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Chapter 13

The Impossibility of Conservatism: The Discourse of New Right Ideology

Darin Barney

The specific care of the political philosopher is political words, not political things. Thus the unique charge of political theorists is not to direct political activists but to safeguard political language. (Andrew, 1988, p. 196)

What's in a "neo-"? Writing in 1965, Canadian patriot and philosopher George Grant (1995) lamented, "The impossibility of conservatism in our era is the impossibility of Canada" (p. 81). Nearly three decades later, political economists Stephen McBride and John Shields (1993) would write that neoconservatism is "incompatible with the continued existence of Canada as we have come to know it" (p. 1). For Grant, conservatism is essential to Canada; for McBride and Shields, neoconservatism undermines Canada. Yet all three concur that the possibility of Canada as a nation, substantially distinct from the United States, relies on its embodiment of virtues that are impossible under the regime of an unfettered market and American liberalism. For Grant, these virtues are conservative; for McBride and Shields, they are social democratic. These authors can say the same thing about liberal capitalism (and Canadian nationhood), while saying opposite things about conservatism, because Grant's conservatism was not the same as the neoconservatism of McBride and Shields. The latter's "neo-" refers to what Grant sensed conservatism was becoming, even in 1965, when he observed that "Lockian liberalism is the conservatism of the English-speaking peoples" (p. 75).

Confused? I have not yet reached the part about Canada's history of political parties calling themselves *Liberal* and *Progressive Conservative*,

ideologies that have long since ceased to correspond unambiguously to their names. In fact, the discursive terrain of Canadian partisan ideology is as formidable, shifting, and deceptive as the geographical terrain of the country itself. This chapter will explore what the rise of "new right" political parties and ideology might mean for civic discourse in Canada. I will argue that the ideology of the new right not only presents a challenge to our contemporary political conversation, but also signals a crisis of meaning in that part of our civic vocabulary where ideological designations demarcate coherent political positions. In particular, I will suggest that the discourse surrounding the rise of the new right finally drains the word *conservative* of any descriptive utility in the Canadian context.

A NEW RIGHT PARTY FOR CANADA

The new right in Canada is a multifaceted, loosely aggregated social and political movement. Its non-partisan elements include intellectual incubators such as the Fraser Institute and the Conservative Forum; media outlets such as *Alberta Report* and *BC Report* magazines; umbrella organizations such as the National Citizen's Coalition; and more directed advocacy and activist groups such as the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, REAL Women, the Campaign Life Coalition, the Canada Family Action Coalition, and the Canada West Foundation. The partisan manifestations of the new right are similarly diverse, with several parties of varying strengths and prospects emerging in a number of provinces. Included in this list are the Progressive Conservative parties that have managed to form governments in Alberta and Ontario, the Saskatchewan Party and the Liberal Party of British Columbia (the official opposition in their respective provinces, with strong prospects for eventually forming governments), the Confederation of Regions Party (a minor but notable force in New Brunswick and elsewhere in the 1990s), and a smattering of provincial Reform and Libertarian Parties in various provinces.

For the purposes of this discussion, I will limit consideration to the federal Reform/Alliance Party. On the one hand, singling out Reform/Alliance is somewhat artificial, as the party is organically linked in membership, organization, and ideology to most of the above-listed actors. On the other hand, it is Reform/Alliance whose impact on civic discourse—and political life generally—has been felt most acutely at the federal level. Also, many of the ideological elements of the new right constellation find order in the ideology of Reform/Alliance.

The rise to prominence of the Reform/Alliance Party has been well documented (Dabbs, 1997; Dobbin, 1991; Harrison, 1995; Sharpe & Braid, 1992). Conceived at an assembly in Vancouver in May 1987, the Reform Party was born at a founding convention in Winnipeg in October. At this convention, the party chose as its leader Preston Manning, a management

consultant in the oil industry and son of former Social Credit Premier of Alberta Ernest Manning. Apart from the historic sense of alienation often felt by western Canadians, a number of specific events explain the impetus behind the Winnipeg convention. The founding of Reform/Alliance coincided with the unraveling of Brian Mulroney's historic electoral coalition of moderate Québécois nationalists and disgruntled western Canadian economic and political elites. The dissolution of the coalition followed closely on the heels of the 1986 Meech Lake Agreement. In the same year, Canadair-CAE Ltd. of Montreal received a large federal contract to build CF-18 military aircraft. The unhappy loser in the bidding process was Winnipeg-based Bristol Aerospace (Carty, Cross, & Young, 2000; Harrison, 1995).

