

One Swell Hoop #3

Special



Issue

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ONE SWELL FOOP #3 (April 2011), the journal of diagonal relationships, comes from Garth Spencer at 82 East 40th Avenue, Vancouver, BC CANADA V5W 1L4, garthspencer @ shaw.ca.

Art Credits

Cover Taral Wayne
p. 5..... Roy Pounds
p. 10..... Charles Dana Gibson
p. 11..... Darrin Brown
p. 12..... Alan White
p. 23..... Brad Foster

Missing Current Contact Information:

Fanartist Roy Pounds

Monkey Mind

Election Day

After next month's election, I can foresee no outcome that would be an improvement, and several ways things could get worse.

In "Casting Votes Before Swine", Taral has a more detailed and well-grounded analysis, which I decided to run in this issue. Bear in mind that he was originally framing this as an article for American readers unfamiliar with Canadian institutions.

Me, I just blame the Belgians for everything.

The Anarcho-Surrealist Party of Canada: A Manifesto

I wanted to start an absurdist party in Canada (again), but there was no time to prepare by May 2nd – certainly not by April 1st, my first choice. Every time there's an election – and we have had rather frequent Federal elections in the last seven years, resulting in four different administrations – I am caught short.

It's hard to know where to start, pointing out the false assumptions and lame practices of the several political parties, to say nothing of the administrations. It's also hard to know what to do that previous humorists haven't done to death. About the only insight I can offer is that *everyone*, no matter where you turn, seems to live in a fool's paradise – that is, in their own more or less tailored reality, or set of comforting illusions.

What do I mean? Let's see: there's the illusion that eliminating Canada's deficit will reduce our problems, the illusion that intelligently directed public spending will reduce our problems, apprehension over terrorism or youth gangs or foreign agents corrupting our MPs, outrage at our Harmonized Sales Tax, or outrage at our continuing loss of lives in Afghanistan and Iraq, etc., etc.

Why an *anarchist* party, of all things? Partly because there is no particular public support for anarchism. Partly because the well has been poisoned by the kind of assholes who stirred up shit every time there was a large gathering of world leaders, in Seattle or Vancouver, so of course the meaning of “anarchist” has been co-opted and maligned and will be misunderstood.

But mostly, I am influenced by my family. My grandfather was a veteran and a Conservative (and, I suspect, a member of the Monarchist League); my father was a union socialist who voted NDP; both parties sort of lost credibility when they formed governments, and I began to suspect there was a logical progression in my family. What else is left?

Here’s my platform: *any* society can work, if the members have enough sense of community, enough unity of beliefs and actions – enough solidarity, to revive a disused word – and *no* society works, however it’s officially organized, if the solidarity isn’t there. You can overorganize a society, as the Nazis and the Russian Communists did; you can lack enough organization, as the Somalis do; or you can miss the whole point and ignore real social needs while wasting lives and treasure on inessentials, as Canadians do. Why not establish what people and communities need to function, at whatever scale, and then maintain the infrastructure? (Or do we imagine that’s what we’ve *been* doing?)

There are anarcho-capitalists and there are anarcho-communists, and then there are anarcho-surrealists like me. If people across Canada want to experiment with their communities, probably Albertans will lean towards libertarian syndicates to provide social services, and some people on the Coast will try collectives that just assume the solidarity they depend upon, and the rest of the country will descend into the warlordism that China experienced eighty years ago. Maybe that would suit the Americans just fine.

There may not be a snowball’s chance in hell of anyone forming an Odonian Society as in LeGuin’s *The Dispossessed*, but hey, I can dream.

To Absent Friends

Mike Glicksohn, a longtime well-known fanzine fan, died in Toronto on March 18. An enormous amount of email news and fanzine farewells have commemorated his contributions; I merely had some contact with him from the mid-1980s, through a newszine and through fanhistory research. And now I won't see more of his wit, or fanwriting, and I won't have a chance to lose all my money to him in a friendly poker game at a convention.

In Vancouver, Al Betz passed away. Steve Forty writes:

Al Betz passed away on April 14th 2011 from complications associated with Kidney failure and Heart Disease. Sandra tells me that he has been cremated. He was well known as Mr Science (with many experiments and liquid nitrogen ice cream) and for his column that ran in *BCSFAzine* and was run in other newsletters (for which he won an Aurora - now called a Casper Award). Al was a TV repairman for many years here after he moved up from San Francisco. He was the Audio Video man for many VCONs, he was a chair of VCON (theme was Science in SF), he was a one time editor of *BCSFAzine*, he was involved in BCSFA and VCON in the early years. I really got to know him during Westercon XXX and VCON 6, he was a good friend and he will be missed. Remember as Mr Science he is probably trying to contact someone right now, he will let us know what happens next in the new life.

