who, among other things, encouraged me to bring the perspectives of political philosophy to the study of Canadian politics, as several former students of Strauss had done with American politics. A good example was Bloom's friend Walter Berns, a fellow Cornell refugee at the University of Toronto. Also at Toronto was Peter Russell, who shared Berns' interest in philosophic approaches to practical politics, especially constitutional politics. Russell ended up directing my Canadian-politics dissertation,

with Berns serving on the supervisory committee. Bloom supervised my minor area: political philosophy. And I continued to see Howard Brotz, who lived in Toronto. Those were good years!

The title of my doctoral dissertation, *In Defense of Liberal Democracy*, says much about how my thinking had changed since the McMaster days. Here's the unwieldy subtitle: *An Inquiry into the Philosophical Premises Underlying French Canadian Liberalism's Battle with Theocracy and Nationalism* (Whew!). My study of liberalism's battle with theocracy – the first half of the dissertation – turned me for practical purposes into a Laurier liberal, the kind of classical liberal who today counts as a conservative.

Even before completing the dissertation, I landed a job in the University of Calgary's political science department, where I met Tom Flanagan, another classically liberal conservative. Three years later, Barry Cooper arrived, as did Ted Morton (who had also studied with Russell, Berns, and Bloom at the U of T). That made four conservatives. Four! In a single social science discipline not called "economics." Nearly 20 percent of our department. Outrageous!



The Calgary School: (l-r) Knopff, Cooper, Morton.

So outrageous – or at least noteworthy – that people began to pay attention. The *Globe and Mail's* Jeffrey Simpson wrote a column about the “Calgary Mafia.” Others later softened that to the “Calgary School.” And the rest, as they say, is history – a [history well told](#) by Tom Flanagan in his essay “*Legends of the Calgary School: Their Guns, Their Dogs, and the Women Who Love Them*” (first published in a 2013 [festschrift](#) for Barry Cooper and now also available on the VoegelinView website).

Telling my own story makes me reflect on the role of

chance in our lives. Encountering the right people, the right teachers, the right books, at the right time makes all the difference. Would life have turned out the same for me had that train continued on its way instead of returning to the station? I can't help wondering.

A political scientist at the University of Calgary, Rainer Knopff has written widely on constitutional law and politics. His books include The Charter Revolution and the Court Party and Charter Politics (both with F.L. Morton).

It began with a can of Gold Water

by Monte Solberg



I see now that I never had a chance. Politics stalked me, even as a child. It sat in stacks in the den where, as kids, we played board games. Conservative icons like Frank Meyer, George Nash and Barry Goldwater stared down at us from oak shelves and, as I would learn much later, from across the ages.

In the late 1960s it would be unusual for a Canadian to belong to the U.S.-based Conservative Book Club. It was stranger still that the Conservative Book Club had a member in Rosetown Saskatchewan. It's probable that my dad, Stan, was their sole customer for a hundred miles in any direction.

I couldn't escape politics even when hustled out to the backyard. Our next door neighbor was George Loken, our MLA. He was a Liberal. Of course in those days the Progressive Conservative Party barely existed in Saskatchewan, and Saskatchewan Liberal Party leader Ross Thatcher was about as conservative as they came. Once a member of the socialist Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, Thatcher came to oppose the CCF with the zeal of the converted. He ended their 20-year reign in the 1964 election, and when dad started the radio station in Rosetown two years later it was Premier Thatcher who cut the ribbon.

As often as not politics was the topic at our dinner table. Political luminaries, some only dimly lit and others brighter, occasionally gathered in the living room. Whiskey was served. Insights were proffered. Luminescence yielded to full illumination.

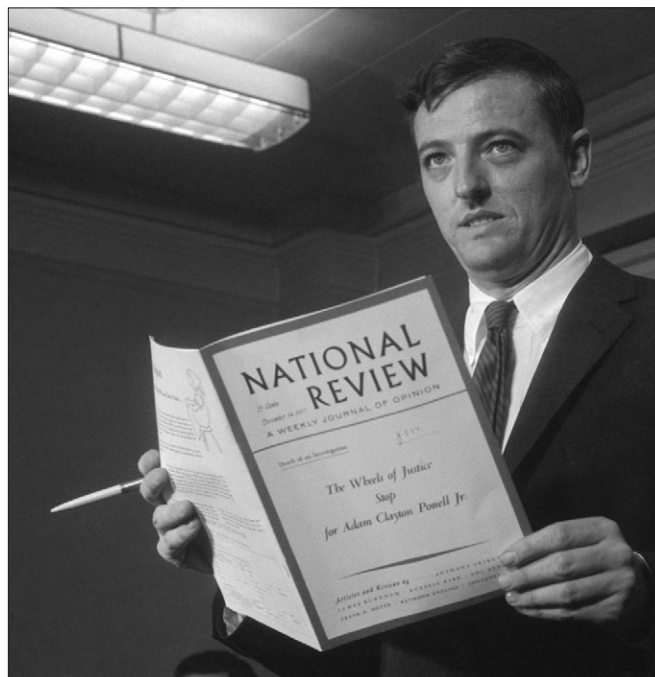
Politics also inhabited our kitchen. For my entire childhood and teenage years a can of beer labelled Gold Water sat in our fridge. It was a souvenir from the 1964 Republican convention where Senator Barry Goldwater accepted the GOP nomination. That was the same convention where an actor named Ronald Reagan first came to national prominence, but that is a story for another day. I was too young to care or understand much of this at the time, but I divined from that can of beer that my dad had different interests than some of the other dads, and my own interest was piqued.

That refrigerator heirloom came from my father's great friend Bill McVeigh, whose passion for conservative politics

on both sides of the border kindled dad's interest in what would become a key theme in his life.

Bill even collected vinyl records of William F. Buckley talking politics and interviewing guests, probably recordings of his long time TV show, *Firing Line*. Naturally Bill also subscribed to Buckley's *National Review*, surely the only subscriber in Drumheller, Alberta. As the Cadillac and Olds dealer in Drumheller, Bill had the means to make what was then the exotic journey to the Cow Palace in San Francisco for that 1964 Republican convention. There he collected a can of beer for his friend Stan.

A few months later dad and Bill were in the radio station in Drumheller watching the teletype spit out the results from the presidential election, as close to live coverage as you could get in Canada in the 1960s. Goldwater was crushed by Lyndon Johnson. Conservatism had been dealt a blow, but Ronald Reagan's career had been launched, and dad's appetite was whetted. Whiskey was served to soothe the hurt. A small boy gathered in these stories and began to



wonder at their meaning.

The first time I recall campaigning was in 1971. I was 13. My sister was 11. We had been pressed into service to drop campaign literature on behalf of Mr. Loken. Child labour was warranted because the NDP were massing at the gates, and they were at war with capitalism.

I didn't appreciate the seriousness of the situation, and it didn't apply to me anyway. I was expecting to be drafted to the NHL, especially with all those new teams coming into the league. Yes, I was a dreamer, but being a dreamer was to have its political advantages.

George Loken held the seat that year, barely, but province-wide the NDP won a huge majority. Allan Blakeney was the new premier. My father grieved that an ill wind was going to howl across the Saskatchewan prairie and blow down what the private sector had built up. Businesses would be nationalized. Investors driven out. And unions given the keys to the province.

This coincided with the rise of the eccentric Dick Collver, the new leader of the revived Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan. Dad worked locally for the PCs, and took me to see Collver speak to a packed audience at the Rosetown Community Hall. Then Collver came over to the house, and the whiskey bottle came down from the cupboard.

The local PC candidate was Roy Bailey. Dad was Roy's campaign manager, and as an amateur pilot, he often flew Roy to campaign events around the riding. One day during the 1975 campaign they ran into a bank of fog and dad tried to land on a gravel road. They hit a railroad crossing and flipped the plane over, but both walked away unhurt.

Collver ended up winning 28 percent of the vote and seven seats in the 1975 election campaign. Roy Bailey won our Rosetown riding, launching a long political career that eventually led to he and I serving together as Reform Party MPs in the House of Commons.

By my late teens I had started thumbing through some of those books in dad's library, and first became acquainted with the ideas of conservative thinkers like Milton Friedman, Russell Kirk and James Burnham.

One friend shared my political interests was a brilliant student named Joel Shortt. When not talking about girls we debated politics, often while cruising the back roads with a case of beer sitting on the console of my 1968 Buick Skylark. In 1978 Joel and I were roommates at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon.

“Political luminaries, some only dimly lit and others brighter, occasionally gathered in our living room.”

At dad's instigation, we drove to Unity, Saskatchewan to vote in the Kindersley-Lloydminster federal Progressive Conservative nomination. Our candidate, Bill McKnight, won the nomination. Bill would go on to win the riding and become one of the most competent and respected ministers in Brian Mulroney's government.

I left university to work in the family radio business. Joel went on to become a well-known and fearless litigator in Calgary. Whenever we got together beer and politics were on the agenda.

By 1979 dad had had enough of Allan Blakeney's socialist paradise. He sold the radio station in Rosetown, packed up the family, and returned to his native Alberta. A couple years later he sold his Alberta radio stations to Toronto broadcasting giant, CHUM. I stayed on to manage them for a while, but it was the mid-1980s, Alberta was a simmering cauldron of western conservative discontent, and I felt the call to political action.

A major catalyst for me, and many others, was the 1986 decision by the Mulroney government to award a big CF-18 maintenance contract to Montreal-based Bombardier, even though Winnipeg's Bristol Aerospace submitted a cheaper, better bid. The west erupted. *Alberta Report* magazine gave voice to our anger. Led by Ted and Link Byfield, the *Report* took on the issues that other media outlets avoided or downplayed, and always from a conservative perspective.

The Byfields were supported by a stable of brilliant young writers, some destined for the editorial pages in Canada's largest newspapers. Every edition of *Alberta Report* landed like a bomb. I read them all, cover to cover.

It was in those pages, in the early months of 1987, that I first read about a conference in Vancouver designed to bring together conservatives who felt alienated from the mainstream political parties. Later I read the *Report* account of the event and learned how Ted Byfield, Stephen Harper and Preston Manning were developing a vision for a different kind of Canada. By the fall of that year their vision had given birth to the Reform Party of Canada. Western discontent had a political vehicle to express itself. Canada was about to change.

Around the same time my friend Joel introduced me to Allan Bloom's 1987 book, *The Closing of The American Mind*, a reflection on the philosophical roots of western civilization. It was an unlikely bestseller and a major volley in the culture wars of the 1980s. Bloom was anything but an easy read, but I was intrigued. It was a book that I would read half a dozen times. Thanks to Bloom I began to see the connection between the great ideas of



history, the modern political state, and the equality and freedom that marked western civilization.

In August of 1988, once again it was my dad who would be instrumental in my political life. He stood at the front reception desk at the radio station in Drumheller and sold me my first membership in the Reform Party of Canada. Soon after I joined the board of the Medicine Hat Reform Party riding association.

By that time I was ploughing through the great books of the conservative canon. Digging through Calgary's used bookstores was a favorite pastime. I would occasionally stumble across a conservative book which somehow had made it to Canada. It all felt vaguely subversive. On my first ever trip to Washington D.C. in the late 1980s, I went to the Barnes and Noble in Georgetown and picked up Russell Kirk's *Prospects for Conservatives*, a book I have since read at least four times. Kirk's ideas made and continue to make such an impression on me that with every reading I can't resist restating them in my own hand in the margins of the book.

By the early 90s the Reform Party had taken full flight. Preston Manning's manifesto *The New Canada* became a Canadian bestseller and mandatory reading for young conservative political activists.



In 1993 I won the Reform Party nomination in the riding of Medicine Hat by two votes on the third ballot. Soon after I would be elected to the House of Commons. Without question I owed my victory to many people who got me nominated and then elected. They sold memberships for me and then twisted arms to get my supporters out to a nomination meeting. Six months later they helped me win my seat in the general election. A populist wave swept across the prairies, and I rode it.

But just as clearly my victory would not have happened had it not been for

the conservatives who influenced me: my father, his friend Bill, and my friend Joel. But it was also the conservative men of ideas: the Byfields, Preston Manning, Allan Bloom and Russell Kirk, and so many others whom I first encountered on those oak shelves, in that den in our house in Rosetown, fifty years ago.

Monte Solberg, a Calgary-based Principal at New West Public Affairs and a Sun Media columnist, was the MP for Medicine Hat from 1993 to 2008, as a member of the Reform, Canadian Alliance and Conservative parties. He served as Minister of Immigration and Minister of Human Resources under Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

Twenty years a fool: My long journey home from the left

by Elizabeth Nickson



I blame it on the dining room table. When my mother died, I couldn't get rid of it; no one in the family wanted a mid-Victorian mahogany table that could seat ten in considerable luxury. Bad karma I thought, remembering the spectacular arguments, wherein every night the most controversial subject imaginable was introduced for debate. We children were expected not only to have an opinion, but to argue it with force. There was a lot of un-WASP-like shouting, and a cavalcade of slammed doors.

I grew up in Westmount, with a father who more than belonged, but who had married an educated prairie girl who decidedly did not. I hated the snobbery, the cruelty, the exclusion she was all too often shown. Further, why didn't anyone know any French people – barring, of course, the staff. No Jews, no Americans, no people of any colour but ours, all pink and tailored and sporty, in the same semi-grand houses, eating the same food, living a year bound by the Anglican

calendar refreshed by a procession of some pretty glorious parties. Class and position were identified by a thousand tiny signifiers. To others it was the most foreign of languages, with no lexicon. Deliberately so. What I didn't understand was that I was growing up in a pre-modern clan, like every other of the time, cloistered within its intricate cousinage, being trained like a SWAT team member for leadership in business, the battlefield, or charity. By 17 I declared myself at war with all of it, and marched through McGill's campus with the French students, the anti-war left, and any other protest that was going around.