Once on its feet, the party fielded 28 candidates in the 1988 federal general election but failed to secure a seat. The pivotal issue in this election was the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, proposed by the Progressive Conservative government. Reform supported the deal, which left the upstart party in the somewhat ironic position of fighting its first campaign by aligning itself with a key platform position of the very party it had risen to oppose. Entry into the House of Commons would await the victory of Deborah Grey—"a straight-talking, gospel-singing schoolteacher with strong anti-abortionist views and a political pedigree" (Harrison, 1995, p. 140). Grey won her seat in a 1989 by-election in the Alberta riding of Beaver River. Also in 1989, Reform candidate Stan Waters won a vacant Senate seat.

The general election of 1993 marked the emergence of the Reform Party as a full-fledged player on the federal scene. The party capitalized on the collapse of the Progressive Conservative vote in the West and on its exclusive status as the only federal party based in English Canada to have opposed the Charlottetown Accord. Riding a popular sentiment (54.4% of Canadians had voted against the constitutional proposal), Reform won 52 seats, all but one from west of the Manitoba-Ontario border. These figures meant that Reform had elected five times as many MPs in western Canada as the other opposition parties combined; and in so doing, Reform had become "the *de facto* parliamentary opposition west of the Ottawa River" (Laycock, 1994, p. 214). The 1997 general election saw Reform convert *de facto* into *de jure*, as the party won 60 seats, and Preston Manning became the leader of the official opposition in the House of Commons.

The news in 1997 was not all rosy. Despite the expenditure of considerable effort, the party was unable to elect a single member to a seat east of Manitoba. The party and its leaders were convinced that their lack of success was due to a split in the right-wing, anti-Liberal vote. The division occurred between ascending Reform candidates and declining Progressive Conservatives. Soon after the 1997 election, Reform leader Preston Manning began to press for a solution to the perceived vote-splitting problem.

He appealed to Progressive Conservative voters in seat-rich Ontario to consider switching allegiances and voting strategically to prevent the election of Liberal candidates by default. Quickly, Manning's overtures matured into a full-fledged strategy to "unite the right." Manning urged Reform and Progressive Conservative constituency associations not to contest each other in ridings where their combined vote might exceed that of their Liberal opponents or, alternatively, to agree to a formal amalgamation of the parties at the national level.

Despite having his invitations rebuffed by many Reform members and the federal leadership of the Progressive Conservatives, Manning pressed forward with the plan under the auspices of the United Alternative movement. The United Alternative plan ultimately garnered the support of the federal Reform caucus, gaining 60 percent of the party membership (as expressed in a June 1999 referendum). He also gained the crucial support of Progressive Conservative Premier of Alberta Ralph Klein and several high-profile members of Mike Harris' ruling Ontario Progressive Conservative Party. As a consequence, in February 1999, a United Alternative convention voted to create a new right-wing federal political party. The proposal reignited dissension within the Reform fold, and Manning threatened to resign, should the membership reject the plan for a new party.

In January 2000, delegates attended a second United Alternative convention, at which they adopted a constitution, policy declaration, and name for the new party—the Canadian Conservative-Reform Alliance Party (CCRAP). (The name was later changed to the Canadian Reform Conservative Alliance to circumvent derogatory pronunciation of the acronym.) In a March 2000 referendum, the Reform Party membership approved formal consolidation with the Alliance. Four months later, in July 2000, the Alliance selected its first leader, Stockwell Day—a former pastor, auctioneer, and Finance Minister of Alberta under the Progressive Conservative government of Ralph Klein. The founding father of both the Reform Party and the Alliance, Preston Manning placed second in the leadership contest, with Ontario Progressive Conservative strategist Tom Long placing third. Under Day's leadership, the Alliance contested the 2000 general election in each of Canada's 301 federal ridings. The party increased its national seat total to 66 (from Reform's 60) and its percentage share from 19.4 to 25.5 of the national popular vote. The Alliance retained Reform's status as official opposition in the House of Commons. Despite a massive campaign effort in Ontario, the party captured only two seats in that province and increased its popular vote from 19.1 percent to 23.5 percent. The remaining Alliance seats were all located in western Canada, 50 in British Columbia and Alberta.