(BCSFA email group, April 21, 2011)

Minding Other People's Business

Maybe I should explain why I'm posting revised Canadian fanhistories (eventually) on a Wikispaces account. Every time I organized my notes covering another decade into another chapter, and posted it on fanac.org, I received a few comments to correct and complete the narrative ... which I couldn't do. Now that wiki markup is available, and

several wiki websites, I can make the narratives accessible for myself, and for others to amend.

(One of the minor annoyances about doing this is that I spent a lot of effort converting narratives about a city or region, like Vancouver fandom or Quebec fandom, into decade-by-decade chapters. Then Fran Skene, who first introduced me to fandom outside my home town, commented that the narratives would have more continuity if they were organized by region, rather than by chronology. “WTF?!” is my mildest response.)

Over the last month or two, organizers have been soliciting nominations for Canada’s national Aurora Awards; I received a list of nominees for the Constellation Awards, and a note that the end of March is the deadline to apply for the Canadian Unity Fan Fund. There was a time when I made this sort of news my business. Eventually, though, I found myself banging my head against the fact that I was trying to deal with fandom as if it were 1950s/60s fannish fandom, a “mainstream” fandom where everyone had a stake in the same few interests and voluntary institutions ... but in fact I was struggling with 1980s/1990s fandom, several self-absorbed subfandoms which had less and less to do with each other and progressively less awareness, or interest, in the Auroras or in CUFF.

Recent Reading

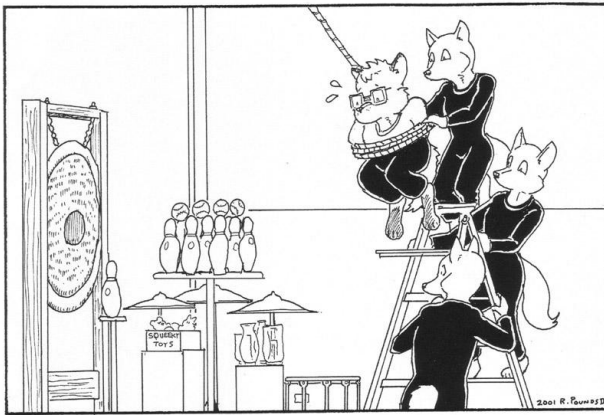
The latest phase in my determined effort to construct my own tailored reality is reading *Racing Toward Armageddon*. This is Michael Baigent’s polemic that some fanatic alleged Christians, Muslims and Jews are attempting, severally and collectively, to undermine modern education and constitutional democracy in the United States, to prepare to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, and to prepare for – or bring about – Armageddon. As lunatic as these plans are, apparently the lunatics are real and are at liberty. Baigent documents a number of names and organizations, in North America and Britain and Israel, which are arguably seditious and should be on terrorist watch lists. Relatively few are (allegedly) Muslim. Tim LaHaye, the co-author of the “Left Behind”

novels, is one of those names; something called the Chalcedon Foundation is one of the organizations.

Now, I already thought the Southern Baptist Convention in the United States would bear watching. Some people have been warning about apocalypse-obsessed alleged Christians in the leadership of major American institutions, and close to the Presidency, from the Reagan through the last Bush administration. I already thought that terrorists as described were not Muslims, and not Christians, but Kali-worshippers in disguise.

What I had not expected was the rather blatant similarity between the agenda of the Chalcedon Foundation, and allied organizations, and the preparations leading to the rise of the NSDAP in Germany, or the Fascists in Italy.

I wonder if Homeland Security and the CIA are paying attention? For that matter, what threats does Canada's intelligence service monitor?



Locs

Brad Foster, March 14, 2011

Got the second issue of *One Swell Foop* in this week. And suddenly that illo I sent you will always be, in my mind, a picture of one heck of a swell Foop! (Since you've still got two other fillos on hand, I won't send anymore of my nonsense your way just now 'til you need them.)

Re Taral's loc: Hey, what's wrong with liking the music of Phillip Glass? I can listen to his soundtrack to *Koyaanisqatsi* and it STILL moves me. The sounds and rhythms are amazing. It's one of the pieces of music I can't just put on and let play in the background, it just enters my body and takes over. So, leave the Glass-man alone!

And since that is my only real loc-like feedback on the issue, it is plain to see why I feel the need to send out fillos for the fannish usual—my locs suck!

((No, they don't.))