By 22, I was dating a philosophy teacher, an Indian from Trinidad whose parents had been indentured labourers. He had been sent to Oxford by the Anglican church, was satisfyingly ink-black, and a pal of Paul Goodman and Ivan Illich. My beleaguered parents were suitably horrified, more by his ideas than his colour. For good reason; every Saturday we would go to lunch in Chinatown, and thence to the Communist bookstore, where a new pamphlet would be pressed upon me. The paranoid right is correct about the fate

of their kids at college; I was being indoctrinated. But, Mao's *On Practice* inspired me. Rather than spend my life reading in the cloister, for which I was far too restless, I would throw myself into the stink and chaos of real life.

My first "action" was the founding of a feminist theatre company, called the Women's Theatre Co-op, where decisions would be made by consensus, and all the plays were written by women, and all the parts played by women. The nightmare of consensus decision-making gave me pause, but apparently not enough.

When I finished graduate school (leaving as a thoroughgoing Keynesian), I moved to New York and got married. I wanted to write, and a red diaper baby opened the first door. Shaun was the daughter of Joe Slovo, head of the South African Communist Party and Umkhonto We Sizwe, the terrorist arm of the African National Congress. Her mother was Ruth First, Minister of Education in Mozambique, before she was blown up by a letter bomb, sent, it was said, by the South African police. Shaun got me a job at legendary filmmaker Arthur Penn's office in New York. Arthur wanted someone who could spend the days in his office writing, because the office was a shell, used a few times a year. Shaun worked for Robert deNiro, Martin Scorsese and Al Pacino, all of whom were greatly impressed by her Communist activist parents. When people say Hollywood is left-wing, the cliché masks the deep penetration of the hard left into film and television.

I learned to spell my name before saying it, because of the dumbfounded silence on the other end of the line from people like Warren Beatty or Elia Kazan when I said "Nickson". But in those years I did teach myself how to write, and another red diaper baby (whose most recent book was a celebration of Fidel Castro) got me my first job writing for the *LA Weekly*. When my marriage broke up, I moved from New York to London, where Shaun now lived in her family home in Camden Town. My best friend was a young punk musician, who lived in a squat on Fernhead Road. Brer's father was a poet, an Earl and a Minister in Thatcher's cabinet. This breadth of acquaintance made me catnip for the *Time* bureau chief in London, since most of his reporters moved almost exclusively within the expat community.

I moved between Brer's squat and Shaun's, kicked out of the latter whenever Joe Slovo came to town and MI6 was parked outside the door. Joe had been on Interpol's ten most wanted list for a decade, but finally had been allowed to travel around Europe. I met him one night. He sat in the shadows and interviewed me for a few minutes, out of politeness perhaps, and the possibility that given my job at *Time*, I might be useful. I was thrilled by the favour; to me



Late 1960s McGill student protest

he was a great man and access to him sharply limited. I was a happy swimmer in the cultural left and everyone I met – and it seems now as if I met everyone – was unhappy only because the right political system, socialism, had not been established. With few exceptions, every publisher, columnist, artist, great and small, thought the world would be made right, if that happened, and most cultural product was deemed to have gravitas only if it moved the cause along.

Time hurled me into hundreds if not thousands of interviews with politicians, artists, deposed kings and princes, scientists, torture victims, blood-soaked IRA chiefs, crooks and Nobel Prize winners. These encounters established a larger reality for me and hairline cracks appeared in my world view. I became European bureau chief of *Life* magazine and one day Nelson Mandela's lawyer, Ismail Ayoub, walked into my office and offered me the rights to Nelson's autobiography. Tout London wanted to know how an obscure Canadian girl with no political heft got the rights to *Long Walk to Freedom*. There were a couple of reasons; Mandela was familiar with *Life* which had long treated him as a hero, and one of *Time*'s South African stringers was a one-time lover of Winnie. The clincher, I suspect, was that I had met Joe Slovo, and was friends with his daughter. I was safe.

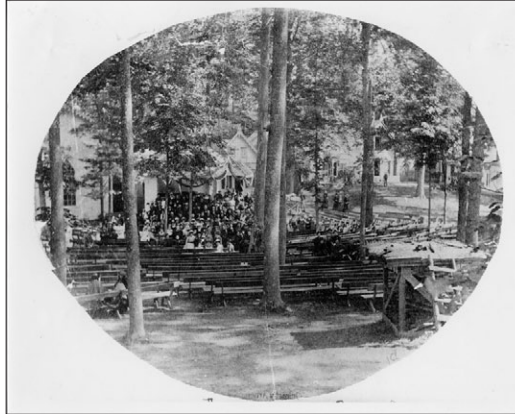
When Nelson was released, I went to Soweto, and while waiting for our meetings I interviewed the wives of the men who had been in Robben Island with him. One day I had lunch in a tiny bungalow, owned by a woman whose brother attended. His face was badly scarred, he was missing an eye, and more than a few teeth. One shoulder had been broken and twisted and he couldn't walk without a lurch. He said he had been tortured by the ANC in Zambia. I said, you mean the South African police or the military. No, he said, by the ANC; at one of their camps, he disagreed with their methods and ideas. He was not a communist, but had leadership potential, so they broke him. I didn't believe him.

After *Time*, I wrote a book about the CIA's mind control experiments in Canada. My English agent was a socialist, despite his childhood as the son of a wealthy Jewish peer. My publishers, both in the UK and Canada, two of the most august literary editors working at the time, were left of center, as were the staff. Because I had met Prime Minister Thatcher, they would ask: "Why was she so popular? What do they see in her?" People who voted for the right were deemed to be primitive and lacking virtue and the allegiance to Thatcher from "the people" confounded them. I am ashamed to say I agreed. In the world in which I lived – literature, theatre, film, design – everyone saw the right as devoid of compassion for the less advantaged. Exploiters all. And profoundly racist.

Change came rapidly. The catalyst was my father saying at a family dinner in Vancouver, when I was at the magic age of 40, that I reminded him of my great-great-grandmother, who declared in 1850, at the age of 20, that marriage was slavery, and set off to see the world. She had a kind of portable piano – a melodeon – which she carried so she could play for her supper. She set off from St. Catharines to the Ohio frontier.

This was fascinating. This was my next novel. My editors agreed – a feminist from 1850! And my agent gave me the help of a brilliant woman editor to help me shape the story. I began to comb my way through the family papers which were lodged in tiny libraries all through eastern Canada and the U.S. And immediately fell into a kind of trance from which I have not fully awoken.

The first thing I discovered was that they were Christian. And I mean very, very Christian. This was unnerving since on the intellectual left, faith in God, and particularly Christ, signifies a weak mind. But these people were anything but weak. They had been town, church and infrastructure builders from the time they arrived in 1630. They were involved, critically, in the first three Great Awakenings, including the one in Northampton with Jonathan Edwards, into whose family they married. Two direct ancestors were Commissary and Deputy Commissary for the Revolutionary Army, one a member of the Continental Congress. They had enormous families. The patriarch of the branch that moved to Canada in 1824 to dig the first deep cut on the Welland Canal, had 17 living children with one wife, who lived to 101. For decades, they were officers on the Underground Railroad, all through the northern states, with tunnels into Canada. They hid



Early Grimsby Park camp meeting

fugitive slaves, donated land for the "colored village" around the Welland Canal, and started schools for black children.

They also fought for the Indians; one of them, who had married a daughter of Joseph Brant on the Five Nations reserve in the Niagara region was such an effective advocate for Indians that he had to be smuggled out of Canada to Chicago before the British could hang him. Another, the family historian and a prolific writer, while serving as mayor of St. Catharines wrote flaming editorials protesting the treatment of the "red man" and

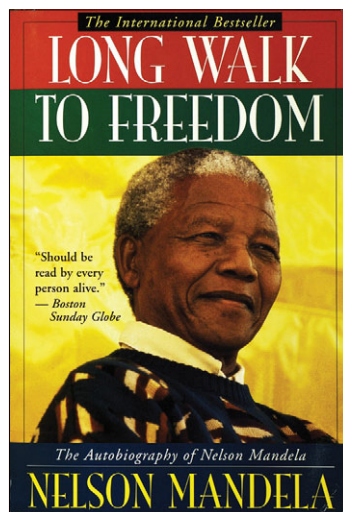
illuminating their virtues and strength. The entire clan's Christianity was hard-wired and their charity never-ending. When they moved anywhere, first they built a church, then a school. My great-great-great-great-grandfather the canal builder would go round the farms every morning and collect little girls out of the fields, quietly giving their parents some money, before taking them off to school.

Because many of them were well established by the 1800s, they traveled, it seemed, ceaselessly, and they wrote letters, in part to weave together far flung family members. The tiny museums through upper New York State and the Niagara peninsula had thousands of documents, photographs, letters, diaries, all original source material. To my dismay, however, none fit the narrative we were aiming for. Evidence of my great-great-grandmother's oppression did not exist. She was not oppressed, she was free to do what she liked. Free to travel, not marry, and support herself by her own hand. The women of her family were decidedly not of the whining pathetic Susanna

Moodie archetype so beloved by Margaret Atwood. They were mightily strong. They loved pioneering, and when they saw a problem, they damn well solved it.

This simply would not do for a modern publisher. There was none of the barbarism expected of those unenlightened times. Instead it was a 400-year history of a family who, like all the other families they knew, constituted a parade of virtue and strength. By 1900, there had been so much enthusiastic breeding and pioneering, a vast cousinage reached through every sector of the culture, stretching from sea to sea in both Canada and the U.S. Finally one of the librarians, after another afternoon of my obsessive digging for dirt, declared in frustration, "Look, they were good people."

Their Christianity particularly defeated me. Especially the revival thing, for along with participating in the Great Awakenings, in 1859 they started camp meetings in Grimsby Park on Lake Ontario, where revivals ran all



summer long for decades. This was an ecstatic Christianity I knew nothing about. So I started to go to revivals, which today take place largely in black communities. I was pretty much the only white person in congregations of a thousand or more, and they treated me like a sister come home. Those revivals – and they are vital, exciting, and filled with extraordinary music and spirit – dragged me out of the Buddhist passivity that is the only approved spiritual attitude on the left. No one who is even a little open to the idea of God can go to these gatherings and not be suffused with grace.

This final lesson popped me right out of the cultural left where I had made my home. It was now clear to me that our contemporary story tellers were telling lies. They had utterly corrupted our idea of our country and culture, religion and past. They misread the very ground of human character. They had taught us that with few exceptions, we came from exploiters, oppressors of natives and blacks. All the “great” writers of our time read to me now as depressives caught in an almost demonic fiction, charlatans who had seized the criminal and disaffected and made of them the norm that

must be defeated and replaced by another system. And that system was inevitably command and control socialism.

Ten years after the ANC took over South Africa, Oxbridge scholar R.W. Johnson moved home to South Africa and started a think tank. Joe Slovo, I discovered through reading his research, was an assassin, who ran torture/re-education camps in Zambia and who ranged through Europe neutralizing any African potential leader black or white, who could stand in the way of the communist party in the new Africa. I had set my lodestar on evil.

This summer, I am going to take that mahogany table out of storage, lacquer it a deep Chinese orange, and rechristen it as a table where the big issues will be argued, and where, with luck and love, another generation will learn engagement with the wider world, informed by a true account of our past.

Elizabeth Nickson has been published by Harper Collins, Bloomsbury and Knopf Canada. She has written for Time, Harper's, and The Sunday Times Magazine, and was European Bureau chief of Life magazine.



Choosing sides in the clash of civilizations

by Fred Litwin



On the morning of September 11, 2001, my phone in Ottawa rang at about 8:45. It was my new friend Janet Fiabane, who I'd met only a few weeks before at a party. She told me that a plane had just hit the World Trade Center. I turned on the television and watched the horrifying events unfold, hardly

able to move, as thousands were murdered before my eyes.

No one who saw it could fail to be affected emotionally. But when the fear, anger and grief subsided, we were left to grapple with it intellectually. For me, and I suspect many others, it would profoundly change our political perspectives and allegiances.

In the short term, we rallied together. New Yorkers responded with courage and sacrifice. More than 75,000

Canadians gave blood. Two hundred and twenty-four U.S.-bound planes were diverted to Canadian cities, mostly Halifax and Gander, and 30,000 stranded Americans found temporary homes in our country. On that day, at least, Prime Minister Jean Chretien said all the right things, and made sure that Americans knew that Canada was with them all the way.

"None of us will ever forget this day," President George W. Bush told the world that night. "Yet, we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world." Three days later, he gave his stirring bullhorn speech to emergency workers still clawing through the rubble. Just two minutes long, the speech packed an emotional wallop, and I was moved by his courage and leadership.

Prime Minister Chretien proclaimed Friday, September 14th a national day of mourning, and more than 100,000 people crowded Parliament Hill. The main doors of the American Embassy were piled high with flowers, trinkets and messages, tokens of appreciation for the close bond between Canada and the United States.

Right from the start, there were reports linking the attacks to Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda network. I'd never heard of Al-Qaeda, or if I had, I'd forgotten. And I knew little about Islam. In fact, my overall understanding of the Middle East was embarrassingly deficient. It was time to think, read, and learn more about what had happened.

