

The Outer Limits Of American Politics

LYNDON LAROUCHE AND THE NEW AMERICAN FASCISM

By Dennis King
Doubleday, 415 pp. \$19.95

THE SILENT BROTHERHOOD Inside America's Racist Underground

By Kevin Flynn and Gary Gerhardt
Free Press, 419 pp. \$21.95

By David J. Garrow

POLITICAL EXTREMISTS receive relatively little press and public attention nowadays so long as their activities remain nonviolent. Numerous such groups exist, particularly on the far right, but active followers are few in number and factional splits occur more often than do significant recruiting drives. Only in the rare instance when a self-proclaimed extremist attains public office—such as Louisiana state representative David Duke—or when one band or another turns to visible criminality is the critical eye of the media turned their way.

Often the unspoken premise is that expanded coverage, be it of Louis Farrakhan or a white neo-Nazi, will help promote a message rather than expose it. Only when the danger seems immediate—a credible election campaign of lightly veiled public death threats—does a harsh and unremitting spotlight descend.

Quietly but persistently, however, a few journalists and a few civil liberties groups, most notably the Anti-Defamation League, keep a careful and almost respectful eye on those whom most political observers find too marginal or bizarre to worry about. Often their published work—Chip Berlet's investigation of the Fred Newman/Lenora Fulani New Alliance Party, James Coates's 1987 *Armed and Dangerous: The Rise of the Survivalist Right*, and Elizabeth Wheaton's 1987 *Code-name GREENKIL: The 1979 Greensboro Killings*—receives far less public attention than deserved.

Among students of extremism no one's commitment or courage exceeds that of Dennis King, who for over a decade has studied Lyndon LaRouche and LaRouche's chameleon-like network of organizations with remarkable dedication, undeterred by the foul aspersions that every critic of LaRouche encounters. In recent months LaRouche and his Leesburg, Va.-based followers have been more in the news as LaRouche himself and six top aides have been convicted of federal fraud and tax-evasion charges and jailed for sentences reaching up to—in LaRouche's case—15 years. While King emphasizes that LaRouche's legal downfall had its

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roots in the brazenly deceptive fund-raising practices that were employed in his 1984 presidential campaign, the most significant stimulus for both media and prosecutorial scrutiny of LaRouche's network came from the unexpected March 1986 Democratic primary victories of two of his followers running, respectively, for lieutenant governor and secretary of state in Illinois. Although most voters had not known who they were, and although they were resoundingly rejected in the general election, the LaRouche followers' Democratic success fatally harmed the gubernatorial campaign of former senator Adlai E. Stevenson III.

King's detailed and fascinating book traces both LaRouche's life story and the development of his cult-like band of followers. Now 66, LaRouche was born a New England Quaker, spent part of World War II as a conscientious objector, and in 1949 joined the small, Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party. Up until his 1966 expulsion from the party, LaRouche busied himself with the minutiae of Marxist sectarianism while earning a living as a management consultant. As a self-designated teacher of Marxism on the upper west side of Manhattan during the late 1960s, LaRouche acquired some adherents within the "progressive labor" faction of Columbia University's important chapter of Students for a Democratic Society. When SDS disintegrated, LaRouche gathered his several hundred followers together as the National Caucus of Labor Committees (a rubric LaRouche still retains) and initiated physical confrontations with other left sects while beginning to introduce cult-like psychological dependency tactics along with a conspiracy-theory view of history that gradually became more and more explicitly anti-Semitic. Beginning as early as 1973, and unmistakably apparent by 1977, LaRouche moved his 500 or so energetically devoted adherents from the far left to the far right.

King's book provides as full a picture of LaRouche's convoluted rhetoric and ideology as anyone is likely to want. Despite the odd shift, despite the transparent anti-Semitism and despite a maximum number of committed followers of under 1,000, LaRouche from 1979—when he entered the Democratic Party—through 1988 accumulated no shortage of politically significant achievements: personal audiences with CIA deputy director Bobby Ray Inman, Mexican president Jose Lopez Portillo, Argentinian president Raul Alfonsin, Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi and heads of state in Turkey and Peru; federal matching funds from his 1980, 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns totalling \$1.7 million; a nationwide electoral effort that put hundreds of candidates on Democratic primary ballots; and a predatory fund-raising effort that gen-

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Children saluting a burning cross at the 1986 Aryan World Congress

erated over \$30 million in 1984—and over \$200 million from 1980 to the present—often by deceiving elderly conservatives.

King's argument that LaRouche should be viewed as a dangerous and anti-Semitic fascist, rather than simply a bizarre figure given to weird ranting about the Queen of England and Henry Kissinger, is persuasive and correct. However, King errs in stressing that LaRouche's greatest threat lay in the electoral potential of his con-

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spiratorial blame-laying; instead, LaRouche's greatest harm has been the human damage done by his financial frauds, which, as King notes, bear “striking resemblances to a traditional racketeering enterprise.”

THE SAME point—that extremist groups consistently pose more of a criminal than a political threat—can be made more directly about the rural western revolutionaries—also right-wing and anti-Semitic—profiled by Denver reporters Kevin Flynn and Gary Gerhardt in *The Silent Brotherhood*. The central figure in their story is handsome, clean-cut Robert J. Mathews, who joined the John Birch Society at the age of 12 and eventually, at age 31, died in a 1984 shoot-out in Washington State with scores of federal agents following a year-long series of successful robberies—including the largest armored car hold-up in American history. The proceeds were to provide multi-million dollar funding for “The Order,” Mathews's small, white “Aryan” army that he hoped would violently overthrow “Zog,” the “Zionist Occupation Govern-

Martinez has told his own story (with John Guinther) in *Brotherhood of Murder* (1988), and his account nicely supplements the comprehensive, first-rate reporting of Flynn and Gerhardt by giving distinct portraits of Mathews's followers.

Flynn and Gerhardt view The Order as “rather ordinary” working-class white men, many with one employment grudge or another, for whom the robbery loot had as much meaning as Mathews's battle plan. If LaRouche's several hundred middle-class, generally well-educated adherents are psychologically trapped in an all-but-total dependence upon LaRouche's all-encompassing version of “us versus them,” Mathews's brand of more violent but similarly money-oriented anti-Semitic racists are simpler, more familiar figures. In both cases, however, basic criminal law enforcement—whether against fraud, robbery or murder—will curtail most extremist threats. Most, but not all—and in this King is correct in his largest point, even if not in its application to LaRouche, rather than, say, to David Duke. “America is too violent and diverse—and too vulnerable to economic crisis,” he writes, “to avoid forever a major internal challenge from some form of totalitarian demagoguery.” When that time comes, however, parallels will be drawn to Huey Long and George Wallace, if not Duke, rather than to Lyndon LaRouche or Robert J. Mathews. ■