Eric Mayer, March 16, 2011

I've been trying to ease back into loccing, making no effort to "catch up", being as brief as politeness allows. I pretty much burned out a couple years back while writing less than a fifth of the number locs Lloyd Penney writes. (Less than a tenth probably) Considering how relatively few locs are written to ezines, I wonder what percentage are from Lloyd? I think we'll have to start calling electronic letters of comment "llocs."

((Nyuk nyuk nyuk. My theory, which is mine and belongs to me, is that Lloyd is the secret love child of two incredibly prolific lockers, Harry Warner Jr. and Gina "Dutch" Ellis, the "Duchess of Canadian Fandom" once upon a time.))

But enough about Lloyd, since this isn't his fanzine. I enjoyed reading *One Swell Foop* and hearing a bit about what's going on in your

world, and that of your correspondents. Which is similar to what's going on in my world, a lot of bad stuff on the political and jobs front. I'm still doing legal writing on contract and creeping nearer to being entitled to a pittance of Social Security benefits. If I can keep getting work until I am sixty-six we might be able to get along on the amount of benefits I'd be entitled to at that age, but since they keep cutting benefits -- or at least not raising them to match rising costs -- there'd be no guarantee I'd be able to live on what I'd get by the time I was 76. Probably not. Memo to self - die early. Next life: arrange to be born rich.

But at least Mary and I get along well. There's a lot of comfort to be taken from a good marriage as you get older. Your essay about why you remain single resonated with me. I have seen both sides of the relationship thing. My first marriage turned into an unremitting nightmare, my wife treating me pretty much as you describe. Then, when the marriage ended, in my mid-forties, the family courts proceeded to rob me of everything I'd worked for up to that point in my life, and kept me in poverty for child support for more than a decade afterwards.

However, Mary is a different sort of person than my first wife and our marriage has been completely different. I could easily handle being alone since I have always been a loner, but I prefer not to be. So I wouldn't give up on the possibility. Not all women are the same, though it sometimes seems they are! ...

((I kept having second thoughts about making personal revelations in a fanzine setting. I could just as easily have examined my irrational convictions in a diary setting. The purpose is served anyway, once I got things out in words my feelings looked as silly as nightmare figures look in the light of day.))

I'm not exactly sure what you mean by "People to look for" but Colin Upton...hey, I recall him from my days monkeying with mini-comics. He is a heck of an artist. I don't recall ever seeing anything by him in a fanzine but it would be a real coup for any faneditor to be the first. Add him to Brad and you'd have an unbeatable pair of artists!

((I keep discovering belatedly that my addresses are out of date, like my email for Colin. This is what I meant.))

Spring is on the way though. Better things coming right?

Now I'll go check out your website.

*Lloyd & Yvonne Penney, 1706-24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke, ON, M9C 2B2,
Penneys @ bell.net, March 28, 2011*

Thank you for *One Swell Foop 2*. There's always something to see, say and reflect upon. That's what this letter-writing is all about...

Our sympathies to Vancouver fandom at the passing of Ed Hutchings. We've had our own grief to deal with...we lost Mike Glicksohn on March 18 from a stroke. Mike had been fighting cancer for some years. A fan since the 60s, Mike travelled around North America going to conventions, but mostly, he wrote for fanzines, become one of the premiere article and letter writers in fandom. He was a senior member of the successful bid to bring Worldcon to Toronto in 2003. He was a mathematics teacher at Humberview Collegiate for 34 years. It wasn't fair that he was never really able to enjoy his retirement, for that was when his health problems started. We attended his wake last week, and the only thing missing from this celebration of life was Mike himself.

((He might have been amused by the heading I wanted to use – “Let Us Now Praise Famous Fen” – but I wondered if it were really in good taste.))

Memory Control...what a good idea. You could call your company No Regrets. Just hook yourself up to our editing computer, and we will edit your memories. Selected forgetfulness, therapeutic amnesia. We can lightly edit, or wipe you clean, your choice!

((Too bad the idea has already been used in movies. Twice. Paycheck and Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind.))

I'm going to the Belgian consulate, and I'm going to tell them what you blame them for. What will you give me to not tell them your address and telephone number? I doubt they could outbid you, so it would be worth your while to pay for my silence.

((Nyuk nyuk nyuk. They'll probably just expose me as a conscious and willing agent of the international conspiracy to achieve Belgian world domination, financed by Algerian bankers.))

Could we trade Steven Harper to the Republicans for a fourth-round draft pick or something? After his behavior in the past Parliament, plus what's been going on the first few days on this current election campaign, I'd drop-kick him right back to the minors. Hey, Greg, maybe something safe could be done, like a complete and modern reinterpretation of the Tarot. One could be the Politician, and you could get your final revenge on Gordon Campbell... A great political cartoon...a coffee cup label Ethics, and the Conservatives roll up the rim, and it says Please Try Again.