9-11 coincided with an exercise in personal soul-searching that was already underway. For most of my adult life I'd been a man of the left. I had organized demonstrations against nuclear weapons and the testing of cruise missiles, and I had marched for abortion rights. I signed a statement published in the *Canadian Jewish News* condemning Israeli settlements in the West Bank. I protested outside Toronto police headquarters after they raided gay bathhouses in 1981, and I marched in the 2nd Gay Pride March in Toronto in 1982. Back in my university days in Montreal, I joined a sit-in at the library.

In 1983 I left Canada on what was to be a year-long trip; I ended up away for 17 years – living and working in New York, Oxford, Singapore and Hong Kong – only moving back to Canada in June 2000. While living in the U.S., I demonstrated for gay rights in Washington; in New York I demonstrated against the Reagan administration and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for its too-slow approval of AIDS drugs.

By the morning of September 11 I still considered myself a "progressive," but I had been growing increasingly disillusioned, particularly because of the excesses of feminism, identity politics, hysterical anti-Israel attitudes, and "political correctness." And in the preceding weeks I'd

been reading *The Politics of Bad Faith*, by American writer David Horowitz, about his political evolution from left to right. Horowitz was a "red diaper baby," raised by Communists, and he'd learned his lessons well. As a young man in the 1970s he had risen to the editorship of *Ramparts*, a major left-wing magazine.

The book detailed Horowitz's philosophical U-Turn in a collection of essays. He was scathing in his criticism of the left after the fall of communism. He felt that postmodern leftism was the "theoretical expression of agnostic nihilism." All its academic pretensions, from critical theory to deconstructionism to cultural determinism, with its inordinate emphasis on ethnicity and race, led to assaults on our freedom and liberties. Horowitz bemoaned what he called "the rejection of the concept of the individual..."

all of these ideas are direct echoes of the fascist theories of the 1930s." The university curricula had changed – great books were out; minor works were in, as long as they were about colonialism, racism, or capitalism. The crimes of socialist countries were to be ignored. This was all a "radical assault on America's future" – perhaps over the top – but stirring stuff, nonetheless.

So, on the morning of 9-11, I was already trying to make sense of everything. Now, my questions were: How could anybody fly planes into buildings? What kind of monsters were these people? What kind of ideology would counsel the deliberate murder of thousands of innocent civilians? I wondered whether the Left might rise to the occasion and come up with some worthwhile explanations, some reasonable analysis, and some idea of the right thing to do. But straight off, the Left's answer was: it was all America's fault.

Writing in *The Independent* on September 12, popular left-wing journalist Robert Fisk explained the

events of 9-11 this way:

"This is not the war of democracy versus terror that the world will be asked to believe in the coming days. It is also about American missiles smashing into Palestinian homes and U.S. helicopters firing missiles into a Lebanese ambulance in 1996 and American shells crashing into a village called Qana and about a Lebanese militia – paid and uniformed by America's Israeli ally – hacking and raping and murdering their way through refugee camps."

On September 13, in the *Toronto Star*, editor emeritus Haroon Siddiqui wondered whether the attacks occurred because America was "indifferent to the suffering of too many peoples, from Afghanistan to Chechnya to the Middle East...thus driving the ordinary folk there to seethe in silence against America and the crazed ones into fanatical acts." A

“By 9-11 I still considered myself a progressive, but was increasingly disillusioned with the excesses of feminism, identity politics, hysterical anti-Israel attitudes, and political correctness.”

few days later, Siddiqui wrote that the attack was “due to American complicity in injustice, lethal and measurable, on several fronts,” including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the economic sanctions on Iraq, “the mess in Afghanistan where the CIA recruited and trained the likes of bin Laden” (which was untrue) and American alliances with the governments of Algeria, Turkey and Egypt. He concluded that “the public, more than the media, senses this. Some put it crudely: America had it coming.”

In the Toronto *Globe & Mail*, Rick Salutin wrote that the U.S. had nurtured Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan, “in the course of which it worked with, armed and trained – Osama bin Laden” (again, untrue). Salutin’s solution was simple: end the Israeli occupation and end the sanctions against Saddam’s Iraq.

The Council of Canadians called the United States “the biggest bully in town and in the world.”

Also in the *Globe*, Naomi Klein asked whether the U.S. created “the conditions in which such twisted logic could flourish, a war not so much on U.S. imperialism but on perceived U.S. imperviousness?” A few days later, she wrote that bin Laden was a “figure of diabolical fanaticism”, but “also the warped and twisted progeny of all of these unintended consequences of wars past and present – a Frankenstein of collateral damage.”

On October 1, Sunera Thobani, professor and former president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, gave a fiery speech in Ottawa at a conference titled “Women’s Resistance: From Victimization to Criminalization.” Thobani answered everything through the lens of identity politics, with her talk “If We Are All Americans Now, What is a Brown Girl to Do?”

Thobani said the U.S. was “one of the most dangerous and the most powerful global forces that is unleashing prolific levels of violence all over the world.” She had three “demands” that would solve the problem: lift the sanctions on Iraq, resolve the Palestinian question and remove American bases from the Middle East.

Meanwhile, President Bush demanded that the Taliban hand over bin Laden and expel Al-Qaeda. The Taliban refused. On October 7 the United States and Britain began Operation Enduring Freedom and started bombing Taliban positions. On November 12 Northern Alliance forces marched into Kabul and the Taliban fled. By December the UN Security Council had established the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to oversee military operations, and more than 50 countries, including Canada, would join in.

Throughout this, President Bush seemed measured. He certainly wasn’t reckless. Nobody was being bombed

back into the Stone Age.

In November, I walked into Book City in Toronto, and out on the front counter was a display of Noam Chomsky’s *9-11*, a 125-page insta-book. It was typical Chomsky – bashing Israel, bashing American foreign policy; Al Qaida was all America’s fault, the United States was a terrorist state – all regurgitations from the 1960s. I sighed, and put it back.

I was done with the Left.

Two years later when Bush took out Saddam Hussein, one of the cruellest dictators of our times, all hell broke loose. The floodgates opened a flurry of lunacy that lasted for a decade.

You had that mendacious filmmaker Michael Moore with his ridiculous *Fahrenheit 9-11*. You had that fascist clown George Galloway feted on CBC and speaking at United Churches. A decrepit anti-war movement actually wanted to abandon the people of Afghanistan to the Taliban. Israeli apartheid week (a Canadian creation) started on campuses, and Queers Against Israeli Apartheid started marching in Gay Pride. Genocidal terror groups Hamas and Hezbollah could target civilians and people would blame Israel. The United Nations was now run by dictatorships. And pathological holocaust deniers like Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad were invited to speak at Columbia University.

And then, in 2006, Stephen Harper had the gall to be elected Prime Minister. We were now deep into the era of derangement – derangement about Bush, Harper, and Israel. One friend of mine was downtown in Ottawa on a day when Harper’s limousine happen to stop; he got out; and she noticed his icy blue eyes – to her, indicative of somebody who was evil.

So, I started a gay conservative blog, GayandRight, and I found a new political home in the Conservative party. Many gays objected to the fact that I was Conservative and many Conservatives objected to the fact I was gay. But, I also found lots and lots of gay people within the

conservative movement, and two of my friends and I started the biannual Fabulous Blue Tent party at Party conferences. Our last party was so packed that one cabinet minister couldn’t get in the front door. It was ultimately gratifying to see the Harper government accept thousands of gay refugees and to stand up for the rights of gay people around the world.

I also started the Free Thinking Film society to fight for liberty, freedom and democracy.

The left that I knew was long gone.

But my journey is not a typical left to right story. Guess what? The right has its own pathologies – different, for sure, from the left – but just as debilitating. I cringe when Sarah Palin talks just as I cringe when Justin



Trudeau talks. The left may want to “tax and spend” but the right has a very narrow playbook of just eliminating programs and cutting taxes, which, I believe, exposes some pretty empty thinking. Surely there is more to offer. The left has “truthers” and the right has “birthers”. There are isolationists in both the left and right – Ron Paul and Noam Chomsky both believe the U.S. had it

coming.

Neither side has a monopoly on truth and wisdom.

Fred Litwin is the Founder and President of the Free Thinking Film Society which is dedicated to showing films on freedom, liberty and democracy. His memoir on his political journey will be published in the Fall of 2015.

A conservative bureaucrat is an oxymoron, until he's not

by Philip Cross



After 36 years at Statistics Canada, I now work primarily for various think tanks, mostly on the conservative end of the political spectrum. I also write a bi-weekly column for the *Financial Post* op-ed page. Its editor asked one day how and why I had stayed in government all those years. Good question; the *Post* does not reflexively turn to former civil servants to articulate ideas about the functioning of capitalism and free markets. My journey from an unlikely beginning in government to finding my niche in the private sector may be instructive for others, especially the usefulness of exposure to both sectors since the two are so different. The record will show my conservative beliefs have been the result of education and evolution, not a eureka moment of enlightenment, and that they continue to mature based on my experiences in the private sector and reflections on my time in government.

I am a third generation federal civil servant – my father was a government scientist and my mother a nurse, so not a lot of dinner conversations involved starting your own business (and indeed all my siblings ended up in working in government). I entered the civil service at Statistics Canada in the mid-1970s fully expecting to continue in this tradition. Not surprisingly, I was surrounded by professionals who shared my family's belief in public service, even if this was partly based on ignorance

or cynicism about the private sector. Most colleagues had an interventionist bent; one rarely met a senior public servant who did not advocate specific government actions to achieve a desired outcome. Cultivating a climate for business firms to innovate and grow or documenting the downside of government policies were not major priorities.

My initial drift to more conservative leanings accelerated in my job as editor of the *Canadian Economic Observer*, Statistics Canada's monthly flagship for economic statistics starting in 1988. This provided a unique vantage point to observe how the economy functioned, especially what did



or did not work in the real world. For example, while many were engaged in a theoretical argument about whether government deficits mattered as the federal debt mounted in the 1980s and early 1990s, it became evident to me

that economies with low debt levels perform better while maintaining a capacity for the automatic stabilisers of fiscal policy to activate during the inevitable times of crisis. I also began to understand the primordial role of business investment in generating jobs, raising productivity and sustaining prosperity, and wrote extensively on the subject.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, it was clear that market forces inevitably triumphed in the long-run, because they best served what the majority of people wanted. More fundamentally, capitalism maximizes economic freedom, which is intertwined with political freedom. As noted by leading conservative economists such as [John Taylor](#) and [Milton Friedman](#), more freedom is desirable in itself; the enhanced standard of living that capitalism provides is just a bonus. Ultimately, markets are the only system equipped to cope with the fundamentals of human nature. Although my lifelong study of business cycles made me acutely aware that capitalism is prone to recurring periods of boom and bust, I learned the folly of arrogantly assuming government knew best and should direct or nudge people's behaviour, especially when that went against the grain of human nature. More often than not, the destination did not prove as desirable as government imagined or the program was subverted by unexpected side effects as people altered their behaviour in response to government actions.

Statistics Canada expanded my role to include monitoring the quality of its macroeconomic data. The constant exposure to the shortcomings of data ingrained a growing skepticism that the economy can only, or even best, be understood by data. A running joke at Statistics Canada during the 1980s, when it was being hailed as the world's best statistical agency, was that you can be the best but still not be very good. Spend enough time studying the imperfections of data and anyone would become cynical about trusting "just the facts" to speak for themselves. Moreover, too many analysts were interested in putting an ideological spin on the facts being presented to the Canadian public, advancing opinions cleverly disguised and presented as facts. My innate conservatism provided a good foil for screening Statcan releases for unwelcome ideology. To give management its due, Statcan recognized the usefulness of this perspective, creating a unique role for me within the organization. This culminated in my appointment as Chief Economic Analyst at Statcan in 2010 by Munir Sheikh, then newly installed as Chief Statistician of Canada.

At the same time, presenting arguments in a way that would be understood by people predisposed to disagree forced me to constantly challenge and refine both my

thinking about economic problems and its expression. The usefulness of this dialectic is not appreciated enough. William F. Buckley, whose work influenced me as far back as university, regularly debated John Kenneth Galbraith on his TV program 'Firing Line' to sharpen his arguments and inform the audience (while demonstrating Galbraith's grasp of economics was unsound).

Many government departments fall prone to the 'group think' that discourages contradictory opinions. It is instructive that the most outraged reactions to my post-Statcan work, especially my columns in the *Post*, come from former senior civil servants. Part of their heightened affront is the presumption that I should know better, having been exposed to the 'correct' thinking of interventionists and progressives for so long.

My conservative leanings were not as overt or developed while working at Statcan as they became after leaving. Indeed, one of the crowning moments validating my integrity occurred after I left the public service, when a former Statcan senior manager asked "if I had fallen on my head." In an organization like Statcan, which should be politically neutral, people should be unsure about your true political leanings. So it was reassuring that some managers were surprised by my post-Statcan opinions. One of Munir Sheikh's important legacies as Chief Statistician was a heightened awareness that Statcan's "credibility is tied to our neutrality and our independence", in the words of his successor, Statcan should not be a platform for broadcasting political messages, although many people inside and outside try to manipulate it for exactly that purpose. They ignore or don't care how this debasement of the Statcan 'brand' would undermine the credibility of the very platform they want to hijack. You can become as outspoken as you want in

your views after leaving government, but first you must leave the civil service and its creature comforts.

