

LYNDON LAROCHE: THE QUAKER CONNECTION

It may be a good thing that two followers of Lyndon La Rouche won races in the recent Illinois Democratic Party primary. Since then the major media have been paying closer attention to La Rouche, his dangerous political ideas and his shady and intimidating methods. One aspect of La Rouche's career that has received only brief mention, however, is his Quaker background. Yet it seems to me that understanding this brings us close to the core of who he is and what he is doing. I believe that because, for one thing, La Rouche himself has said as much. And for another, because my reporting on La Rouche, going back to 1973, confirms that his development into an extremist ideologue was strongly affected by major events of modern American Quaker history. And not least, Quakers have been among his continuing targets.

(Take me, for instance. In 1974, he threatened me and the paper I worked for after I had uncovered this connection; his minions assaulted me to back up the threat. Then in 1980, while I was working as a congressional staffer in Washington, he published a slanderous report naming me as a "KGB mole" (see sketch, from one of his publications). A major piece of his "evidence" was my Quaker affiliation. The details of these incidents would fill many more pages than we have here; suffice it to say that in 1973 he did not intimidate me, though he did scare off my paper; and in response to the later Soviet spy charge I received a letter stating that there was no evidence for it signed by the Director of the FBI. These experiences, which are unlike anything else in my career, help explain why I am gratified to find the major media looking more closely into La Rouche's beliefs and activities.)

The Making of A Friend Into an Enemy of Friends

La Rouche's parents belonged to Lynn Meeting in Massachusetts, a pastoral group in New England YM. His father, Lyndon Sr., had been a CO in World War One. He was also a fundamentalist in theology, and very conservative in politics; so as New England Friends in the 1920s and '30s moved steadily away from the older Orthodoxy toward the more liberal views epitomized by another New England Friend, Rufus Jones, Lyndon Sr. resisted the trend. He also objected to the talk of reunifying the Orthodox and Wilburite YMs, and came to despise the American Friends Service Committee with a special venom. Nor was he quiet about this; indeed, in Tenth Month, 1941, Lyndon Sr. was ejected from Lynn Meeting and then disowned for disruptive actions, including publishing broadsides attacking Friends of differing views. His wife and teenaged son, Lyndon Jr., then resigned. Still identified as Friends, they worked in a fundamentalist skid-row mission in Boston. They later took it over and renamed it the Village Street Friends Meeting, which had no connections to any other Quaker body. Lyndon Jr. was still an officer of this meeting in 1973. His father occasionally visited other meetings; I recall seeing him at Cambridge Meeting at the end of the 1960s, exhorting us to back President Nixon on Vietnam, and to put our troubles onto the Living Christ.

From Fox To Marx--And Beyond

His family's vehement struggle against reunification and theological diversity in New England Quakerism was elliptically described by Lyndon Jr. in a long 11/7/1978 article in his paper, *New Solidarity*. The article speaks of "a bitter factional struggle within the Society of Friends," one in which "intelligence-mode 'dirty tricks' operations were employed against resistance to "this neo-Gnostic intrusion by 'traditionalist' religious Quakers. This process, he said, had resulted in "the wrecking of the Society generally...." The arch-villain in this campaign of subversion, he insisted, was the AFSC, which had been created by the British Secret Intelligence Service to provide cover for various of its spy projects.

In a followup article (11/10/78) La Rouche told, again elliptically, of his other formative Quaker experience: Like father like son, he began World War Two as a CO, in an AFSC-run CPS camp. What did he think of it? "In every respect," he wrote, the AFSC administration of these camps was a 'soft' model of the Nazi concentration camps." He added that "the effects...of AFSC administration is[sic] psychopathologically analogous to...the mental aberrations produced by the Nazi camps." He speaks of three factions among the camp inmates, "'the 100-percenters' (the 'ins' with the AFSC), the '2-percenters' (the 'political' opposition to the AFSC administration), and a confused, variegated mass of inmates between the two." He no doubt was among the "politicals", who regularly lost out at the camp meetings

held--and, he asserts, rigged--by the AFSC. "To learn to despise the AFSC under these conditions," he insists "was to discover the unbridgeable dividing line between bestiality and humanity. Every principle of pagan, oligarchical evil poured out as the ideology of the AFSC administrators and their '100-percenter' cliques within the camps."