((Oh, we have got to get together and write comedy routines for the next federal election.))

My loc...nothing good yet. I am working a short-term contract at the Ontario Association of Architects, and it is very good, but I've only got a month and a half left. The Law Society is extremely picky, and I might never get back there.

There are times I wonder why any woman would want any guy...I keep beating myself up over not being able to find work, and don't really know why Yvonne hangs on to me. Perhaps we're better together than apart, but I still wonder. I will figure it out one day, but not today.

((I finally realized, nobody commits to anyone else because they're winners in the social/financial game; we make commitments because we recognize the human spirit in someone else.))

I'm good, I'm done, and I'm going to get this out to you via e-mail. Hope it arrives. Take care, stay dry, eat your toast.

Felicity Walker, felicity4711 @ gmail.com, April 11, 2011

"People to Find": Colin Upton: Garth, try
<http://cupton.livejournal.com/>.
((Thank you!))

"Monkey Mind": I don't like nightclubs either. Too loud to talk, too dark to read. Repetitive music. Everyone judged on looks or coolness, not personality.

Garth: *"When the big earthquake hits and half of Vancouver slides into the sea, I want a house that automatically deploys a dirigible"*

balloon..." I had a history teacher in high school who kept a raft on his roof for just such an emergency.

Garth: " 'News' is defined as whatever (a) fills the spaces between ads and commercials, (b) draws attention, and incidentally draws consumers' eyes to the ads and commercials." I like Phil Hendrie's definition, that "news is the intersection of what is important and what is interesting."

((Why do I think Phil Hendrie's definition is outdated?? Maybe because some contemporary "news" seems to be filtered for sensationalism, and against offending advertisers.))

"Original Zombie Jokes": A while ago I tweeted that a zombie multiverse says "Branes." No response.

((You never know what people will respond to, and what passes away into silence.))

"Names for Your Characters": Last night I thought of "Juan Feuer."

"How I Got This Way": I empathize. Might as well take precautions.

"Reviews": Garth writes: "I'm not going to do reviews this issue, because then it would take forever to get this fanzine done." I agree. Reviews take a long time. *BCSFAzine* #454 is five weeks late (so far). At least half of the reason for that is the writer's block I have to overcome when reviewing zines.

We Also Heard From: Brad & Sue Luoma, E.B. Klassen, Taral Wayne





Adventures of the Mullah Kintyre

Kintyre and the Drunk

One night the Mullah Kintyre came across a very drunk man looking for something on the street under a streetlight. He asked:

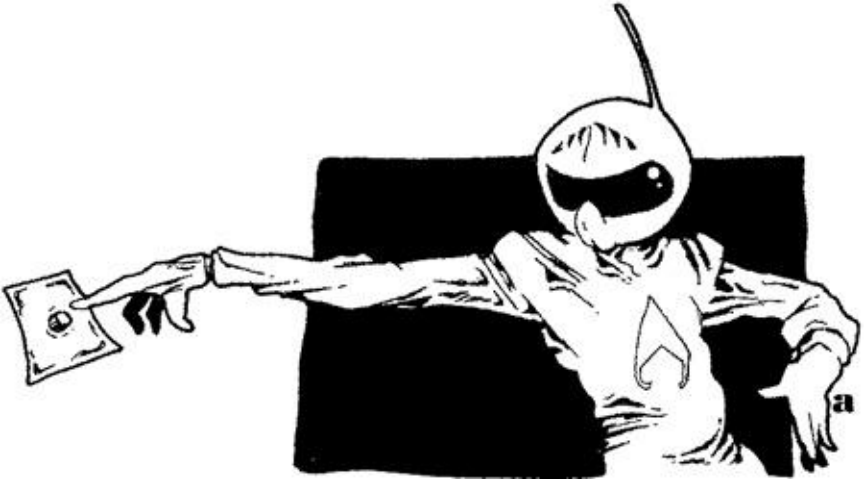
“What are you looking for, man? Have you lost something?”

“Yes”, he said, “I lost my keys back there in the parking lot of the bar.”

“But man”, quoth the Mullah Kintyre, “why don't you look for your keys where you lost them?”

“There's no light there”, the drunk replied, “How do you expect me to find anything in the dark?”

(*This, the Mullah told himself, is why the Prophet forbade strong drink, and he felt a lot better about arguing with his grandfather about Scotch whiskey.*)



Casting Votes Before Swine

Tara Wayne

If you are a Canadian, you know the meaning of “fear.” Elections are on us again.

By “again” I don’t mean to imply that they are unwanted. A change is desperately wanted by most of the voters. The problem is that no change is possible, except a slight chance of a change for the worse.

