
Interview: Carl Oglesby

Former SDS leader insists that LaRouche 'has never been a Marxist'

What follows is an on-the-record interview for EIR of the "famed" 1960s leader of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), Carl Oglesby, interviewed by Herb Quinde.

He recently had a letter published in the New York Times stating that, contrary to published reports, Lyndon LaRouche was not part of SDS, but in fact destroyed it. Oglesby is now a Cambridge, Massachusetts-based "writer." Oglesby is the author of The War Between the Yankees and the Cowboys, a book that indicates his peripheral access to the intelligence community.

Q: You sent a letter to the *New York Times* on LaRouche. Why?

A: As an SDSer I wanted to set the record straight that PL [Progressive Labor Party] and NCLC [National Caucus of Labor Committees] whatever they were had nothing to do with SDS as such.

Q: Many say that Lyndon LaRouche was responsible for the destruction of SDS. Is that your assessment?

A: I think that NCLC was negative toward the democratic left, the spontaneous left, and had as its purpose the destruction of the so-called "Movement."

Q: By "Movement" you are speaking of the 1960s New Left?

A: Where New Left means that you organize around democratic ideals rather than socialist ones. You are concentrating your focus of organization in the community rather than the workplace.

Q: When you say "democratic left," do you mean Michael Harrington, etc.?

A: I didn't like Harrington then. I didn't like the whole LID [League for Industrial Democracy] complex. One of the reasons I found sympathy with SDS was its willingness to have a head-on clash with the LID and to pull itself out of that organization.

Q: Wasn't SDS a child of the League for Industrial Democracy?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: This is an important point because Mr. LaRouche says that his detractors today are the same people he was fighting back in the 1960s.

A: I am not going to debate it. NCLC and Lyn Marcus had nothing to do with SDS. For the media to treat it as though it were an offshoot of SDS instead of a disinformation project targeting SDS, is a bloody shame for people to mis-remember. I was in a position to know how it was from direct experience, and I wrote [to the *New York Times*] on a very particular question, which is whether it makes sense to think of the Marcus/LaRouche, Labor Party/PL/NCLC formation as authentic parts of the New Left and SDS, or on the contrary as organized efforts to frustrate, confuse, disrupt, and destroy the New Left.

Q: Do you think LaRouche was coming from the right, left, or center?

A: None of those. I have learned not to use those categories. I was never a leftist. I was never a rightist. I was not a centrist in the sense that I was namby-pamby, hugging to the middle road. I was a centrist in the sense of Zen. I have always thought that this country works best when it has a broad central consensus. I could always understand conservatives. I felt good about the conservatives I knew when I was growing up. The teachers that I had while in high school were good hard American conservatives cut from a hardwood oak. . . .

Q: How do you view Mr. LaRouche, politically?

A: I think that he has been very consistent. I disagree with the mainstream simplicitude at his expense that tries to paint him as someone who just finds the direction or trend and adopts whatever rhetorical coloring is convenient. I don't think this at all. He has operated in different arenas because different arenas are important at different times. In the 1960s, the New Left was the source of an enormous amount of energy and the focus of a great number of social issues.

Q: Do you think LaRouche was Marxist then, that is, what the Heritage Foundation says.

A: No, I don't think he has ever been a Marxist. I think maybe he has been detained by certain metaphors that are

present in a number of 19th-century economists besides Marx. Metaphors of mechanism of rational process of a direction of a historical movement. I think he is a progressive.

Q: The left alleges that LaRouche was working for some government agency against SDS.

A: I don't know, but I have asked myself that question more in terms of PL than in terms of NCLC.

Q: The Heritage Foundation says LaRouche is a left-winger.

A: I don't know why they call him left. He asked to be called left when he was Lyn Marcus and NCLC positioned itself on the left. I thought the reason for this, as I have said in my letter to the *New York Times*, was to destroy the left. To take up a convenient position from which it would be easy to sow all types of confusion and chaos and despair and a good deal of fear in this naive group of people grouped under the term "New Left."

Q: Do you think LaRouche was tied to East bloc?

A: Oh no. Besides, that is something beyond what an average citizen could know. I don't think anyone can answer a question like that. For one thing, when you are on the outside, you don't know anything. When you are on the inside and you get that clearance and see what those secrets are like, then it is a hall of mirrors and infinite regress. Like Howard Hunt said in a different context, but it applies, he says, at a certain level in the intelligence trade, not even the top operative, knows at last, who he is working for.

Q: Could you be more clear in answering the question?

A: I am trying to answer the question. I am saying the guy [LaRouche] could be a dispatched counterintelligence agent of the National Security Agency. If I had to pick one of those kinds of things, I would have had with other alphabet soups, I would have had FBI, CIA. If he is a dispatched counterintelligence agent of an American institution legally operating in this mode, then I would say it was the National Security Agency.

Q: What if Mr. LaRouche is what he says he is?

A: Well, that is another possibility as well. The point I am making is that I look at politics in terms of authoritarianism on one side, as a kind of negative value for me. I think authoritarian systems are bad from an information-theory standpoint. On the other side is the politics of freedom and I favor the politics of freedom. I would call myself, if forced to, a libertarian. But most of these terms cover a lot of garbage. I believe the Constitution is divinely inspired. I think it is one of the great things we have. I believe that democracy is the best of all possible systems. I believe in every citizen's right to be independent of politics and party. I think these are the three classical American virtues and the foundations of our strength, constitutionalism or, in other words, republicanism and democracy and the sense of independence. . . .

As we modernize and keep faith with the mission of technology and science, which I believe is part of our obligation as modern people, we have to remember how good it was for our grandfathers to be independent and free-standing. We should always keep that as a value.

The politics that is authoritarian and introduces paranoid fears of our adversaries, I am against. I am in favor of a politics of non-ideological realism. Like I made a speech at Fort Leavenworth a couple of years ago at the Army General Staff and Command College where I predicted that because of this ideological stuff, we were spending way too much of our effort against the Soviet and East Europe, and this whole new world of fronts—Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia, not far behind—were opening up and we were not ready. I mean, how many people do we have working in Arab cultures? We didn't know enough about that part of the world and it was becoming very important. We had ideological Cold War blinders on. We still don't understand the problems between us and the Japanese. That's the kind of thing I have been trying to talk about.

Q: The "best and the brightest" have either been one-worlders or bi-polarists?

A: If you know my works, you know that I have been one of the few people on the left that has tried to push an awareness of the Trilateral Commission.

Q: An example of how *EIR* differs on analysis of strategic questions is the case of Nicaragua. The country is more of a Jesuit theocracy than a communist state—

A: You have a point there.

Q: On the Soviet Union, Gorbachov is more religious than Jerry Falwell will ever be.

A: I agree with you. I spoke on a similar subject at Fort Leavenworth once also.

Q: Mr. Olgesby, are you working for the CIA? Is Cord Meyer or Tom Braden your control?

A: I don't know sometimes. I wonder who is running me.

Q: Again, do you think Mr. LaRouche is a Yankee or a Cowboy?

A: I think he is an authoritarian.

Q: Do you think he is an authoritarian because he likes Plato?

A: Yes. If LaRouche were on my side he would like Aristotle. I am an Aristotelian.

Q: This issue has recently become prominent in the debate inside the Democratic Party. It would be interesting, don't you think, if this debate were to make it to the Supreme Court?

A: You just may get that chance.