I left Statistics Canada in February 2012; like the ex-football player Ricky Williams, I like to say "I didn't retire; I graduated." Leaving government meant there was a risk of sinking into oblivion and irrelevance, an undesirable outcome after a high profile career in government. I worked at the small Macdonald-Laurier Institute as research director for a year, which introduced me to the workings of a think tank. Since then, I have had contracts with a wide range of think tanks, academics and business firms (and on rare occasions, government). Now established in the private sector, I have the choice of accepting only projects that interest me – a major improvement from being at the beck and call of an employer. From this vantage point it is hard to understand

“Most colleagues had an interventionist bent; one rarely met a senior public servant who did not advocate specific government actions to achieve a desired outcome.”

the assumption that self-employed jobs are inferior; for many, the flexibility and independence they offer is the pinnacle of the labour market.

There are good reasons why I have become more conservative since leaving government service. As a civil servant, government was many things, including my paternalistic paymaster and constant reminder of my family's deep roots in public service. However, after leaving the civil service I broke the family mould by starting my own business. Being self-employed completely changes one's perspective on government. Government is now the source of a web of taxes and regulations, such as requiring a GST return every quarter with all the book-keeping compliance requires. (Economists who wonder why policies like the GST have not boosted Canada's productivity should be made to fill in those forms for a year.) So contact with government is now more burdensome and adversarial than during my time as a civil servant, and my views have changed accordingly.

Fuelling my growing disenchantment with government is the fact that working in the private sector has surpassed anything I imagined possible. The focus is on results, not process. I don't waste large chunks of time in pointless, stupefying meetings designed with no real purpose other than to fill up someone's agenda calendar. Risk-taking is encouraged, flexibility exalted, and a premium attached to creativity. A great example of all these traits at work was a [scathing review](#) I wrote about the film *Melancholia*. I submitted it, knowing it did not fit the format of FP Comment but convinced it was an interesting column. Terry Corcoran, editor of FP Comment, saw the problem and immediately thought of a solution. He created a new feature called FP Comment At The Movies, and made my piece the inaugural column. This was done in a couple of hours. Creating a new feature in government would have taken weeks if not months for approval from myriad committees and testing of focal groups.

Working in the private sector also pushed me to learn a wide range of new skills, including how to operate a business in a virtual world of researchers and publishers,

how to write an op-ed, public speaking and even business travel (something I avoided in government). It has taken time to learn new skills, especially without the resource support available in the public service. Helping with this process of adaptation and change were a wide range of people in the private sector who are every bit as unselfish and generous with their time and knowledge as public servants, but without the self-congratulation public servants never tire of (the federal civil service celebrates itself for a week every summer, while businesses host customer appreciation events).

Still, freedom is the best perk of working in the private sector. One can write an email without worrying if it will appear on the front page of a newspaper after being hit with an access to information request (a good example of how a well-intentioned policy backfires in practice, because it did not account for how people would adapt to it). There is the freedom to work on projects you choose and to pursue ideas to their logical conclusion, rather than tailoring them to be politically correct and socially acceptable. There is also the freedom from the fishbowl of working in a bureaucracy more focused on appearances than substance. No one cares anymore what shoes I wear or what car I drive. All that counts is being intelligent, productive and creative.

Since leaving government, people frequently ask what I was doing in government since I am obviously more at

home professionally and ideologically in the private sector. I don't really have an answer for why I stayed in government so long, other than at some point one becomes a prisoner of the security and routine of the civil service such that it is difficult to imagine that there is another way of doing things. If I had known how differently the private sector evaluated people than the public service, I would have left years earlier. With any luck, my post-government career should be at least half as long as the one I had inside government, while being many times more productive and satisfying.



The fall of the Berlin Wall signaled the triumph of market forces.

Among his other post-government endeavours, Ottawa-based Philip Cross maintains an economics website called [InsidetheNumbers.org](#).



The Calgarian who loved Alberta so much he became a Liberal

By Warren Kinsella



In my limited experience, one's political origins originate with the The Four Ps. That is: the Place where one grows up; one's Parents, or parental equivalents; the Politics of the era; and some memorable Personal event. The Four Ps explain, for the most part, why most of the people I grew up with in Calgary were conservatives, small and large "C." Calgary, perhaps more than any other city in Canada, is decidedly conservative. The politics of Calgary, in this or any era, are equally conservative. If your parents spent any time at all in Calgary – whether they be from Whitehorse or Witless Bay – they often succumbed to the right-tilting zeitgeist of the place.

And the "personal" part of the formulation? Well, most of us look at politics through the prism of economics. And the economics of Alberta have been rather good, thank you very much, for many, many years. Those who arrive there tend to stay there. And the pre-oil-price-crash economics of Calgary – as they manifest themselves in things like jobs, quality of life and disposable income – compare favourably to other places in Canada and the world.

It's a good place to grow up in (although a debate persists about whether I ever truly grew up, at all). But however much I love Calgary (and I do), and however much I regard it as my true home town (and I do), one thing cannot be denied: I am a Calgarian who is not a Conservative.

I had no shortage of opportunity to become one, whether of the Progressive Conservative, Reform, Alliance or Conservative variety. Wherever I looked, in my youth, conservatives littered the landscape. They were endlessly organizing to bring things together (Uniting The Right) or tear them asunder (Western Canada Concept). Alberta conservatives ran the provincial government, most municipal governments and – periodically – the federal government itself. Their priorities, and their people, dominated the agenda. The notion that something other a conservative could become Premier of Alberta seemed far-fetched, like unicorns, or Nickelback possessing talent.

Thus, Conservatives were, and are, everywhere in Wild Rose Country. If you were from there, you were one. Any other political persuasions that existed in Calgary were exceedingly rare, and protected only by endangered species legislation. It wasn't against the law to be a Liberal in Calgary, of course, but it was an excellent way to get singled out in Social Studies class by your home room teacher as a "communist." Which, at Bishop Carroll High School, I was (thanks, Mr. Zelinski). It was a good way to not fit in. Which, mostly, I didn't.

I arrived in Alberta with my family in 1975. The five of us – my artist Mom, my doctor Dad, and two brothers who were younger than me and therefore immaterial – were Irish Catholics who had been born in Montreal. As such, being Liberal was in our DNA. It was part of our genetic coding. We could not help ourselves.

We had left Montreal because the Quebec language

and culture wars had gotten to be a bit much. Many of our English-speaking friends and relatives were doing likewise, choosing discretion over valour, and scooting down the 401 to The Great Satan, Toronto. Our family was the only one that chose a place that was in a different time zone, however. My Dad was a doctor who did medical research, and there was research money to be had in Alberta, praise be to Premier Lougheed. So off we went – me, Mom, Dad, and the two brothers whose existence I acknowledged as little as possible.

From the start, we were welcome. In the Seventies, Albertans were open and generous and neighbourly. They greeted us with open arms, and we soon had many friends. My two best friends were Calgarians, and they remain my best friends to this day. Neighbourliness notwithstanding, one fact could not be glossed over, even in polite company: we were Liberals. In Calgary. On the streets, in Calgary. With Liberal membership cards, in Calgary.

Spending my teenage years in Calgary, I was not always aware that I possessed political views that were anathema. There were, however, moments when the uniqueness of our situation was brought home to me. Being called “a communist” by the aforementioned home room teacher, for sure. Being described as a “Marxist agitator” by the exceedingly thoughtful Vice-Principal at St. Bonaventure Junior High School – that, too. Also memorable: finding the Canadian flag we kept on our roof burned to cinders, one day, at the nadir of the National Energy Program imbroglio.

Me: “Why did they go up on our roof and burn the Canadian flag, Dad?”

Dad: “Good question. Go buy us another flag.”

Flag-burning incidents aside, we were not infrequently asked how we came to be Liberals in Calgary. Did we take a wrong turn on the Trans Canada? Were we serving out some sort of a prison sentence, and our Lake Bonavista neighbourhood was to be our well-to-do gulag? They were fair questions.

My parents, per The Four Ps above, were a big part of it. I drove them batty, of course – the time I was almost arrested for inciting a riot at a punk rock show at the Calgary Stampede remains one cherished Kinsella family memory – but they were the best parents a guy could have. If they were

Liberals, I didn’t see any reason why I couldn’t be a Liberal, too.

The place that is Calgary, as noted, is decidedly conservative. Fine. But it was the very ubiquity of conservative philosophy – it was so all-encompassing, it seemed to be part of the very air itself – that compelled us to remain liberals and Liberals. Democracy, like Newtonian physics, requires opposite and equal forces. We wouldn’t ever be equal to the conservative juggernaut, but we’d try. It felt right.

The politics of Alberta in the Seventies, as noted, were very, very conservative. The NEP was an unmitigated disaster, a policy Viet Nam conceived in spite and jealousy. As a Liberal – and as a Liberal who would later become Special Assistant to a Liberal Prime Minister – the NEP disgusted and appalled me. Still does.

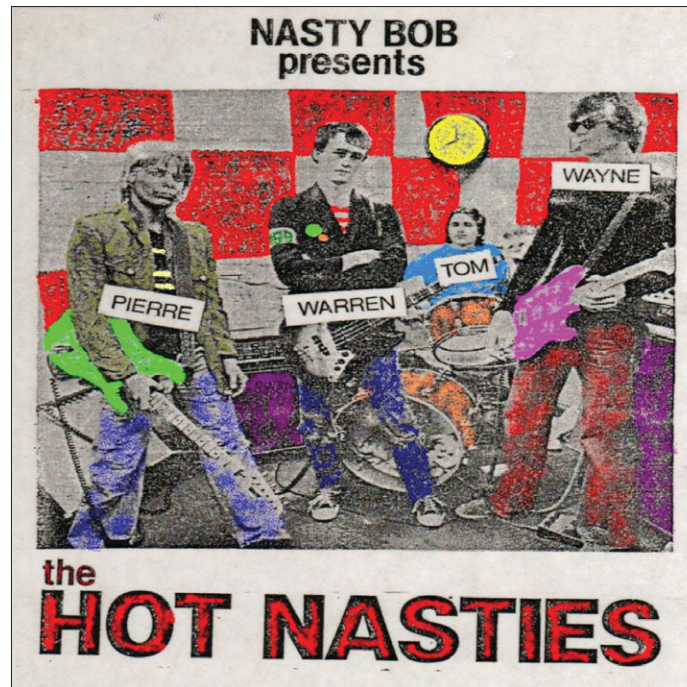
Opposing the NEP was legitimate. Opposing it was right. But the way in which some of that opposition manifested itself – most notably with the nativism and xenophobia of the Western separatist movement – shocked us. We had left Quebec to get away from the separatists. We therefore were damned if we were going to let it fester in our new home.

Thus arrived my political awakening. At the time, I was the lead screamer in a ham-fisted high school punk quartet

called the Hot Nasties. Our songs were almost entirely about girls and being teenagers. But when the dark, seamy underbelly of Western separatism revealed itself – and when I saw too many otherwise-respectable folks being sucked into its abyss – I got active. In no time at all, I was organizing “Rock Against Western Separatism” and “Rock Against Racism” gigs at local community halls, and writing songs about the inadvisability of carving up perfectly good countries because you are angry at someone.

I started looking around for a political party that shared my point of view. The New Democrats had no power, and never would. The PCs, appallingly, were playing footsie with the separatists.

So I joined the Liberal Party of Alberta – not, I note, the federal Liberal Party – when the Western separatist movement was at its greatest strength. I strode into the offices of the provincial party wearing my cherished biker’s jacket, purchased at the Boutique of Leathers in Southcentre Mall on MacLeod Trail. I forked over the cost of a membership to one Nick Taylor,



then leader of the Alberta Grits. He looked nervous. (He later told me he had been worried I was there to rob the place, not sign up.)

Punk rock, while fun, was an inadequate vehicle for opposing a surging separatist movement. Most of the kids who attended our shows were there to have a good time, not to debate the intricacies of sovereignty and energy policy. So I got more involved with the Liberals, provincial and otherwise, and have only regretted it about a hundred times in the intervening years.

Along with the influence of my folks – who deeply loved Alberta, and Albertans, and only left the place to be closer their grandchildren – the thing that propelled me towards liberalism, and Liberals, was that extraordinary year, 1979-1980. That was the year that things got a bit crazy, at both ends of the country. And, while my family and I opposed the NEP, we certainly didn't think opposing it should entail wrecking the country. We'd had quite enough of that sort of nonsense in Quebec, thank you very much, and we were in no rush to relive the experience.

As I have gotten ever-older – and as I have lived and toiled in places as diverse as Dallas, Kingston, Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver, and yes, The Great Satan itself – I have come to recognize that our political differences are

negligible. Ideological distinctions are exaggerated by political people, because it is in their self-interest to do so. But most Canadians, wherever they may be, are good and decent folks. And Albertans, however stubbornly conservative they may be, are among the most good and the most decent.

It is an imperfect country, quite often led by imperfect people. Sometimes, they make bad decisions. The response to that should be as measured as it is democratic. The response to that should not ever be blowing the place up.

That, more than anything else, is how this Alberta Liberal came to be Liberal in Alberta. It was my parents, a bit. It was the place, and some of the politics of the era, to be sure. But, mainly, it was because of a pretty personal reaction to the events of that year, 1979-1980, when assorted Albertans were running around, trying to reinvent the wheel. Western separatism, to me, was as dumb as the NEP that gave rise to it.

Per the words of Pierre Trudeau, I became a Liberal to put Alberta in its place. And Alberta's place is – was, and always will be – in Canada.

Warren Kinsella is a Toronto-based lawyer, author, bon vivant and columnist. He is not profound, but he enjoys a good scrap.