Our government is a “minority” one. In a Parliamentary system, that means that none of the parties who ran in the last election won enough seats to form a government by possessing a majority of the 308 seats making up the House of Commons. The party with the largest number – regardless of having fewer than half of the seats – is “invited” by the Crown, represented by the Governor General, to form a government. This makes Stephen Harper the Prime Minister still, but it has its drawbacks. To remain the PR, Harper must retain the “confidence” of

Parliament. There are a number of self-defined circumstances in which he can lose confidence, and his government be dissolved.

That's what's happened this month. A major financial bill is always a "confidence motion," and the government's budget was highly unpopular with the opposition parties – who you must remember altogether hold more seats than the government – and who made the usual demands for change that would water a tight-fisted budget down to a somewhat more generous one. At that point, the PM can hold 'em or fold 'em. He folded last year. This year he swore he'd hold 'em.

It was not so much an act of bravery as a shrewd gamble. The Conservative Party is required to call for an election after holding office five years – the clock was ticking remorselessly down on the PM and, if not this year, he would have to go to the voters for a new mandate in two years' time, at latest. Six months is an eternity in politics. Who knows what might happen to destroy the government's popularity in two years? As well, the Conservatives were riding about as high in the popular polls as they ever do. Asked if they would vote for Stephen Harper in an election, about 34% of those polled answered yes. His popularity over the last several years has never been higher than that, although it has been as low as about 28%. At that figure, the Liberal Party would most likely win enough seats that they, and not the Conservatives, might form a minority government. So, "now" was about as good a moment for an election as Harper has had, including those elections that made him PM.

Stephen Harper is actually feeling pretty cocky. He's the alpha-male type, so that's simply part of his make-up, but he's also a neo-con, managerial type, who believes in something akin to Mussolini's idea of government. A leader like him, in touch with the "common people," feels that he should be unfettered by inefficient checks and balances, legal procedures, compromises and debates, and allowed to get on with the "business of government" by issuing orders straight from his office. Democracy only comes into it every five years (four, in the U.S. constitution), when the people get to elect a different boss.

But it didn't turn out to be the budget that brought Harper down, after all! The government had been found to be in contempt of Parliament! He had refused to disclose information to the House that was Parliament's right to hear, and that the government had no right whatever to withhold. This is the first time that the government of any Commonwealth nation has ever lost the confidence of Parliament on the grounds of contempt, and the first time history of the English Parliamentary system! It's literally history in the making.

Despite what the Prime Minister may think, he is not a head of state, but only one member of a popular assembly. Nor is his party the government. *Parliament* is the government. It includes all parties and all members, including even the handful of independents scattered along the back benches. *No* member – not even the PM – can keep secrets from the government if he wants to keep his job!

The surprising thing is, a lot of Canadians seem to share Stephen Harper's view of democracy. His government has been caught red-handed in misadventures that could be loosely defined as deceitful, illegal, subversive, possibly even treasonous. But that third of the country's voters who make up the government's supporters can only yawn. Ministers who secretly reverse the decisions of their departments by tampering with official documents? Ho, hum. Excess campaign funds laundered and fed back into the Party's war chests? No problem. A billion dollars spent on entertaining other heads of state at a G20 meeting that put the largest city in Canada unwillingly under martial law for a weekend? A promise that Canada will leave Afghanistan in 2012 – followed by sly statements that nearly slid under the news radar that we would remain in a "training role" indefinitely? Stats that show that Conservative Ridings in favour with the government have enjoyed almost all the government spending in the last few years, and opposition Ridings none? An announcement of a military procurement worth \$9 billion, without competitive bidding or debate in Parliament? Moreover, an independent U.S. adviser that estimates the true cost of the new fighter plane is more likely to cost *twice* that? A recent effort to disqualify pre-voters in a Liberal Riding who had already cast their ballots? Being in contempt of Parliament for refusal to disclose information requested by Parliament? (This is the

sort of thing that nearly got Richard Nixon impeached.) Does any of this bother the Conservative vote? Apparently not. They see it as getting back at the pointy-headed, atheist city dudes that they don't like.

If this sounds familiar to American readers, it should. Canadian politics that emanate from the west – and the Conservative Party's support is mainly from Alberta and Saskatchewan, and rural parts of Ontario – are a dim reflection of Tea Party politics in the US. We haven't descended to mass rallies of unemployed truckers with shotguns and bible-wielding grandmothers draped in Confederate flags, demanding there be no healthcare or public schooling... yet. But it is the same grassroots, know-nothing, blame-the-stranger constituency. It should be. Half the people who live in the Canadian west drifted into our country from your Bible Belt.