NEW RIGHT IDEOLOGY IN CANADA

In the popular imagination and discourse, Preston Manning's Reform Party and its Alliance offspring are typically characterized, often dismissively, as a western party of regional protest. Canadians view Reformists as vaguely descendant from the failed tradition of Canadian prairie populism, pathologically xenophobic (particularly in relation to the Québécois), and animated by fundamentalist Christian zealotry. This interpretation is inadequate and misleading on a number of levels, as revealed in the growing body of scholarship that attempts to reckon with the nuances and complexity of the party's ideology (Barney & Laycock, 1999; Flanagan, 1995; Harrison, 1995; Jeffrey, 1999; Laycock, 1994; Patten, 1996; Sigurdson, 1994). Concentrating on official Alliance policy, I will point to the primary and enduring pillars of the party's ideology, as it moves into its period of maturity and institutionalization. These pillars include commitments to particular interpretations of liberty, equality, and democracy—which, in turn, combine to yield a principled conviction regarding the role of the state and the character of public and private life.

Liberty

Accepting his election as leader of the Alliance, Stockwell Day began his speech by proclaiming that the "Freedom Train" was about to roll forward to Ottawa, bringing with it "freedom from oppressive government." As this declaration suggests, the core of the Reform/Alliance ideology is a principled commitment to the protection of negative liberty—understood as individual freedom from formal, external constraint. This conviction manifests itself in a particular antagonism toward the state and its government. Rooted in the political theory of John Locke (1986), this interpretation of liberal ideology seeks to provide philosophical justification for strict limits on the scope of public authority (especially in economic matters). According to Locke, men unite into political communities in order to preserve their lives, liberties, and estates. Each is reducible to "the general name, property" (p. 180).

In Article 21 of its policy declaration, the Canadian Alliance commits itself to amending the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to include "the right to own, use and benefit from private property" (Canadian Alliance, 2000a). While common law has historically recognized this right, its inclusion in the *Charter* would constitute a radical change. More significant, however, is the anti-state commitment to roll back the expansion of public authority, which attended the growth of Canada's welfare state in the postwar era. As stated in the preamble to the policy declaration, the party seeks to ensure "minimal government intrusion in people's lives" by limiting the powers of government to "the functions essential to a modern state" (Canadian

Alliance, 2000a). Chief among these essential functions is creating "an economic climate in which businesses can thrive" (Canadian Alliance, 2000a). Achieving this goal implies minimizing or eliminating the intervention of public authority in market distribution of private property and goods.

The most obvious manifestation of this ideological commitment has been the party's policy on taxation. An indispensable instrument of wealth redistribution, taxation is perhaps the most basic claim the public good makes against the private property of individuals. It is also the primary target of new right liberalism. This view holds that the level of taxation necessary to sustain the welfare state is, by definition, excessive and a coercive infringement of individuals' right to dispose freely of their property. In its platform for the 2000 federal election, the Alliance characterized current levels of taxation as "an incredible hardship for ordinary Canadians trying to make ends meet." In a new-age twist on an old bourgeois refrain, Alliance promised, "By paying lower taxes you can achieve your true potential" (Canadian Alliance, 2000b). Central to the Alliance's first campaign for office was a regressive proposal to flatten income-specific taxation to the single rate of 17 percent.¹ In effect, this proposal would have neutered what remained of the welfare state in Canada. Along with this lowering of personal income tax, the 2000 election platform pledged to reduce payroll and capital gains taxes paid by corporations, high-technology enterprises, and small businesses (Canadian Alliance, 2000b).

The liberal conception of liberty as the freedom of property holders from state intervention in markets animates a range of Alliance policy positions that extend beyond matters of taxation. These oft-repeated positions include the following: support for international and interprovincial free trade; massive reductions in social spending; dismantling of regional development agencies such as the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency; reduction of employment and income security benefits; privatization and divestiture of Crown corporations, including the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and VIA Rail; comprehensive deregulation (specifically of the commercial airline industry); abandonment of the federal spending power in social policy areas; eliminating the universality of the Canada Pension Plan; de-collectivization of agricultural marketing; and legislated requirements regarding social spending, balanced budgets, and debt reduction. This legislation would seriously curtail the economic discretion of elected governments.