My head and heart, always in the Right place

by Lydia Miljan



I must have no heart, as I can safely say I have never been a socialist, or even had socialist leanings. The die was probably cast when I was about five years old, sitting on my father's knee. My parents were new immigrants to Canada in the 1960s. To make

ends meet in their early years my father would work during the day as a bricklayer and my mother would clean offices in the evening. While my mother worked, my father was entrusted with the care of my older brother and myself. Rather than sit us in front of a television – mostly because we only had two channels and nothing really of interest to a pre-schooler and third grader – he would play guitar and teach us about life.

On one occasion, after he exhausted all the music he knew, he talked to us about political parties. He mentioned the Conservatives, the Liberals, and the Communists. He might have said NDP, but I remember Communism because he made the point that the ideology was based on a book written by one man. I found that fascinating

that people would change their way of life just because some guy wrote a book. From his description, it didn't even sound like that much of a book. To be fair, my father was biased; he escaped socialist Yugoslavia in the 1950s because he could see as an ambitious young man that he would never make it in that country. His explanation about the role of government in the socialist state coloured my perception of state dominance and control. I would never be a fan of either.



When I finished high school I went straight to the Political Science department at the University of Calgary. At the time the department was in its most productive years of what would be later called the Calgary School. I sat in seminars with Barry Cooper and Tom Flanagan. Later, during my PhD., I would take classes with Rainer Knopff and Ted Morton. From Cooper I learned about Canadian federalism, Leo Strauss, Eric Vogelín, Hannah Arendt, and Karl Marx. From Flanagan, I learned about Aboriginal politics, Millenarian movements, and Liberalism. I thoroughly enjoyed those years as those courses and those professors provided me with the foundation of classical liberal thought. They also made valiant attempts to help me improve my writing. On one poorly constructed essay I submitted, Flanagan wrote that my future would be in jeopardy unless my writing improved. As devastating as the comments were at the time, they inspired me to do better.

During one summer between my BA and MA, Cooper had me work on a content analysis of CBC radio news. The paper that resulted from that study, "Bias at the CBC?", was presented to the Canadian Political Science Association meeting in Winnipeg the following summer. A small media frenzy ensued, with some communications media scholars denouncing our work, and the President of the CBC, no less, calling for a reprimand of Dr. Cooper. It also resulted in Mike Walker, then-President of the Fraser Institute, learning of our work and making it a personal project of his to raise some funds to further this research. By the time I finished my MA in Communications, Walker had raised enough money to fund a project that would later be known as the National Media Archive.

When I started at the Fraser Institute I didn't self-identify as a conservative. Early on Walter Block, the American libertarian economist who was then with the Institute, asked me about my political beliefs. I rather awkwardly replied that I didn't have any. He graciously avoided challenging me on the subject, but the conversation got me thinking more deeply about where I stood. I read his brilliant and controversial libertarian manifesto, *Defending the Undefendable*, and an equally provocative article he wrote on abortion, which still sticks with me.

Published in *Reason* magazine in 1978, Block's essay offered a libertarian compromise on abortion. He noted that while the unborn child was trespassing in the mother's womb and she could on those grounds evict the child, she nonetheless had a duty to do no harm. His analogy was that of a dinner guest who overstayed his welcome. Certainly the dinner guest's hosts had a right to ask him to leave after the party, but they did not have a right to end his life if he



refused. The problem, then, was how does one evict an unborn child without taking their life? Since there is no way to do so, Block argued for a compromise based on property rights. This acknowledged a woman's right to "evict" her unwanted fetus, but only in a manner that is as gentle as possible and does no harm to the unborn child. That argument resonated with me and to this day I think it ought to have a larger role in the mainstream debate over abortion.

Fraser Institute staff were encouraged to read widely, beyond the writings of our in-house authors. The Institute subscribed to a wide range of publications including the *New Republic*, *Commentary*, *The Economist*, *Reason*, and the *Public Interest*. These magazines opened my eyes to the world far beyond what I got from my media analyses of CBC and CTV news.

My horizons were further expanded by Institute luncheon events with conservative speakers from around the world. Former U.S. President Gerald Ford was the guest at my first such event, but over the 14 years I worked at the Institute I would attend many more featuring the likes of Margaret Thatcher, former Prime Minister of Great Britain, Milton Friedman, Nobel Laureate, and Ralph Klein, former Alberta Premier, to name a few.

In addition to the great speakers who graced us with their presence, the Fraser Institute was home to a number of visiting scholars. Economists such as Herbert Grubel, Stephen Easton, Zane Spindler, and Steven Gliberman would work on research projects and provide intellectual stimulus in the office. I clearly was not the only beneficiary of the Institute's education. Many students who passed through our offices during those years would later become leading figures in the conservative movement.

All during this time, I learned about free market economics. Mike Walker had a wonderful way of using storytelling to explain complex economic ideas. At the core of these lessons was a simple truth: people are better than governments at making decisions for themselves. With all due respect to Winston Churchill, the quote often attributed to him that a person who is not a socialist in their twenties has no heart is a false premise. It assumes there is only one way to solve the problems of the poor. What I learned at the Fraser Institute and from the readings and people I came into contact with was that government solutions to social problems such as poverty often only perpetuated the problem and created dependency.

Despite my admission at the outset of this narrative that I mustn't have a heart, in fact, I do care about those less fortunate than myself. But growing up in a working class

family who struggled in the beginning without the aid of government assistance, the lesson I learned is that we survived and thrived based on our own good judgement and hard work. It was only when well intentioned, but mismanaged government policies came our way that we suffered. And suffer we did; the National Energy Program was one such policy that harmed many people in Alberta, including my family, although we fared better than some of our friends and neighbours who lost their livelihoods, and in some cases their homes. In that case, certainly, the market would have been a much better friend to us than the government ever was.

We are all the products of our upbringing and those we have come into contact with. Given my first hand encounters with the brightest and best right-wing intellectuals of the 20th century, and my experiences with Alberta's booms and busts, how could I be other than a conservative?

And yet, here I am mid-career at a university in the heart of a union-dominated city in southwestern Ontario. I certainly didn't expect that turn of events and when I started I was a little concerned about how my views would be received by both faculty and the students. For the most part, faculty tend to leave each other alone, and apart from the odd disparaging remark at union meetings aimed at the Fraser Institute, I tend to be shielded from any overt hostility.

As for my students, many have said that they find my classes refreshing because I offer content quite different from that of my colleagues. Some worry that they have to take my

political view in order to get good grades. I try to assure them that what matters to me is that they make their case, and if they can provide good evidence, I'm not going to penalize them for disagreeing with me. After all, I am confident that students will in time come to see the wisdom of conservative and libertarian writers.

A few years ago a student who described himself as a Marxist was in one of my seminar classes. He was openly hostile to the prospect of reading an article published by the Cato Institute on the economic crisis. I asked him to read it anyway as we would be discussing the content in the next class. A week later when we took up the reading, the student said that he had a complete reversal of his previous thinking. Apparently he wasn't a Marxist after all but in fact a libertarian. The rest of the semester he worked on his policy paper from a libertarian perspective. He then decided that his goal was to work for a market-orientated think tank. He ended up interning at the Fraser Institute as well as the Frontier Centre for Public Policy and is now a policy analyst for the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies. As a teacher, it is gratifying to see how the ideas that influenced me are now influencing the next generation.

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No political home but my own

by Bernd Schmidt



I've been told that I belong to the boomer generation. I was born in post-war Germany. Frankfurt, to be precise – a city that had been bombed into ruins. Until I was six, I lived in ruins: houses with sections missing, rooms with no doors, no running water, a toilet in the courtyard. My brothers and I played in ruins. This was where I first started to learn about the world.

Looking out onto the street from our second floor apartment, I would often see men in sleeping bags on the sidewalk, next to a truck or a tracked vehicle: soldiers, American soldiers. While playing on the street, we kids would shyly walk closer. We learned the word "chewing gum," but of course mispronounced the "w" as a "v." It delighted them and they would give us candies or small brown tins of milk powder. My father would often help them



with various things, as a translator or chauffeur, and would get paid in packs of Lucky Strikes or Camels. Cigarettes were, after all, the currency of the time. I loved Americans. They were friendly; they had things.

My parents, like most of their generation, were politically apathetic. No one talked about politics in Germany in the Fifties. Of course at that age I didn't know what that meant – being political. I knew that the Nazis had done bad things, but I had no frame of reference of what constituted “good” politics.

The uprising against the Soviets in East Germany on the 17th of June 1953 had no meaning for me. I didn't even know about it while it was happening. But as I proceeded through elementary school, I took note of some “political” events; a new German Army, a treaty with France and other European countries, France's difficulties in Algeria. I heard the name “Mau Mau.” There was a revolt in Hungary and Russian tanks were deployed. I came to dislike Russia, the Soviet Union. And I still liked America a lot.

I remember reading a slogan during some federal election, “On Saturday Daddy belongs to us.” I liked it; I liked the people who wrote it.

Everyone loved the chancellor. He brought prosperity and material goods. My dad had a good job, so we could afford a nanny from the East. Nothing spectacular happened in the Fifties – at least nothing that I would have noticed. Elvis Presley sang in German; America discovered das “Deutsche Fräulein.” There was another election. This time the slogan affirmed stability – “Keine Experimente!” – no experiments. It had a good ring to it. That party won by a landslide.

The later high school years brought the Beatles, long hair, and a pronounced fear of a nuclear war between the superpowers. Germany would have been right in the middle. In school, we'd predict how Russian tanks would push through the “Fulda Gap”, charging for the Atlantic. Our teachers made us practice getting underneath our desks. Joan Baez and Bob Dylan provided the soundtrack to my youth.

These years brought something else – a reckoning with our parents' generation.

“How could you let this happen?” The war, the Holocaust, the partitioning of Germany, the threat of nuclear destruction. “Don't trust anyone over thirty!” became the slogan of the day. Our parents had avoided talking about politics; my generation talked of little else. Germany buzzed in the Sixties, especially the universities. I found it hard to settle on a comfortable political home amid all the high-voltage choices. Marx and Lenin were re-discovered, along with Mao, Che Guevara, Frantz Fanon. The Americans were fighting a war in South East Asia – a colonial war. My contemporaries were very much anti-American. “U.S.A.-S.A.-S.S.” was their battle cry.

I had joined the youth organization of the German Social Democrats. Friends brought me into it, mostly. Willy Brandt, their leader, had been the mayor of Berlin when President

“I consider myself a political traveller. But there are ports which I will never sail into.”

Kennedy came there. Brandt been exiled during the war and was not tarnished by the Nazi past. He was someone to look up to.

The Six Day War in 1967 created my first political conundrum. My heart was with the Israelis; I kept newspaper clippings and followed the campaigns closely. I had finished high school and was doing an internship. Many of my classmates had gone to university and

their support lay with the Arabs. Over coffee and cigarettes – still the currency of the day – we would debate in cafes for hours. I'd established a position that I could defend in support of Israel. It felt good to stand for something, and to debate it well with others.

In '68 a lot happened all at once. I started university in Munich; the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia; French students fought the police in the streets of Paris and Nanterre in hopes that de Gaulle would resign; the military in Greece putsched; the Viet Cong launched the Tet Offensive.

In Germany, as elsewhere in Europe, radical students wanted to fire up the masses, and ended up becoming criminals. In the U.S., the civil rights movement gained traction. Students were killed in campus protests. Chicago and Detroit were torched. The Black Panthers talked about armed uprisings. I transferred to the Freie Universitaet in Berlin to study political science. I attended seminars on Karl Marx and studied *Das Kapital* and Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?*

Berlin was a volatile place in the Seventies. I was excited by the activity, by the potential to change things, but not by the politics that drove it. My wife and I smuggled someone across the Berlin wall. We gave false testimony to protect our friends. We went to protests and carried signs. But we did it for the sake of those actions themselves, not for Ho Chi Minh or for Che. My fellow students organized in socialist groups bent on imploding the “Establishment” that their parents had built. A full buffet of political ideologies was available on every campus – Leninists, Trotskyists, Maoists. But it seemed that these organizations were almost as authoritarian as the much-reviled organizations to which their parents had belonged.

A few years later, in the mid-seventies, the Americans pulled out of South East Asia. What came after was not pleasant. The Khmer Rouge killed a million people while the North Vietnamese cleansed the South.

Whichever cause I tried to latch onto bared its ugly underbelly before long. I wanted, but still couldn't find, a political home. All of the options were seriously flawed. I drifted towards Anarchism. I got away from party lines and political organizations. My partisanship belonged in my soul, not on a membership card in my wallet. The violent political upheavals of the Sixties and Seventies had not dented my belief that humans could sort out their issues based on compassion. If anything they'd only strengthened my conviction that ideologies, and the parties that coalesced around them, were more often a hindrance than a help to human progress. I could not tolerate any party that prescribed



Russians in Hungary; Americans in Vietnam

how people should do things. Plus, my experience had been that many political activists were only in it for the money (as Frank Zappa understood before me), and they often despised the very masses for whom they were allegedly doing their politicking.

In 1978 my wife and I moved to the Yukon. People were more relaxed in Canada – maybe because of the space. Political discussions were nothing like the verbal battles in Europe that I was used to. Frequently, much to my chagrin, the conversation ended before I was even warmed up. There seemed to be an aversion to controversy. Passionate debate was impolite, I learned. My wife and I weren't used to this. When a federal minister flew into Whitehorse, we showed up at the airport draped in white sheets to protest the testing of cruise missiles down the Mackenzie River corridor. None of our friends joined us.