Maybe we should be the ones flying remotely-controlled Predator drones along the border, to spot "greenbacks" sneaking in to take jobs in the oil industry, eh?

The stakes in the new election are simple. There is no hope of a Liberal or New Democratic Party (NDP) government, not even a minority one.

The country was ruined several years ago when the Reform Party – born in Alberta – engineered the coup of a lifetime, and merged with the doddering Progressive Conservative Party. The old PC's had seen glorious days. Our first Prime Minister, John A. MacDonald – blessed be his grog-blossomed nose – had been a Conservative. As recently as the 1980s, Brian Mulroney had been one of the country's more popular leaders, even though he unfortunately did many things that, in hindsight, strike one as harebrained at best. And history has not been kind to him, as circumstantial evidence almost certainly shows he was influence-peddling in office, or very shortly thereafter, and concealing his income from Revenue Canada. When Mulroney brought the old Conservative Party down to its lowest ratings in modern history, he conveniently retired, and left a not-very-popular Kim Campbell as his successor. Campbell was PM for about four months before the unavoidable election was held, and the party she led did so poorly that

it dropped from holding a 151-seat Majority to only two! It was the biggest setback in Canadian federal politics in history.

Much of the blame for this goes to the “first-past-the-post” system of counting ballots. In this system, a party can get 49% of the votes in every Riding, but still lose every seat in Parliament. In such an extreme case, 49% of the people have no representation in Parliament at all. In real life, the vote is never as imbalanced as that, but the 1993 election was as close as theory ever came to fact.

In the aftermath of that debacle, the old Progressive Conservative Party negotiated a merger with the up-and-coming Reform Party. PCs I knew said that it would bring in new voters, enthusiasm, and would temper the extremism of the Reformists. I said pigs would fly first. You cannot dilute a party of hotheads and extremists with institutionalized apathy and a lingering atmosphere of failure. I was right, too. The synergy was with the cranks. The Reform Party lunged at the old Conservatives like a barracuda after your finger, and swallowed the morsel whole. Suddenly the new Conservative Party of Canada went from marginal, western-oriented politics to centre stage. The far right had merged with the centre-right, and it wasn't the Bay Street Boys in their pin-striped suits who were in charge any more... it was the cattle-barons, the oil men, and the trailer people who sent their checks to their TV ministry on time every month who were suddenly in possession of the entire right wing of the political spectrum.

The “left,” unfortunately, remained fragmented.

The country had already been left vulnerable to such an asymmetrical move. Only two years before the merger of the Reform and Progressive Conservative Parties, a number of members of Parliament from both Liberal and PC seats left their parties to form the Bloc Quebecois. (Those of you who only speak American, that is acceptably pronounced “block keh-beck-wah.”) For years I wondered what exactly the point of this was. How can anyone justify a federal-level party that is, by its own definition uninterested, in what the country does, only in what it does for Quebec?

I have actually understood the Bloc, finally. It is not merely an “us first” party, it is a pretence that Quebec actually *is* an independent nation, on the same footing as the rest of Canada. In their eyes, the Bloc doesn’t send Members to Parliament, it sends representatives to Canada, to negotiate the best arrangements between the two co-equal nations. Whose point of view is closest to the truth, I don’t know, and don’t care to speculate on. I might unpleasantly surprise myself.

It was the beginning of the end for the left end of the political spectrum in Canada, though, because it lured many French-Canadian voters away from the Liberal or NDP parties they might otherwise have voted for.

As well, the Canadian left had always been split into two principal camps. The Liberal Party occupied the middle ground throughout most of my life, but in comparison to the united Right, it has moved, relatively speaking, somewhat left of centre. And the New Democratic Party (“Deeps”) was always clearly a social-democrat party similar to dozens that can be found in Europe. It has moved farther from its birthright – ironically, the socialist stirrings of the Canadian West, that brought us unemployment insurance, old age pensions and our health care system – toward the centre, and where the Liberals sit.

As long as the NDP was tarred with brush of hysterical reaction against socialism, they were relegated to holding only a few seats in Parliament. But as the Libs moved left and the “Deeps” moved to the centre, they began to compete for many of the same voters. The number of seats held by NDP members grew, at the expense of seats held by Liberals.

As though having three parties occupying the left end of the political spectrum wasn’t divisive enough, the Green Party formed, to occupy the far left on environmental issues. The leftist vote split again. As the situation stands, the Liberals can, at best, count on about 24% of the vote, the NDP 15% and the Greens perhaps 6%. The Bloc Quebecois commands another 15%.