In the Alliance's relatively unreconstructed liberal economic ideology, the chief positive role of democratic government vis-à-vis the economy is thus, ironically, a negative one: to institutionalize the absence of the state. Such an absence necessarily renders moot the possibility of the state acting as a public agent of economic redistribution or as a medium through which considerations of common welfare might moderate the extremities and in-

equities of the capitalist market. In place of the welfare state, Alliance ideology (as expressed in its policy declaration) recommends "personal responsibility, individual freedom, and independence" (Canadian Alliance, 2000a). For "those who require assistance to achieve the level of independence of which they are capable," the Alliance suggests that, rather than the state, "families, communities and non-governmental organizations are best placed to respond to individual needs on a personal basis" (Canadian Alliance, 2000a). That these agents of civil society might face resource challenges due to reductions in social spending by the state is of no concern, as Alliance tax cuts "will leave resources in the hands of those who are best able to help" (Canadian Alliance, 2000a).

Alliance ideology, however, departs from the doctrine of strict non-interference in certain areas such as civil relations and personal morality. In these areas, Alliance recommends a robust, activist role for the state—but only in certain instances. For example, Alliance principles and platform items regarding criminal justice indicate unambiguously the party's willingness to flex the muscle of the state in order to enforce its particular vision of social order. Under the rubric of establishing "clear consequences for crime and compassion for victims" (Canadian Alliance, 2000b), the Alliance advocates a range of measures, including removal of judicial discretion in sentencing, increased use of indefinite incarceration for "career criminals," registration and mandatory lifetime supervision or monitoring for certain categories of offenders, lowering the age for prosecuting youth offenders as adults to 14, enabling publication of the identity of youth and other offenders, increasing restrictions on parole eligibility, and denying prisoners the right to vote. Survey research into the opinions of Reform Party activists in the early 1990s indicated that 82 percent favored the restoration of capital punishment (Archer & Ellis, 1994)—a position endorsed publicly by Alliance leader Stockwell Day in the 2000 election campaign (Leblanc, 2000).

The party's endorsement of the above measures confirms that the Alliance's concern for minimalist state intervention in economic liberty is not matched in reticence toward state invasion of individual civil liberties. Although it may seem contradictory and illiberal, the Alliance view is completely consistent with Locke's foundational vision of the state's primary responsibility as being to protect private property (life, liberty, and estate), in this case by punishing grievously those who threaten or do it harm. This vision of justice as individuated restraint and retribution (as opposed to, for example, equity, fairness, or collective welfare) supplements the Alliance's liberal view of negative liberty. This latter vision is expressed ideologically as a principled conviction that "the rights of victims of crime must take precedence over those of criminals" (Canadian Alliance, 2000a).

The role for the state in domestic relations, as contemplated by Alliance ideology, is also less than perfectly non-interventionist. On the one hand,

Alliance principles assert a liberal doctrine of non-intervention in private domestic matters, affirming “the right and duty of parents to raise their children responsibly according to their own conscience and beliefs” and stating that “no person, government or agency has the right to interfere in the exercise of that duty except through due process of law” (Canadian Alliance, 2000a). At the same time, the Alliance is committed to using state authority to legitimize certain types of domestic relationships as constitutive of “family,” while explicitly de-legitimizing others. Calling the family “the essential building block of a healthy society,” Alliance principles endorse the extension of legislated benefits to “individuals related by blood, adoption or marriage” but restrict qualification in the latter category to “the exclusive union of one man and one woman” (Canadian Alliance, 2000a).² Given the number of entitlements (and obligations) attached to conjugal union in Canadian society, Alliance policy regarding promotion of “the family” would involve the state in an uncharacteristically high degree of prescriptive intervention in private life. For example, an Alliance government would not define gay and lesbian couples and their children (or those living in other non-traditional configurations) as “families.”