Meanwhile, the Iranians had a revolution and the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. In Nicaragua, Panama, Guatemala, El Salvador, Chile, and numerous African countries, "revolutionary" movements were active. In almost all cases the end result far from improved most people's lives. My faith in the new ideologies had already faded. Now it was fully quashed.

If my political journey seems chaotic, it's because it has been. Entropy has still not given way to resolution, but I've realized that at the root of my politics are two fundamental principles that have never wavered.

The first has to do with human purpose. I believe that the general goal of life should have something to do with the survival and betterment of the whole species. For most of my time, that was widely accepted. But by the mid-Seventies, in the wake of the feminist and civil rights movements, that purpose had changed. It wasn't about the species anymore; it was about the individual developing his or her potential to

the fullest. That was the beginning of the era of self-interest.

This development has impacted my second principle, which is that the human ability to generate and debate ideas should never be underestimated nor constrained. The age of individualism has fundamentally changed how people interact and even how they talk. We are, by some accounts, in an era of scientific innovation far beyond what Newton and Edison could have ever imagined. We develop new technologies almost daily. Yet the political correctness that has developed in complement to the advancement of the individual has, in many ways, stalled the innovation of ideas. Instead of

having debates worthy of the memory of the Enlightenment, we too often stifle ideas at their incipient stage because someone might take offence. Of course, we still argue about politics, about culture, about religion. But even then, we're often presented with a binary choice of views: Pro-development or pro-environment? Israel or Palestine? Obama or NObama? And your answer largely defines you in the views of others: You questioned aboriginal rights? Racist! You support sending troops to fight the Islamic State? Jingo! You want renewable power? Hippie!

These two principles are the standards against which I measure politics. I cannot stand anything that constrains human freedom, but this classical liberalism is

tempered by my belief that an individual's purpose should have some bearing on furthering society as a whole. The individual spirit and the collective good are the yin and yang of my political core.

My views on various issues are rooted in those principles but are otherwise dynamic. Finding a political "home", resting there, was never my goal. My politics remain an unfinished symphony, and I will integrate any new instrument or motif that seems worth adopting, as long as the harmony of the whole stays intact. Today, we too often defer either to the

“The individual spirit and the collective good are the yin and yang of my political core.”

party line or to the “nuances” of issues as an excuse for not taking a stand. I liked it better when we stood for things.

The wailings of an old man? I don't think so. Socrates was old. So was Aristotle. I'm not comparing myself to either. The point is that principles are, in my view, the best politics. They're sturdier than party platforms and harder to change than membership cards. To me, it's not a sign of ambivalence that I have found myself associating with various political streams over the years. I consider myself a political traveller. But there are ports which I will never sail into.

At the end of the day, it's no particular achievement or event I cherish most. It's my experience, and that can't be bought, sold, or traded. What I've learned is to stop chasing the next big thing. Too often, people are tempted to look for new solutions to modern issues. After all, the world is as much a mess today as it was sixty years ago – history seems to have little good to teach. But sometimes the road less travelled doesn't lead anywhere better than the well-worn path. History doesn't repeat, but issues do. And many of the issues we face today have precedents in the past. Syria is not the first Civil War. This is not the first time oil has crashed. Our kids are not the first generation to act up. There are good ideas to be found in the human archives. Experience remains the best research, and



we've been around long enough to have plenty of it. Perhaps the most important lesson I've learned in my time is that novelty and progress are not the same thing.

I am in my seventh decade now. I consider myself wiser than I was fifty years ago. Back then, my issues were less practical and more idealistic. I haven't given up on idealism, but, alas, I am no longer young. Experience has moderated my enthusiasm somewhat, and I can now appreciate the merits of small

practical steps towards big idealistic goals. Still, young minds ought to be involved in politics precisely because they are idealists. After all, it's not the wise but the naïve who come up with the greatest human endeavours because they have the audacity to imagine what could be instead of the memory to predict what will be. The old guard will close the practical damper soon enough.

Bernd Schmidt is a high school counsellor in Whitehorse. He has lived, hunted, hiked, skied and snowshoed in the Yukon for over 35 years and considers it the best place in the world.

The (short) political history of a Millennial

by Jeremy Cherlet



At 24, my political beliefs are a work in progress. I lean right on some issues, left on others, libertarian on most. Some of my peers – predominantly the leftists – are pretty opinionated, but most of them, I think, are politically unmotivated, and will never roll up their sleeves to see the results they want. For reasons I don't entirely understand, I caught the political bug early, and it became my focus in high school, then university. I liken the evolution of my political beliefs to the theory of evolutionary biology known as punctuated equilibrium. Mine

was no slow, plodding crawl of development, but rather dramatic changes – revelations, almost – that came about through major global events, books, personal relationships, and travel. For the purposes of this essay, I have narrowed it down to five experiences which have most profoundly influenced my political disposition – so far.

9-11 and the War on Terror

I was 10 years old on 9-11. I first heard about the attacks on a bus that morning, on my way to elementary school. Many of the other children on the bus had seen the first news reports about planes hitting buildings in New York. Their descriptions were at once terrifying and surreal, and



even after I saw the smoke, dust, flame, and rubble on television with my own eyes, I could not really comprehend what was happening. Mainly I was worried and bewildered. At that age I had enough trouble dealing with death as a concept; thousands of people dying as buildings collapsed was overwhelming. It took a few years before I could really get a grasp on what happened. Later, as a teenager, I would visit New York and see the haunting, empty space where the twin towers once stood. Only then did I fully grasp how devastating the attacks had been.

The repercussions of those attacks, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have been the dominant global political events of the majority of my life. I don't think of it as Orwellian perpetual war, but I haven't really known a time when Canada's military wasn't abroad fighting radical Islamists, when there wasn't a terrorist threat, or when the Middle East was not in violent turmoil somewhere.

The unrelenting images of the

destruction wrought by suicide bombings or drone strikes illustrated the human cost of war, as did the flag-draped caskets of fallen soldiers. While this prompted a pacifist, isolationist, or blame-America response from some, I came to believe in a capable and prepared military establishment, so that Canada could make meaningful contributions to world security and the destruction of these radical, destructive forces. It seemed to me that the Chretien-Martin era had

left our military in a moribund state, woefully ill-equipped for the Afghanistan mission, at least initially. Today I'm convinced that Canada should be spending well over the NATO target of two percent of GDP, and that the Department of Defense should be striving for a dynamic, adaptable and evolved force, capable of meeting a great variety of challenges.

The Internet

Being online has played such a huge part in how I've developed politically, and also in how I get

“The repercussions of 9-11, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have been the dominant global political events of my life.”

involved, that it's hard for me to imagine how people did these things effectively before the Internet. My life is organized online, much of my communication happens online, and most of the news I read is online. I'm readily involved in online communities, and the debates I've had online played a big role in shaping how I think to this day.

I can't really comprehend how volunteers could be mobilized and events organized before the advent of email lists and social media, because I'm so used to using these tools. Whenever I've wanted to volunteer on political campaigns, as I did a few years ago to elect our current Edmonton Mayor Don Iveson, I was able to quickly sign up and get information online. Currently I'm working on the campaign of a neighbour, an Alberta NDP candidate, and much of our organization and outreach is done via online tools. I don't know what political activism used to look like, but it must have been a lot harder and less efficient than it is today. Anyone involved in politics can access the work of think-tanks, read the reports of groups like the Canadian Taxpayer's Federation, and track media reports about your candidates and their opponents, all from home.

The Web has also broadened my knowledge of political philosophy, and sharpened my skills as a political debater. When I was interested in learning about libertarianism, for example, which had never come up in conversation with my family, neighbours, and friends, I was able to go online to quench my thirst. Forums, blogs, and other community driven sites not only provided information; I could involve myself (completely anonymously) in debates and arguments, and have somewhat meaningful discussions. The importance of this debate to me can't be understated; instead of bothering my friends with kooky ideas I could go online and bother strangers. My ideas develop best through debate, when I can see what others think and hear their perspectives, including new information which might make me reconsider my own views. The convenience, accessibility and risk-free anonymity turned online communities into one of the key incubators of my political ideas, which I think holds true for many others of my generation.

Israel

Now that I'm (a little) older and wiser, I can admit that as a teenager I not only willingly purchased Naomi Klein's books, but also agreed with much of what she wrote. In fact, some of her ideas have stuck with me – I still don't really trust multinational conglomerates. But there was one thing I never agreed with: her virulent anti-Israel stance. Many of my high school and university peers wholeheartedly believed that it was necessary to dismantle Israel, and I was

something of a scorned outsider for not supporting "Israeli apartheid week" and the boycott Israel campaigns. I was told that I supported the murder of Palestinian children when I tried to defend Israel's right to defend itself. The level of discourse was never very high, and chronically tainted by the overly emotional and reactionary speech.

When I was fortunate enough to visit Israel (and some surrounding nations) I found my views vindicated. I found it a modern, democratic and prosperous nation. I was especially impressed by the Israeli people, who in the face of terrorist attacks and neighbouring states calling for their destruction, had built an amazingly successful, open, and free homeland. Around Israeli cities I saw the ruins of buildings destroyed by suicide bombers, and the memorials to victims of terrorist attacks.

I think if my pro-Palestine peers in high school had seen the sites where Israelis were killed simply because they were Israeli (and to provoke Israel into retaliating), they might have changed their minds. I know the Palestinians have suffered terribly from retaliatory actions by the Israelis, but to me the weight of evidence clearly indicates the Palestinian political leadership – especially Hamas – is the main roadblock to peace and therefore the primary cause of Palestinian suffering.

Religion

Sometime during my mid-to-late teen years (likely around sixteen) I got my hands on copies of two new (for the time) bestselling books, *God is not Great*, by the late Christopher Hitchens, and *The God Delusion*, by Richard Dawkins. This isn't the place for a debate on the merit of these works; suffice to say that the books made a massive impression on someone who had never really taken to the lessons we were taught in Sunday school. I and many of my friends read these books, and as impressionable teenagers, anti-theism became an easy outlet for intellectual rebellion, with the religious right the main target of our scorn. I came to fear the fundamentalist Christian right as a group who would impose strict moral codes across society based on their own narrow beliefs.

Then I met an actual right wing Christian. Frank Heinrich, a former Salvation Army officer of strong faith and conviction, is a member of the German federal parliament for the Christian Democratic Union. Through an exchange program administered by the University of Alberta, he generously offered me an internship on his team. I wasn't there very long before I started re-evaluating my absolutist views demarcating faith and politics.

I had thought nothing good about the influence of religion on politics, but during that time I was working with someone who was among the most caring and dedicated people

“Online communities are one of the key incubators of my political ideas, which I think holds true for many others of my generation.”

that I had ever met. With Frank, and other members of his team, I never experienced a crusade, moral policing or intense social conservatism, but a desire to help humanity, create a stronger community, and work towards a better world. There was no “eureka” moment, where I realized I had been wrong for so many years, but rather a dawning realization that I had become somewhat bigoted in my adoption of the atheist movement. Being around Frank showed me just how important it was to have people of strong faith in politics, and the value of their perspective.

Germany

When talking to people who had lived in East Germany, under the communist regime which fell apart along with the USSR, it seemed that everyone had a story about the overbearing state. The father of a friend recalled when, not yet a teenager at the time, he was strictly disciplined at school for doing something perceived as disrespectful during an anthem. The police would later make a few visits to his parents to check up on their “loyalty.” The extremely stifling climate was such that even though people would regularly listen to West German radio and watch West German television, they could never speak about it for fear of punishment. I found some older Germans from the DDR to be less than forthcoming with personal information; they had been conditioned against free expression by their fear of secret police informers or agents.

Both the communist and Nazi regimes in Germany used surveillance as one of their key domestic weapons. Thus it disturbs me to see government in Canada continually expanding its information gathering apparatus. Although I don’t believe our (current) government has authoritarian leanings, wiretapping, data-mining and other electronic surveillance programs, justified in the name of copyright protection, anti-bullying, and public security, are in my



opinion serious intrusions into our lives by government.

Someone who had lived in communist East Germany told me that “we didn’t know how bad it was until after it was over,” referring to the scale of the state’s secret surveillance and domestic intelligence programs. I saw thousands of Germans out protesting when they learnt from Edward Snowden, in 2013, that their government had been secretly cooperating with the U.S. National Security Agency to generate massive amount of intelligence without any transparency. I wholeheartedly agree that this was government overstepping its bounds. The German experience with authoritarianism has made me increasingly wary of how our politicians and governments often conceal processes and block transparency initiatives, and how our

own surveillance and intelligence agencies are continually expanding their powers.

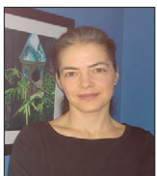
Lessons

If I’ve learned anything from roughly a decade and a half of political questing, it’s that I should never be too set in my ways. And I don’t think I am: While a trip to Israel reinforced my positive bias toward that nation, my opinion on the role of religion in politics drastically shifted after I worked under a person of strong faith. One constant has been my belief in the importance of political involvement – from signing a petition to serving in public office – in pursuit of trying to make a positive difference in the world.

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A pox on all your political parties

by Brigitte Pellerin



Mine is a story of reluctant political apathy, of a drift away from commitment. I’m not quite at the point where I don’t know who the premier of my province is. I mean, I know her name. And that she’s a Liberal, used to be in Dalton McGuinty’s cabinet, she jogs a lot. I also know who the leader

of the opposition is; well, at the moment in Ontario it’s sort of nobody but that’s OK, Tim Hudak was sort of a nobody, too. And there’s my problem: I don’t like the “Ins” one bit, but I have no faith in the “Outs” either. Nobody represents me, and I have better things to do with my time than bang my head against the walls of the legislature. Like gardening.