The Conservatives, I remind you, control about 34%. In the face of a splintered left, it has been enough to win a minority government, as Harper has done twice now. That leaves around 6% of the vote

unaccounted for. They aren't voting for *me*, I know that. It's this 6% that could give Stephen Harper the majority government he wants – and that's what Canadians should be in fear of.

Given the track record of the Conservative government in the last six-years-and-some, we know what we will be in for should the opposition parties be too weak to block government bills.

Harper has sworn to end the long-gun registry, for one thing. This was an unpopular law Out West, where hunting vests are fashionable in board rooms and day-glo orange an acceptable colour for a bridal gown. Back East, though, it was hugely popular in the wake of a lone-gunman-style shooting of 28, killing 14 female students in what is known as the Montreal Polytechnic Massacre in 1989. Earlier, in 1984, a wacko in full military cammies, bandoliers and automatic weapons occupied the Quebec Assembly building for several hours, killing three. There had also been a spate of drive-by shootings in Toronto that were entirely uncharacteristic of the city. As a result, the gun-registry was divisive in the extreme – demanded in the East, and the cause of widespread civil disobedience in the West.

The long-gun registry is not a very good law, actually. The police seem to like it, but statistics appear to show it has had little effect, good or bad. Violent crimes have been on a slow decline for some time in this country, regardless of the law. Most weapons involved in firearms offences are handguns smuggled into Canada from our neighbour to the south, which pretty much renders the entire effort pointless.

The Conservative government has so far dealt with the problem by issuing one “amnesty” after another, effectively refusing to enforce the law. Early this year, a Conservative bill was read in Parliament that would end the long-gun registry, but the combined votes of the opposition parties “shot it down,” so to speak.

Despite this, the PM has vowed to end the long-gun registry in his next government. Evidently, it made no impression on him that the people had plainly spoken and what they wanted was stronger gun-control. He will do away with the registry whether they like it or not.

But Stephen Harper does not want us to rest easily in our beds. The Conservative government has worked long and hard to inflame the public's fear of crime, and offers its own solution. Never mind the guns. Build more jails. Hand down longer sentences. Young offenders should be tried as adults.

The same contempt for the democratic process can be found in Harper's attempt to undermine the financial base of opposition parties.

At one point in our past, the party or parties that catered best to the interests of big business had no trouble raising campaign funds. A word about forestry or mining to the candidate was enough to ensure that he (rarely she) would do nothing to imperil a healthy return to the shareholders. In return, the candidate had no worries about his campaign expenses. Corporate money would roll in and pay all the bills – the travel, the posters, the newspaper ads and spots on CBC radio, even the raucous parties with call-girls after the election victory. CP Rail or Domtar Paper or Inco Mines would pick up the tab. In the 2004 election, though, Liberal then-Prime Minister Jean Chretien passed a bill that gave political parties a per-vote subsidy for their campaign expenses. Although widely debated, it is generally accepted that the public subsidy has increased the independence of political candidates from the influence of corporate donations.

Stephen Harper is dead set against it, and promises to end the subsidy. The Conservative Party enjoys the overwhelming support of Big Business, Big Agriculture and Big Oil. Its campaign coffers runneth over. On the other hand, even the centrist Liberal Party – advocating an end to tax cuts and promoting environmental policies held in deep suspicion by the Big Three – has trouble raising money. The NDP has historically been strapped for cash, while parties as small as the Greens must reach into their own pockets and go into debt. This, of course, is exactly why the cash-rich Conservative Party and despotic Stephen Harper are desperate to end the subsidy.

Compare Canada with the luckless United States, whose Supreme Court has recently thrown the door open to corporations corrupting the

political process, so that the ultra-rich can have the best government money can buy. We know when we have a good thing going. And so does Stephen Harper, who wants to end it, in spite of what the people of Canada want. His concept of a democratic nation amounts, in practice, to a one-party state.

If Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party do pick up those extra 6% of the voters and fill a few more seats in Parliament, he will have his majority. He will do these things. He will try to do them even if he is only elected to another minority.

Well, why can't the "left" merge to form a stronger single party to oppose the united "right?" I would imagine one reason is that a lot of political careers would be lost in the shuffling. There can't be two leaders of one party, among other jobs at stake. Another reason is that there remains a small but very real difference in outlooks between the NDP, leaning farther left, and the Liberals, leaning ever-so-slightly to the Conservative point of view. For the parties to merge, it would likely take a disaster to the Liberal Party on the same scale of magnitude as fell on the old Progressive Conservatives in 1993. Unfortunately, that would give Stephen Harper's Conservatives an overwhelming majority government in the interim.