Equality

The preamble to the Alliance policy declaration lists, among the party’s core principles, a devotion to “true equality of citizens and provinces” (Canadian Alliance, 2000a), and its 2000 election platform pledges that an Alliance government would “treat all Canadians equally” (Canadian Alliance, 2000b). A rhetorical commitment to equality is a minimum condition for admission into legitimate political discussion in a liberal democracy. The liberal democratic tradition proposes a range of “equalities,” including radical egalitarian rejection of distinction and excellence, equality before and under the law, equal opportunity, equality of rights, and material equality. Like other ideological positions in the modern liberal democratic galaxy, Alliance principles suggest support for some of these equalities and not others. The new right, for example, opposes the award of “special” status, rights, or entitlements based on the unique characteristics, needs, or situations of individuals collected in distinct groups or categories. Pledging to abolish “preferential hiring based on gender, race and ethnicity quotas,” the party opposes “the use of affirmative action or any other type of discriminatory quota system” in the federal public service (Canadian Alliance, 2000b). (It is not clear whether this proposal extends to rejecting bilingualism as a qualification for advancement in the federal public sector.)³

The Alliance vision of equality is indicated also in its approach to Aboriginal affairs. Citing “individual freedom and equality before and under the law” as the “key principle” of the party’s position, the Alliance pledges that it will “protect the democratic rights and freedoms of *individual ab-*

originals,” recognizing that they have “the same rights and responsibilities as all other Canadians” (Canadian Alliance, 2000a). In practical terms, this principled commitment to equality for Aboriginals translates into elimination of most aspects of the distinct status that Aboriginals have enjoyed as a group, due to their unique historical and material circumstances in Canadian society. Thus, an Alliance government would eradicate “race-based allocation of harvest rights to natural resources” (Canadian Alliance, 2000a) and end the tax exemption extended to many Aboriginals by assuring that they “pay their share of federal and provincial tax” (Canadian Alliance, 2000b), just like any other citizens.

The doctrine of equality as identical negative liberty for individuals, coupled with non-distinction for and between groups, is equally evident in the Alliance position on multiculturalism. While pledging to “uphold the freedom of individuals and families to nurture aspects of culture that are important to them,” the Alliance declares “we believe that multiculturalism is a personal choice, and should not be publicly funded” (Canadian Alliance, 2000b). Thus, in the Alliance view, individuals should be free to choose and express the identities they prefer from those available in the cultural marketplace. However, the state must not support the maintenance of those identities or the public cultural practices of individuals or collectivities, as such support privileges members of some groups over others. (The Alliance view of equality, however, does not question the institutionalization of the cultural practices of the majority in matters such as state holidays tied to the Christian calendar.)

In regard to allocation of benefits among provinces, the party believes that “all Canadian provinces should be equal before and under the law, possessing equal powers to govern within their areas of constitutional authority . . . and each should have equal freedom to build the society most appropriate to its citizens” (Canadian Alliance, 2000a). The party opposes asymmetrical federalism—the doctrine perceived to be at the root of the special status historically granted to the province of Québec and denied to the western provinces. The party also opposes federal redistributive programs that favor certain regions of the country over others.

In summary, except in matters involving definitions of family and some cultural practices that favor the majority, the new right sees *equality* as identical treatment for all individuals and groups—never differentiated treatment.

Democracy

As with its forebears in the Reform Party, the Alliance expresses its commitment to “direct democracy” under the rubric of institutional and procedural reform of the Canadian electoral and parliamentary systems. Popular discourse and pundits have often placed the new right’s various

democratic designs under the banner of "populism," but *plebiscitarian* is probably a better term (Barney & Laycock, 1999). The animus of the new right's program for democratic reform is a perceived corruption of democratic practice, as it presently exists in Canada. Alliance supporters see the sources of this corruption as twofold.

In the first instance, the Alliance believes that old-line parties and parliamentary conventions have corrupted democratic practice by demanding strictly disciplined voting behavior by individual members of Parliament. Adherence to such codes of practice undermines the ability of elected officials to represent the will of their constituents (Laycock, 1994). To remedy this first defect, the Alliance pledges to "restore democratic accountability in the House of Commons" by increasing the frequency of free votes (i.e., stipulating that, besides those pertaining to the budget and main estimates, no vote in the House shall be considered a matter of confidence unless expressly designated as such). This new parliamentary convention would free MPs to vote the will of their constituents without partisan consequence. Other proposed reforms would include the direct election of senators, parliamentary review of senior public service and judicial appointments, and broader use of the notwithstanding clause (Canada, 1982: s.33) to override judicial decisions. By radically altering political institutions in Canada, the new right agenda for democratic reform would seriously undermine the role of political parties—including itself, of course.