Now, before you go all Andrew Coyne on me and threaten compulsory voting to force me into a dimly-lit booth armed with a stubby pencil, I still think voting is important and good,



like most vaccines. I do trundle down to the local church basement at election time, if only because my husband nags me until I go. Also, I'm trying to model the behaviour of the Good Responsible Citizen for the kids. But my heart's not in it.

It used to be. I started caring a lot about politics around 15 when I read Karl Marx. He was sort of a big thing in high school, an age where irresponsibility feels grownup. Perhaps you remember it. I do. Back then I shaved half my head, and went all power to the proletariat. I also scrawled peace signs in magic marker on my canvas book bag. At that age, it's cool to be stupid, and I was pretty good at it. I was going to stick it to "the man," who had obviously never been young and never heard all my brilliant arguments before. It couldn't fail.

To be honest, all those brilliant arguments, like the half-bald hairstyle, seemed to work better inside my head than on anyone outside it. But the idea of social justice continued to appeal to me greatly. Especially as I was broke and keenly interested in schemes whereby I could get my hands on other people's money.

Then I got a job at McDonald's (initial salary: \$3.54/hour), and whoa, things changed...fast. My first paycheque was for \$11 and change, if memory serves. I'd only worked one shift in that pay period. My second paycheque, two weeks later, was over \$50. The third one was over \$100. I'd never been so rich, and what do you know, I ditched Karl Marx faster than you can say Quarter Pounder with cheese to go.

After that I flirted with various political options that, even as a Quebecoise, somehow never included Quebec separatism. I always thought it was a crazy, unrealistic idea that very few Quebecers took seriously anyway, other than as a tactical weapon to extract appeasement from *les maudits*

Anglais. And once I broke up with Karl I was never keen on governments of any sort. I spent most of my 20s and early 30s as a libertarian, then got married and became more of a small-c conservative. Blame the husband for turning me into a square(head), but not just him.

The terrorist attacks in September 2001 revealed that a great number of libertarians thought retaliating against bin Laden wasn't a good idea, which pushed me closer to the neocons. But it was all cool. Except for my brief but unrewarding fling with Tovarich Marx as a teenager, I've been on Team Liberty my whole life, and I followed politics and public affairs passionately. The TV was always tuned to a news channel while I wrote fiery articles in favour of more freedom and less government, and I was ready to change the world.

Of course I was prepared to meet resistance. I knew political opponents would take issue with my arguments. But what I never expected was the disheartening discovery that very few people in the conservative or otherwise right-wing movement in this country turned out to be on Team Liberty except rhetorically. Most of them were on Team Themselves. They put partisanship ahead of principle, and personal advancement ahead of party.

Eventually I had to face the facts. Stephen Harper's Conservatives are anything but. Tim Hudak's crew was beyond hopeless. Philippe Couillard's Quebec Liberals are worse. And as for Danielle Smith, ah, Danielle. I used to know and like her, back when she was principled. I miss her, too. But she's gone where they all seem to go.

The result is that I have no home, politically speaking. There is nobody out there who speaks to my heart. There is no major

party that is pro-life, for one thing. I know, I know, Stephen Harper always said he would not do anything about abortion, but I wish there was more room in that party for those of us who wish to continue debating the issue. I also wish the party took a clear and compassionate stance on assisted suicide in the wake of the Supreme Court's *Carter* decision. But no. We were told by the Justice Minister that his administration was in no rush to deal with this issue. I don't blame politicians for being reluctant to talk about issues of life and death, for obvious political reasons in this election year. But golly, to most normal people, who have strong feelings on this issue, this kind of political calculation stinks.

Conservatives are not interested in my heart, just my wallet. Sometimes they sweet-talk me with promises of tax cuts, but more often than not they try to bribe me, with my own money or someone else's, so that I might be more active physically or have more children under the age of six. They have not, so far, suggested I might accomplish the latter by cranking up the former, but I'm sure that's only a temporary oversight. Somebody is bound to come up with a subsidy for that. (Man, the bad jokes about stimulus programs and multiplier effects do write themselves, don't they?)

To be fair, the Harper administration has done a few positive things. Very few, mind you, but credit where credit is due, etc. I do like the fact that they got rid of the wheat board, and that they reduced the GST. (It was the wrong tax to reduce, but whatever, I can't afford to be too picky.) I'm tempted to add the scrapping of the gun registry, but unfortunately that one was only a half-hearted stab that did not much change the bureaucratic harassment endured by gun owners in provinces like Ontario. If they had really wanted to be useful, the Tories would have amended S. 58 (1) of the Firearms Act to curtail the powers of Chief Firearms Officers (gun-rights enthusiasts will know what I'm talking about – if you're not in that group, take heart; I'm just about done with this topic), but they didn't dare do that.

There is one thing I will give the Tories a good deal of credit for, and it is their handling of foreign affairs, especially their very strong pro-Israel stance. Canada is not in a position to have a very effective foreign policy since we have no military to speak of, but we can talk and on this file under Stephen Harper Canada is generally saying the right things, at the UN and elsewhere.

Yeah, that reminds me. The military. I am mightily annoyed with the Harper administration for continuing to let our military deteriorate. They didn't start this process, I know. It had long been underway by the time they reached office. But you'd think they might have tried harder to reverse the trend. We have wonderful men and women in this country ready to serve but they don't have enough equipment or senior NCOs to help shape them. What they have is hundreds of paper-pushing colonels in NDHQ, planes that are not fully

interoperable with our allies' aircraft, ships that are rusting out, helicopters that are older than me, and subs that catch fire. This won't do.

Worse has been the Harper administration's treatment of wounded veterans. There have been too many stories of vets having to fight Veterans Affairs – [like having to prove every year that the legs lost in Afghanistan have not magically grown back](#) – in order to get the pension to which they're entitled. These men and women were there for us when it mattered, but now we're letting them down, and this is not something I am prepared to swallow without protest.

Neither can I stomach the business of the prime minister's chief of staff paying the bogus expenses of a senator out of his own pocket, and the prime minister lying to Canadians about what happened and when.

When I complain about these issues to fellow right-wingers, they frequently agree with me that all is far from well in the right-wing part of the political spectrum, but end up saying something to the effect that, "Well, what can

we do? Perfection is not of this world and whatever their faults, the Harper Conservatives are better than any of the other parties." Blech.

Is Stephen Harper a less awful choice for prime minister than either Justin Trudeau or Tom Mulcair? Yeah, sure. I guess. But why is this the question? And why doesn't it bother my "fellow conservatives" a lot more?

I deeply resent being asked to vote for, and defend, nominally conservative options because the other guys are worse in theory, though indistinguishable in practice. They all spend tax dollars like they were an endlessly renewable resource. They all bribe voters with their own money. They all engage in corporate welfare. In opposition everyone promises efficiency and honesty, and in office everyone delivers extravagance and arrogance. To say this leaves me cold gravely understates the frostiness of my current relations with politics.

I understand nobody is perfect. But one of the promises this batch of Conservatives made to Canadians after the sponsorship scandal is that they would be better than the Liberals we

were just about to kick out of office. Now try to forget your partisan preferences for a moment and ask yourself honestly: Have the Tories kept that promise? Some people want to answer yes, on balance, they kinda did. But there's not a lot of enthusiasm behind their answer.

I am not satisfied to vote for the marginally least wretched option. I want politicians who leave my wallet alone and engage my heart and my mind with their vision of the society in which they want to live. I want to hear why they think Canada needs their governance. What they're going to do to make sure we pass along to our children a country that's healthier – financially, fiscally, environmentally – than the one we inherited. But all I get are variants of "the other guys reek more than us."

“I still think voting is important and good, like most vaccines. But my heart's not in it.”

I believe, more strongly than ever, in personal responsibility and our right to be left alone. But I now put most of my time and effort into cultivating my own garden, a far more useful and pleasant pursuit than the world of politics.

I refuse to be on Team Stephen, or Team Philippe or Team Whoever Eventually Replaces Tim Hudak to No Purpose Whatsoever. I'm on Team Liberty even if nobody else is. And

I'm enjoying my freedom from politics to no end.

Brigitte Pellerin is a writer, broadcaster, producer, and multimedia entrepreneur with over 15 years of experience in Canada's media environment. She has written about politics in French and English between 1998 and 2014 and is now writing fiction when she is not busy making documentaries with her husband, John Robson.



After Keynes & the NEP, I chose Rand & liberty

by Colby Cosh



Looking back on my intellectual development, I am struck more and more by how much of it was influenced by mere birthdate. Maybe nine-tenths of what it would be useful to know about me is captured in the date "1971". The people who grew up in the Great Depression have remained Depression people to the bitter end: the people who were young during the Sixties will always be Sixties people, even if it is manifested in a reaction to the Sixties.

What is distinctive about people in my age cohort is the childhood experience of rapid inflation. At the age of eight or nine you have, or rather we had, a trivial disposable income – pocket money for a glass bottle of Coke, some Mojoes, a fistful

of Double Bubble. Living with disco-era inflation was an early lesson in how public policy failure can make the most basic economic planning difficult, the more so the poorer you are. Prices at the corner store in Bon Accord, Alberta, would be adjusted upward from week to week: without warning that Coke would be fifty-five cents, or Mojoes one to the penny instead of two. If you had a bigger purchase in mind that involved actual saving of your allowance...good luck swimming upstream, kid.

I think the mental environment of a person born not very much later than this is radically different. The beginning of the Great Moderation in monetary behaviour is typically dated to about 1985: for anyone who started spending money outside their home after this, the solidity of a dollar has been more or less axiomatic. But Generation X has a Zimbabwean

lobe of its brain that dreads stealthy confiscation of its labour and savings.

Mostly, though, it may have just made us "slackers", to use a term that has followed this age cohort around. We are less concerned about dollar-denominated debt in our own lives, perhaps even in public affairs, than we are of inflation; we know dollars aren't quite real. And one must not forget the Cold War background – the certainty of our annihilation having been preached to us in the classroom from an early age; nay, not just preached, but depicted luridly in movies like *If You Love This Planet* and *The Day After* and the BBC's borderline-pornographic *Threads*. Big laughs in a town next to a major air base, I can tell you.

The rest of my birth certificate will add the information that my 1971 birth took place in Edmonton, Alberta – which brings up the National Energy Program, another thing it is probably impossible to comprehend if you weren't living in the crosshairs. The period from 1980 to 1983 in my hometown was a surreal interlude of vanishing classmates, houses left empty to degrade in the hands of the bank, and constant uncertainty. Our world of play was one of half-finished subdivisions, abandoned lots and foundations, and scavenged building materials.

My father, a heavy-duty mechanic, never went too long between jobs, though in the depths of the crisis he was pulling parts out of wrecked cars for a pal who had some sort of interest in a junkyard. The Seventies had advanced us from a trailer to a house, and we clung on to that progress, eating stewed tomatoes and crackers, wearing runners until the toes made a jailbreak.

If the ultra-fluid late-Seventies dollar had been a lesson, the NEP years were a headmaster's flogging. Not everyone in the neighbourhood was as lucky as us, and we all knew which houses held families who were fighting conditions to a draw, and in which ones they were badly behind on points. Dad was a night-shift driver for the town's volunteer ambulance service. When someone gave up and tried to be excused from the game, the first news of it would often be the ringing of a featureless black phone by his bedside.



This spectacle left me very ready for the anti-statist libertarian ideas that I and my friends began to discover in high school. When I bring up the NEP now, I am always assured by the best authorities that I ought not to despise politicians, even Liberal ones, for it. It was the drop in oil prices after 1980 that was really to blame. What I notice is that at the start of 1985, after Alberta had been thoroughly devastated, West Texas Intermediate was still standing at \$60 in today's dollars – a level the price would not get back to for another twenty years. Right now, before we Albertans go to bed at night, we are all praying like earnest wee children for WTI to come back to \$60.

If Alberta had been permitted to take advantage of world old prices, the effects of the NEP would obviously not have been so bomblike: it was a policy shock that had little to do with slowly dwindling oil prices, and anyone who thinks otherwise is kidding

himself. But of course the vandalistic intention of the NEP was never disguised by anybody at the time. It was not introduced or implemented apologetically; quite the opposite. *Je me souviens*.

The joke immortalized in Jerome Tuccille's libertarian memoir, *It Usually Begins With Ayn Rand*, certainly applies to the high school and undergraduate version of me. I devoured her published works, probably high on every word, and that strain persists in me, though it has been 20 years since I have gone back to those books for anything more than a purloinable bon mot or two. Rand's rationalist egoism, manifested as a hysterical suspicion of plaster saints and appeals to sentiment, remains my basic outlook.

But many of Rand's fellow-travellers, not to mention movement-libertarian types she hated like poison, made almost as great a total impression on me. It was George Hamilton Smith's *Atheism: The Case Against God* (1974) that did the most to turn me from a drifting freethinker into a convinced atheist. On economics Rand deferred heavily to Ludwig von Mises, who preached the sacred law that prices

are signals. She was a great poetic exponent of rationality, but I learned more about how reason actually works, and what it is for, from Karl Popper. And if it usually begins with Ayn Rand, one must add that it almost always passes through Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*.

In public I always try to cite my undergraduate and grad-school association with the late Ronald Hamowy, who was professor of history at the University of Alberta when I majored in that there. Ron was probably the closest intellectual colleague of Murray Rothbard, the father of movement libertarianism, and he may have had the most impressive pedigree of any libertarian scholar, having studied with Friedrich von Hayek and Isaiah Berlin. (Hamowy and Rothbard were even briefly part of Ayn Rand's intellectual circle, ironically called the Collective.)

