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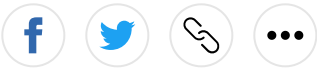
Lyndon LaRouche: The Conspiracist Who Earned a Following

1922-2019



Lyndon La Rouche speaks at a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, DC on May 5, 1988. | The Washington Post via Getty Images

By JESSE WALKER
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Postscript

L yndon LaRouche was a serial presidential candidate, a convicted fraudster who spent the early 1990s behind bars, and a onetime management consultant who became the head of a Marxist sect and then a sort of proto-fascist. But he was best known for his byzantine conspiracy theories, which he and his followers expressed in terms that sounded like an abstruse treatise crossed with a diss track. Bertrand Russell was a “high priest of Isis.” George Soros was “the Queen’s favorite dope-pusher.” Walter Mondale was “jointly owned by the left wing of the Socialist International and the grain cartel.” Jimmy Carter had been compelled by a “systematic behavior modification program” into serving “a small group of preeminent Wall Street financiers.” Henry Kissinger was both “an agent of the British foreign service” and “the kind of homosexual personality who ordinarily makes a potential professional assassin.”

Even LaRouche’s own operation was purportedly infiltrated by brainwashed sleeper agents. Over the years, his network’s political concerns ranged widely—it denounced drugs, promoted nuclear power, claimed responsibility for the Strategic Defense Initiative, called for quarantining AIDS patients and developed an obsession with the evils of improper musical tuning—but it never lost its cultish capacity to go hunting for the enemy within.

So the most interesting thing about LaRouche, who died in February, might be the fact that he nonetheless found his way into the orbit of power. That’s the *far* orbit of power, mind you: There never was any risk that he would get a Cabinet appointment or a job on Capitol Hill. But he certainly makes for an interesting game of six degrees of separation. Conspiracy theories have always played a major role in American life. And if LaRouche’s theories were too weird to give him real influence, they weren’t too strange to keep him from becoming a Zelig figure.

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Political
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The Writer
Who
Recalibrated
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Some of the prominent names whose lives intersected with LaRouche-land won't surprise you. Former Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura has long had a fondness for conspiracy yarns, so it isn't exactly shocking that he rhapsodized about LaRouche's "world of knowledge." The same goes for the prison-bound political operative Roger Stone: *Of course* he called LaRouche "a good friend of mine" and praised the man's "extraordinary and prophetic thinking." It would be more surprising if he hadn't.

But what about Dixy Lee Ray, who served in the Nixon and Ford administrations before becoming governor of Washington? A fierce foe of the environmental movement in office and afterward, she eventually turned to LaRouchie literature for ammunition. "I'm not interested in their politics," she told reporter David Helvarg shortly before her death in 1994, "but they're doing some of the best work on cold fusion and other technologies frozen out by the science establishment."

Or what about Norman Bailey, a high-ranking official at the Reagan-era National Security Council? He admitted to meeting three times with LaRouche, and he told NBC that the old crackpot had "one of the best private intelligence services in the world." When the *Washington Post* asked about the relationship, Bailey said that other NSC staffers had introduced him to LaRouche's network and that he had circulated a LaRouchie position paper on fusion power. The *Post* [article](#), published in 1985, went on to note that "the LaRouche group has spent the last several years currying favor with officials of the NSC, CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency, Drug Enforcement Administration, the military and numerous other agencies." It casually added that LaRouche had scored meetings with a president of Mexico, a president of Argentina and a prime minister of India.

Or how about Fiona Hill? #Resistance readers whose hearts just skipped a beat needn't worry: The ex-NSC official who testified at last month's impeachment hearings never went through a LaRouche phase. But she did write two books and several articles with a fellow named Clifford Gaddy. At the time, Gaddy was her colleague at the Brookings Institution, but before that he spent years helping to run LaRouche's operations in Sweden. (As far as I can tell, Gaddy has not publicly discussed this portion of his past. When the BBC's Matthew Sweet attempted to extract a comment from him—a tale described in Sweet's 2018 book [Operation Chaos](#)—the effort culminated with Gaddy's wife berating the reporter between sets at a folk-music concert. "We have no interest in this," she said. "Do you respect that? *Do you respect that?*")

Robert Dreyfuss, who reports for publications ranging from *Rolling Stone* to the *Nation*, used to work for LaRouche's *Executive Intelligence Review*. (A [sample Dreyfuss sentence](#) from 1980: "Exhibiting the strong flavor of faggotry, the puffy-cheeked, baby-faced [Robert] Moss combined the worst English pomposity with that exquisite simpering quality that most Americans dislike about the British aristocracy.") David P. Goldman, whose byline has appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* and *Commentary*, [got his start](#) with LaRouche, too. A [conspiracy book](#) he co-


wrote for the LaRouche organization managed the impressive error of confusing Milton Friedman the economist with a Milton Friedman who ran a liquor company.

My point isn’t that Lyndon LaRouche was quietly pulling strings in the circles of power and punditry. That would require a logical leap worthy of LaRouche himself. It’s that he’s a particularly vivid example of a certain social type: The operator who sets up shop in Washington or its outskirts (in LaRouche’s case, Leesburg, Virginia), where his out-of-the-mainstream views don’t prevent him from trying to sell himself to figures in and around the government. Even as he hurls abuse at one collection of prominent people, he finds part-time allies elsewhere in the power structure by telling them what they want to hear. And if he acquires enough followers, some of them will later try to climb the pole themselves, shedding as best they can the affiliations of their youth.

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