The second source of democratic corruption, identified consistently by Reform/Alliance, is the perceived capture of governance by "special interests." The new right ideology defines a special interest as "any group that requests publicly provided benefits that require governments to skew market distributions of resources" (Laycock, 1994, p. 217). According to this definition, "feminist lobby groups, native organizations, organized labor, multicultural, linguistic and ethnic groups, the management of most crown corporations and state agencies, and public sector unions are special interests" (Laycock, 1994, p. 217). Advocacy organizations such as the Canadian Taxpayers' Federation, the Fraser Institute, REAL Women, the National Citizens' Coalition, and the Business Council on National Issues, on the other hand, are *not* special interests because their efforts do not demand redistribution of public resources.

In the new right imagination, special interests exert inordinate influence on bureaucrats and elected officials, whose legitimacy becomes contingent on their ability to satisfy these groups. This "tyranny of minorities" usurps the sovereignty of ordinary Canadians (Manning, 1992, p. 321). The proposed remedy for this condition is a reconstruction of democratic practice to include a variety of direct democracy instruments—often technologically mediated (see Barney, 1996). The use of these tools would de-amplify the voice of institutionalized special interests and enable the common sense of the common people to emerge and be recognized. Thus, the Alliance main-

tains traditional Reform Party commitments to the frequent use and recognition of instruments such as MP recall, state-sponsored referenda, and citizens' initiatives in Canadian democratic politics (Canadian Alliance, 2000a).

As mentioned above, previous research has demonstrated that the democratic elements of new right ideology are best described as *plebiscitarian*, rather than simply *populist*. Briefly, plebiscitarian democratic practices bear three definitive elements: a relative absence of institutionalized preference mediation/representation, decision-making oriented toward private calculation of personal interest (as opposed to public deliberation on collective goods), and a high degree of elite manipulation in the process of opinion registration (Barney & Laycock, 1999). Direct democracy, as designed and practiced by the Reform Party, exhibited each of these qualities, and little evidence suggests that the Alliance mutation will differ substantially. While this plebiscitarian approach to democracy makes logical sense, it also drains democratic participation of its public-spirited character and downplays the role of collective deliberation and dialogue. Thus, plebiscitarian democracy deprives civil society of a regime (i.e., a political sphere and corresponding set of civic practices) in which it might organize itself to attend to its common welfare. Plebiscitarianism thus accomplishes a profound depoliticization/privatization of public life. That it can do so in the name of increased democratic participation is the model's particular, albeit cynical, genius.

A QUESTION OF DEFINITION

Some would contest the designation of the partisan new right as an ideological phenomenon. Reflecting on his tenure as senior advisor and strategist for the Reform Party, Tom Flanagan (1995) rejects ideological characterizations of the party as "fundamentalist" or "conservative" (pp. 5–36). Instead Flanagan attributes the party's direction to the personal, non-ideological, methodical populism of Preston Manning. I would disagree. The maturing of the Reform Party into the Alliance Party and the takeover of leadership by Stockwell Day suggests that the glue binding the federal new right in Canada is something more deeply adhesive than fealty to the vision of a single individual.

In the foregoing, I have presented this glue as ideology. That is not to say that new right ideology is coherent, consistently expressed, or easy to name. Indeed, attempts to locate the thread that stitches together the various elements of the party's ideology are thwarted by the subject's complexity and the emptying of meaning from nomenclature historically applied to ideologies. Thus, for example, Harrison (1995) labels Reform ideology as *pure populism* when it comes to politics and *neoliberalism* when it comes to economics. Patten (1996) writes, "Reform's neo-liberal

populism is further characterized by libertarian and socially conservative ideological commitments" (p. 96). Jeffrey (1999) prefers simply *neoconservative*. Laycock and I throw *neoconservative* around with abandon but also isolate in Reform "a distinctive ideology we call *plebiscitarianism*" (Barney & Laycock, 1999, p. 318). Sigurdson (1994) describes Manning's ideological disposition as "a distinctively postmodern conservatism" (p. 250).

In brief, if there is a consensus on how to characterize the ideology of the new right in Canada, it is roughly as follows: liberal economics, populist politics, and conservative social values, with the label *neoconservative* often offered as the discursive bag to hold these three attributes. Yet this elaboration of the contemporary new right's positions on liberty, equality, and democracy provides ample support for its designation as predominantly liberal in the classic Lockean sense; it suggests modifying the populist label to *plebiscitarian*, and finds little persuasive ground for a meaningful association of the word *conservative* with the new right in Canada.