Indeed, there were many complaints from the COs about having the camps run for the government by AFSC and other religious groups, and the system was eventually changed. But in the meantime, many of the COs turned to resistance and prison; others volunteered for noncombatant military service. But as for La Rouche, CPS not only reinforced his hatred for the AFSC and its liberal Quakerism; it was there that he found an alternative: Marxism. He took to Communism avidly, then jettisoned not only his parents' religiosity but their pacifism as well, quitting CPS and joining the army. After the war he joined the Socialist Workers Party and took the *nom de guerre* "Lyn Marcus." He kept that alias until 1974, when my research unearthed his real name and Quaker roots--that's what he threatened me for. A few years later he shifted his identification from that of a "leftist" to the "right."

Quakers--Still on his Target List

But his political notions do not easily fit into "left" and "right" categories; and charting them is not our present task. But this sketch of La Rouche's Quaker background may begin to show some parallels which can help illuminate his otherwise bizarre career. He wrote recently that "[I] spent my childhood and youth in preparation for the Friends ministry." The father-son pattern of a dissident prophet rejected by fellow-believers and then returning to pronounce judgment on them is too evident to miss. For that matter, his self-image as a lonely visionary bearing witness against persecution and fanatical opposition is a familiar one in Quaker annals. This hardly explains all of his career, of course; but in my view it is an essential piece of the puzzle.

Besides that, the La Rouche-Quaker antagonism is a persistent one. His attacks on the AFSC quoted earlier came in 1978; my "KGB Mole" ordeal in 1980, some seven years after I had written anything about him. More recently, La Rouche has tangled with Friends in Loudoun County, Virginia, his current base of operations. Loudoun County has had active Quaker meetings since the 1700s. The county, about an hour west of Washington, used to be known as a quiet place; but now its citizens, including Friends, are increasingly nervous as they have seen La Rouche and his followers in action. For example, in a leaflet distributed last fall in Leesburg, Loudoun's main town, La Rouche cited his ancestry to declare, "I am an expert on Quakerism," and then denounced Goose Creek Meeting as part of a "nest of Communist fellow-travelers." Later, members of the meeting were called by people who give phony names, then pumped them for information about certain attenders; such inquiries are very common La Rouche tactics, a way of getting data to be used in other harassment efforts.

Seeking That of God Even In Lyndon La Rouche

To be sure, my sense of the importance of this whole subject is strongly colored by my experience. And there is one further, unexpected chapter of it that deserves mention: one First Day morning a few years ago, when I arrived as usual for worship at Langley Hill Meeting, there sat Lyndon La Rouche, Sr., on a front bench; I remembered him at once from his visits to Cambridge more than a decade earlier. He was very old then, retired and widowed, staying with a daughter who lived in the area. Attending our meeting apparently became one of his only outings. He spoke, usually briefly, every time he came, usually quoting Whittier, and often telling us of his sense that a great war was impending. It was not easy, given my experiences, to sit with him week after week; and the content of his messages bothered some others. Yet it was evident too that we were ministering to a lonely old man on the last lap of his life's journey. So I held my peace; and when he died, several Langley Hill Friends gathered with his daughter at an informal memorial meeting. For me this became a practical opportunity to meditate on the meaning of Jesus' advice to love our enemies.

How to apply that advice in dealing with the son is not so clear. My experience, and that of many others, suggests that he is a dangerous man, and a persistent one. Moreover, recent news reports indicate his group is the object of several fraud investigations. He sees himself as the target of paid assassins, and is surrounded by heavily armed bodyguards. It is not easy to foresee a peaceful--never mind friendly--conclusion to his story.