I think the editor of *C2C Journal* is expecting me to write about how Dr. Hamowy libertarianized me. The embarrassing truth is that I signed up for one of Ron's seminars without having the slightest idea who was teaching the course, and I attended for weeks before I realized he was one of the deities of 20th-century libertarianism. I only found out when I went to his office with some nugatory technical question about the syllabus and saw a Randian mate of mine chatting with the prof. The bizarre coincidence – don't you know who this guy is?? – was soon explained to me.

Ron, enjoying the curious collision between us, took a liking to me, as I did to him. In his last year before retirement, he greatly enjoyed watching my mobile eyebrows react to the blatherings of other students in the seminars, and calling on me whenever I seemed particularly vexed. I had already passed through most of my undergraduate years without impressing anybody in the slightest – essentially still an autodidactic hick. I remain one, mostly, but Ron provided me with a brief, photographic flash of worldly finish and encouragement. I got the chance, almost pissed away between me and the sheer brute unhelpfulness of the U of A, to see first-hand how a scholarly conference goes



“At *Alberta Report* I added some colour and complexity to my ideology, and got at least a master's in intellectual street-fighting.”

and how books are assembled. It was a first encounter with the serious, high-octane life of the mind.

Actual scholarship, I ended up fleeing from. I mean – have you met those people? Even Ron, as dear as he was to me, was a decidedly bitter man, full of hostility toward a university that had tempted him to the tundra in the late Sixties with large nominal numbers of what he always called “Canadian pesos”. The other graduate students tended to be equally bitter, as if preparing for a life of disappointment, and they certainly lacked the redeeming quality of genius.

The newsroom at *Alberta Report*, to which I decamped after leaving university, was a more congenial graduate school. Under the influence of the Byfields and their gang of misfits – mostly people who had the same flashbulb exposure to higher learning than I did, or less – I added some colour and complexity to my ideology, and got at least a master's in intellectual street-fighting.

At *AR* you could always find somebody who had the same books concealed in their secret trove that you did, or you could add to yours based on their conversations. There was a G.K. Chesterton cult; there was an Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn fan club. I still catch myself recommending books someone or other at *AR* thrust into my hands, relatively few of which are in any way right-wing: Bill Buford's *Among The Thugs*, William S. Burroughs'

Junky, and Nicholas Monsarrat's *The Cruel Sea*.

As a public intellectual circus-performer I don't go in much for libertarian axe-grinding – which is probably too bad, given all the Koch Brothers money churning around out there. As a rule it is more effective, and just more fun, to turn people's own premises against them – to show a pro-lifer that he might be a poor Christian, a woman that her idea of feminism might be incomplete or inconsistent, a Liberal that he has lost touch with liberalism. (Capital-C Conservatives, of course, are no longer capable of shame about not being conservative.)

The fact is that libertarianism amounts to a lone principle or two – violence should only be used in retaliation, preferably under the rule of law, and people should trade peacefully rather than seeking coercive power over one another. These axioms don't solve every practical political question, and may solve hardly any on their own. That's why there are "left-libertarians" and "right-libertarians".

The study of history has tended to make me increasingly monarchistic and anglophile, increasingly chauvinistic about the virtues of our inherited, time-tested system of government. You can't get more right-libertarian than having a Queen and liking it. (By an accident of 20th-century history, there really is a strong pro-Habsburg streak in libertarianism; there's a reason it's called Austrian economics.)

But for a Canadian this actually involves a psychic distancing from the veneration of the United States that is characteristic of right-libertarians – characteristic, in fact, of most of us here in the Loyalist redoubt. We mostly don't think

of the American founding fathers as slave-owning terrorists; we don't think the U.S.A. ought to be ashamed that ending slavery required 600,000 men to be thrown into an industrial death machine. When someone in a Hollywood movie gives those sneering redcoats heck, we cheer.

But there's a concentricity to this. My father has always been a huge Northwest Rebellion buff; you can see the historic battleground of Frenchman's Butte if you go a little ways uphill from the homestead he has returned to in retirement. The rifle pits from which men defending their homes shot at red-clad enforcers of Empire are still there; probably you could find a shell casing or two. People named Cosh probably wouldn't live within a thousand miles of the Butte if the Empire hadn't won the decisive battle. But all intelligent Westerners harbour some sympathy for, if not Louis Riel himself, then certainly Gabriel Dumont.

Colby Cosh is a columnist for Maclean's Magazine.



A francophone, conservative, federalist Montreal 'Stockaholic'? *Incroyable!*

by Paul Beaudry



"Where were you Friday afternoon?"

My high school principal was giving me a stern look, visibly not amused. It was March of 2001. I was 17, and a few months away from graduating.

For the first time during my five years of high school, I had committed an act of light rebellion against authority by skipping class on a Friday afternoon. And unlike many other students who had done so before me, I had been caught. How did I suffer such a misfortune? Two words: Stockwell Day. My principal had seen me on the evening news, shaking the Canadian Alliance leader's hand. You heard right: I, a young

francophone Quebecer, had skipped class to attend a gathering of “Stockaholics” in Montreal.

My passion for politics started at a young age, even though my parents were not particularly political and we rarely discussed politics at the dinner table. The issue that whetted my appetite was sovereignty, Quebec’s all-consuming political debate since the 1970s. As early as the third grade, I would quiz my parents about their beliefs. Both were staunch federalists, and even though I was a contrary child in many ways, I trusted their judgment on this big issue and became a federalist. In the fourth grade, as class president, I organized a mock referendum debate, where I played the role of Quebec’s federalist leader. In retrospect, subjecting my classmates to my mediocre talent for self-promotion might have constituted an abuse of my presidential powers; but it was so much fun!

My interest in politics grew stronger in high school. Ever the contrarian, I self-identified as a conservative, which caused satisfying consternation to my social studies teachers who mostly held very different political views. I read about politics and history to inoculate myself against their left-wing, separatist rhetoric, even trudging through Conrad Black’s massive Maurice Duplessis biography just so I could argue with my history teacher who, naturally, despised Quebec’s former conservative premier. I enjoyed being a rebel, and reveled in provocation. Who knows, if I had been born in rural Alberta, I might have become a Marxist!

The apex of my ideological awakening occurred thanks to the Internet (props to you, Al Gore!). In October 2000, I was surfing the web in search of my daily dose of right-wing political commentary when I fell upon the website of the Cato Institute, the well-known U.S. libertarian think tank. Having never heard of libertarianism before, I was



“I enjoyed being a rebel, and reveled in provocation. If I had been born in rural Alberta, I might have become a Marxist!”

intrigued by its radical ideas about the role of the state and its relationship to the individual. When I learned that Cato would be holding a “Cato University” seminar in Montreal at the end of the month, I immediately wrote to Tom Palmer, the director of the program and libertarian proselytizer extraordinaire, and requested to attend. He gladly extended me an invitation.

Cato University was an intellectual feast. For the first time, I met ideological kindred spirits and had the opportunity to exchange and learn from them. I learned that what I instinctively believed in was, in fact, a coherent political philosophy. Cato gave me the intellectual ammunition I needed to debate with statists of all stripes.

After the Cato seminar, I returned to school with the zeal of a convert. Exchanges such as the following would often happen during class:

Teacher: This year, our school charity campaign will fund an initiative that aims to preserve and strengthen the right of Ethiopian children to an elementary school education. Yes, Paul?

Me: Actually, education is not a “right”. It’s a privilege. A right to

education implies that you can force others to pay for your education, thus depriving them of their property.

Teacher: Right, Paul. In any event, those kids don’t only suffer from a lack of education. They work in inhumane conditions, often for U.S.-based multinational corporations.

Me (yelling): TWO AND A HALF CHEERS FOR SWEATSHOPS!

I’ll admit it: I was an obnoxious “know-it-all”. Shortly thereafter, I started immersing myself in the

writings of libertarian icons. I read Hayek, Friedman, Rothbard, Mises and Rand (although I must confess to never finishing *Atlas Shrugged*). I also started writing about politics and libertarian ideas for various publications, including student newspapers, the Fraser Institute's Canadian Student Review, and *Le Québécois Libre*, a French-language libertarian webzine. I attended CEGEP at Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf, Pierre Trudeau's alma mater, and founded the "Brébeuf Student Right" with a few friends. We organized several events featuring guest speakers on such politically incorrect topics as "Why the Kyoto Accord is a Bad Idea" and "Why Socialism is Evil". This was not particularly helpful to our social lives, and I must admit that maintaining my virginity during those years was not difficult.

Thanks largely to Friedman and Heinlein, a key pillar of economic wisdom is that "there ain't no such thing as a free lunch." However, students interested in free market and libertarian ideas might have difficulty understanding this, due to the plethora of free think tank-sponsored lunches and seminars they can attend. As a student, I milked these opportunities for all they were worth. Over

an approximately five-year span, from when I was in grade 10 to the beginning of my law studies, I attended seminars and conferences in exotic locales such as Washington, Philadelphia, New York, Santa Barbara, and Auburn, Alabama. Attending these seminars deepened my understanding of libertarian ideas and introduced me to new friends from all over the world.

Of all the think tanks and organizations I have encountered during my libertarian journey, the Montreal Economic Institute undoubtedly had the most significant impact in my life. Shortly after attending my first Cato seminar in 2000, I showed up at the Institute's door on St-Hubert Street in Montreal and introduced myself to Martin Masse, the director of publications. We had an hour-long discussion and I have been involved with the Institute ever since, first as a freeloading student, and more recently as one of their research associates and their corporate secretary.

It was through the Montreal Economic Institute that I met Maxime Bernier, who would later become my first boss. At the time, Bernier had recently become Vice President of the Institute, and had authored a study on the benefits of a flat tax. He would later run for the Conservative Party in the 2006 federal election.

As my interest in libertarian ideas was growing, so was my involvement in partisan politics. During my high school years, I had gotten involved with the Quebec Liberal Party. The QLP had a very dynamic and powerful youth wing, and held a huge convention every summer. I rarely failed to air some radical thoughts on some public policy issue that would reverberate in the media, which raised the ire of some within the party. I was a member of my riding association executive, and was (rightly) perceived as a loose cannon by some of my colleagues, who really did not appreciate the NRA-logged tie I used to wear at riding association meetings. Eventually I grew disenchanted with the muddled policy

positions embraced by the QLP and ceased my involvement with them. When I resigned my position on my riding association executive, I wrote a scathing letter to my MNA informing him that I could no longer support the Liberals' socialist policies. For good measure, the letter was laden with Ayn Rand quotes extolling the morality of laissez-faire capitalism.

Federal politics was much more satisfying. I volunteered for the Canadian Alliance during the 2000

federal election, helping my local candidate (who did not have the slightest chance of winning) tack electoral signs on telephone poles in the frigid cold. A few years later, I campaigned for Stephen Harper to become the leader of the newly-formed Conservative Party. My involvement was rewarded with a coveted internship in Harper's office during the summer of 2004, when he was Leader of the Opposition. I volunteered countless hours during the 2004 federal campaign, which the Conservatives ended up losing by a hair. It was a depressing time to be a Conservative: despite the Sponsorship scandal, the Liberals had clung to power. If the Conservatives could not beat them in such favourable circumstances, how could they ever aspire to form government?

But Harper, whom many had thought politically dead in early 2005, won a surprise election victory in January 2006, and became Canada's 22nd prime minister. Shortly before the swearing-in of the new Cabinet, I received a call from Maxime Bernier asking if I would consider joining his staff as a policy advisor in his Industry portfolio. I jumped at the offer. The Conservative win could not have occurred at a better time. I was completing my last semester of law school. Once I passed my final exam, I headed to Ottawa right away.



Maxime Bernier, Steve Forbes, Beaudry, and Adam Daifallah at a 2011 MEI event.

Working for Minister Bernier was a dream come true. It allowed me to apply the free market principles I held dear to real-life public policy issues. I developed an expertise in telecommunications policy and regulation, which I use to this day in my law career. More importantly, working in a minister's office helped me understand how the machinery of government works, which only affirmed my belief that free markets are generally preferable to interventionist government. I will always remember a particular scene: Bernier and I were seated in an airplane and railing against some federal government program or another. A man seated across from us looked at Bernier and, with an intonation akin to that of Sir Humphrey, said: "But sir, you are the government." We had a good laugh.

Over the last thirty years, Quebec has maintained an ever-expanding welfare state financed by debt and equalization payments. It has instituted social programs that no other Canadian province – no matter how rich – considers within

“My Liberal colleagues really did not appreciate the NRA-logoed tie I used to wear at riding association meetings.”

its means. Such runaway government spending has come at a steep cost: economic stagnation and the largest debt load in Canada.

Quebec's few fiscal conservatives have done our best to stand athwart history (alongside W.F. Buckley) yelling "Stop"; but to little avail, until recently. Last year's election of Philippe Couillard as premier of Quebec on a platform of lower spending, less debt and freer markets, and the apparent rising fortunes of the federal Parti Conservateur of late, has given us hope that the province's political culture is finally shifting right. We now dare to dream that conservative anglo-Canadians will soon lay off attacking Quebec for its profligacy, and instead focus on our

spendthrift neighbour, Ontario.

Paul Beaudry is a lawyer based in Ottawa. He previously worked as senior policy advisor to the federal Minister of Industry, Maxime Bernier. Paul also serves as research associate and corporate secretary for the Montreal Economic Institute.

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