Still, the label persists, and not without reason. As Jeffrey (1999) has shown, the lineage of the party's liberal economics are traceable to roots in parties led by Thatcher in the United Kingdom, Mulroney in Canada, and Klein in Alberta. Each of these parties carried the word *Conservative* in their names. (U.S. counterparts are the Reagan/Bush Republicans.) In the same way, Reform/Alliance leaders and members refer to themselves as *Conservatives*, although some prefer *fiscal* to *social* as an antecedent modifier. The Alliance recently added *Conservative* to its official name. The left has managed to convince many that the proper name for an ideology supportive of market capitalism is *Conservative*. However, while extant, the reasons for calling Reform/Alliance *Conservative* are ultimately not persuasive, particularly in the Canadian context.

It is commonly supposed that the label *conservatism* connotes an abstract aversion to change. Thus, Sigurdson (1994) suggests that Reform conservatism "speaks to the fear that Canadian society is changing too rapidly" in the wake of the cultural and economic dynamo of postmodernity (p. 267). However, to the extent that conservatism in the Canadian tradition has ever existed as a meaningful category, the ideology is rooted in British "Tory-ism," not American liberalism. The priorities of Canadian Tory conservatism include the following: a preference for stability over change, order and collective welfare over abstract individual liberty, a willingness to use the state to intervene in the market distribution of resources, support for nationalism, protection of hierarchy and social distinction (rather than abstract egalitarianism), and deference to duly constituted and responsible authority exercised by elites in the public interest (Ajzenstat & Smith, 1997; Horowitz, 1967; Taylor, 1982).

CONCLUSION

If the preceding discussion even remotely captures the distinctive historical attributes of Canadian conservatism, then it is difficult to refer to the ideology of the new right as *Conservative*. Indeed, the Reform/Alliance agenda precisely inverts each of the principles listed above. Individual liberty must trump the demands of social order and collective welfare. State intervention in the market must be minimized. Free trade and globalization are encouraged. Equality (as identical negative liberty for individuals) obliterates hierarchy and disallows social and political distinction (i.e., multiculturalism) or asymmetry (distinct status for Aboriginals and Québec). Plebiscitarian populism neuters elite trusteeship and shifts power back to the people. Even the argument that the new right is *Conservative* because its adherents value tradition over change is difficult to sustain, since Reform/Alliance proposals for institutional upheaval in the Canadian electoral and legislative systems verge on the revolutionary.

Should we label adherents as "Conservative" simply because they maintain a conception of "the family" and domestic life that might be better described as reactionary? Calling the new right *Conservative* makes sense only if that word is drained of its Canadian content and historical substance. Calling the new right *Conservative* only makes sense when, as Grant observed, it is reduced to identity with the very liberalism it has historically opposed. On a discursive terrain where unreconstructed liberalism assumes the mantle of conservatism, there is no place for the latter as a genuine, substantive ideology. Ironically, the rise of a new right liberalism that calls itself *Conservative* speaks to the final impossibility of conservatism in Canada.

NOTES

1. Article 17 of the Alliance's Policy Declaration commits the party to "a single rate of taxation" (Canadian Alliance, 2000a). The 2000 election platform promises an Alliance government would "move towards a single rate of tax on income"—moving in the first term of office from the current rates to two (a basic rate of 17 percent and a rate of 25 percent on incomes above \$100,000), and presumably to a single rate in a subsequent term (Canadian Alliance, 2000b).
2. It should be noted that at the time of this writing Canadian law also defines marriage in this manner. However, it is also true that some federal benefits and entitlements are beginning to extend to same-sex couples. The evolution of this shift is slow and far from complete, but it is fair to say that even this limited extension of rights to non-heterosexual couples and alternative families is beyond the contemplation of new right ideology in Canada.
3. Article 40 of the Alliance Policy Declaration supports the need to maintain service in both official languages in "key federal institutions, such as Parliament

and the Supreme Court," which might suggest that the party contemplates relaxing this requirement in the public service more broadly. This same article stipulates that the application of bilingualism must "reflect the reality of the community served," which can only be read as a retreat from the policy of Official Bilingualism in Canada.

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