In a Parliamentary government, however, there is another possibility. Parties may at any time form a coalition, and when they possess enough seats between them, they form the government. This is perfectly normal. The government of the United Kingdom – who would surely know what is kosher for Parliament – is currently a coalition between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Parties. Coalition governments are virtually the norm for many countries – I can name Italy and Israel without even checking, and I suspect the Scandinavian countries to belong to that list as well... as indeed they do! Also Germany, Australia, Switzerland, Japan, and on and on...

Even Stephen Harper sought to form a coalition government to become Prime Minister in 2004. He signed a letter with the leaders of the Bloc and NDP that they would form the next government should the ruling Liberals fail in a confidence motion. As it happened, the Governor

General didn't call on the opposition parties to form a government when the Liberals failed, but called for a more usual election instead.

Fast forward to 2010. Suddenly, the shoe was on the other foot. The NDP and Libs toyed with a coalition that had Steven Harper livid with anger. Non-democratic, he charged. Thwarting the will of the majority, he cried – fine words for a PM with less than 34% of the popular vote. In the end, the threat was brought to an end when the PM went to the Governor General and asked her to prorogue Parliament. What that means is to bring that session of legislating to a premature end, on his say-so. For whatever reason, the Governor General permitted this – perhaps she was grateful that Steven Harper had appointed her to the job. It was the second time he had requested a prorogation, too. He had done it in 2008, as well, to avoid a non-confidence vote against *his* government – the first time in our history that a Prime Minister had done so.

Our PM is taking no chances in the current election. Taking a leaf out of the Republican campaign book, he has demonized what he fears, and created the “C” (for “Coalition”) word. (In America, it's the “L” word, for Liberal. Or Liberty... I forget which.) By flying in the face of facts, and attacking the imagined undemocratic idea of coalition government, he has made it impossible for the opposition to even *discuss* the possibility. Instead, they have scrambled to their feet to denounce it, along with Harper's Tory minions. The amazing thing is that the voters appear to believe this nonsense! Yet Canada has twice before been led by coalition governments. Our very first was the Great Coalition of all parties, that welded Upper and Lower Canada together to form our present-day Dominion. The second was the Union Party. Comprised of Liberal and Conservative Members of Parliament, they joined forces in 1917 to better conduct the national effort during World War One. What could be more Canadian than “For King and Country?”

Yet Stephen Harper tells us that a coalition government is undemocratic, unCanadian. He means it's unConservative Party, and could lead to him vacating the Prime Minister's Office. *Nothing* in his mind is more wrong than that.

And so we lose our last best chance to rid ourselves of a dangerous autocrat.

What have we to expect of a Stephen Harper majority government? The very least, we can be sure, is that it will be easier to carry a rifle along with you for those occasions when you sight a raccoon you have an impulse to pot... and we can expect the government agencies that assist the disadvantaged will be quietly under-funded. Tough-sounding statements will be made about our Arctic sovereignty, while nothing is actually done. Taxes will be cut for the oil industry, while the public continues to *actually subsidize* the still-uneconomical cost of extracting oil from the Alberta tar sands – a favour to the White House? Or tribute? There will be tax breaks and shelters for those of us who already have substantial savings. That is to say, not many. Cities will be neglected, their revenues declining, their public transpiration decaying, their services drying up. When our present agreements between the Provinces and Feds must be renegotiated in a few years, Ottawa will put privatization – a much-hated concept in Canada – on the table, so as to benefit insurance companies. We will waste much-needed tax money on arms that make us useful to the Pentagon. We will build more prisons for the criminals that Stats Canada says aren't committing crimes. Stats Canada's figures will be set aside in favour of figures more to the liking of the government. Meanwhile, the agency itself will be further impeded in its role of collecting information. The CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation – a hallowed public institution) can expect threats to its funding – it might even be eliminated altogether. Who knows, we may even sell all distribution rights for maple syrup to the Saudis or Russians, for no particular reason... just to rub Canadian's faces in how powerless we are. A few years ago we actually sold the theme music for Hockey Night in Canada, and Disney now owns the right to market the likeness of the RCMP. For certain, we will have much to fear in a virtual one-party state, where ordinary features of our Parliamentary system are demonized in pursuit of a more presidential-style leadership. We all know how well *that's* been working out in places like Libya and Egypt, lately.

With so much choice, let's all get out and vote, eh?

Me? In the last election I voted for the Marijuana Party, and I don't even smoke the stuff.



L'Esprit d'Escalier

Garth Spencer

I swear that one of these days I have got to do an all-reviews issue, just to catch up on the fanzines I receive in trade.

One of the most unexpected was *Swill*, a revival of an intentionally provocative 1980s fanzine from one of Vancouver's Surrey Contingent. I haven't decided how to respond yet (and it's been about a month).