

# the Progressive

Founded in 1909  
by Robert M. LaFollette Sr.

Morris H. Rubin  
Editor, 1940-1973

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## MEMO from the Editor

# Anticonspiracism

All of the Letters space in this issue is given over to readers who reacted—negatively, in the main—to Chip Berlet's article on "Friendly Fascists," the cover story of our June issue, and to Berlet's response to those readers.

I found some of those letters deeply disquieting—especially those that stated or implied that we shouldn't be too finicky about pursuing truth backed up by solid evidence, so long as one or another set of untested allegations fits in nicely with what we want to believe. Another troubling assertion was that there's no possible harm in making common cause with racists, anti-Semites, and others on the lunatic Right, so long as we can find some common ground on a particular issue.

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"Isn't it time to get in sync with the people and stop criticizing those who notice that the Right is beginning to do it better? One can make a strong case that those who read *The Progressive* are more privileged and elitist than those who read *The Spotlight*."

Well, I don't know about elitism and privilege among *The Spotlight's* readers or, for that matter, among *The Progressive's*. I do know that *The Spotlight*, affiliated with the neo-Nazi Liberty Lobby, engages in repulsive demagoguery. And yes, as-

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Maybe our unnamed letter-writer is correct (though I doubt it) when he claims that "the Right is beginning to do it better." We'll stay on the Left, thank you. Regardless.

Incidentally, our disgruntled reader asked us to cancel his complimentary subscription. I'm just glad he didn't demand a refund.

Bernard D. Nossiter, an old friend and frequent contributor to *The Progressive*, died of lung cancer in New York City on June 24. He was sixty-six years old.

Bud Nossiter was the author of half a dozen books, mostly on economic themes. At death, he was working on a study of the decline of the U.S. labor movement. For twenty-four years he covered economic news and several overseas beats for *The Washington Post*, and from 1979 to 1983 he was chief of *The New York Times* bureau at the United Nations.

In all of these positions, Nossiter's work was illuminated by a strong commitment to economic equity and social justice. He detested the deft manipulation of public opinion by corporate interests.

Last month in this magazine, Bud Nossiter wrote about the Government's deliberate high-unemployment policy and how it has contributed to economic disarray and urban blight. It was his last article. Like all his other work, the piece was clear, concise, and right on target.



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## Readers Respond to Chip Berlet's 'Friendly Fascists'

Chip Berlet seems to consider any talk of "conspiracy" as part of a right-wing plot ("Friendly Fascists," June issue). He criticizes Oliver Stone's fine film *JFK* as a tool of right-wing paranoid theories.

What is Berlet trying to say? Is he satisfied with the Warren Commission report? What was Watergate? What was Iran-contra? Is Oliver North a figment of our imagination? Were the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy self-engineered by James Earl Ray and Sirhan Sirhan? Who does Berlet believe was behind the attempted assassination of Eden Pastora?

Lorenzo Canizares

West New York, New Jersey

Chip Berlet's "Friendly Fascists" was instructive in showing how strange political bedfellows can indeed be, especially when right- and left-wing ideologues grope for each other in anti-government passion. Surely this unlikely courtship is not what Norman Mailer had in mind when he said, "Left meets Right at the end of the ideological road."

Nonetheless, Berlet himself seems to have fallen into the reactionary fallacy that all "conspiracism" equals paranoia—a flawed and counterproductive assumption that seems to pervade most of the establishment media, precluding good investigative reporting into possible (and often probable) coverups and conspiracies.

Although a hallmark of clinical paranoia is irrational fear of (misperceived) plots, cabals, etc., such activities have constituted much of the stuff of history itself. Conspiracy theory and investigation are legitimate intellectual and social fields of inquiry. Unfortunately, the subjects of investigation can, by nature, become so complex that potentially good in-

vestigators are denied the resources (time, money, energy) to pursue their efforts.

And corruption in government can become so common that the public wearies of its regular revelation and even begins to resent the media for bringing bad news so often. Meanwhile, the members of the power elite who really pull society's strings rest assured that general confusion and ignorance will continue to block insight into their hidden agendas and—yes—conspiracies.

A. Wayne Senzee  
Phoenix, Arizona

There is an evil trend in this country today to libel perfectly innocent people in the media. Chip Berlet is one of a group of immature activists who perpetrate this crime. I would hope a magazine with *The Progressive's* fine reputation would not lend itself to such slanders.

Berlet charges that my 1973 book, *The Secret Team*, "sparked much of the current resurgence of conspiracism." He is totally wrong. The book is autobiographical and certainly not political. It simply states things as they were in 1955-1964, with normal follow-up to the time of publication because of the release of the Pentagon Papers. "Conspiracism," as Berlet calls it, had nothing to do with that book. I doubt the word appears in its 496 pages.

Berlet cites the Christic Institute's use of my title, *The Secret Team*. That was unauthorized, and I have never had anything to do with the Christic Institute and Daniel Sheehan. I had nothing to do with the fact that the Iran-contra principals also made use of the title, *The Secret Team*.

Berlet says, "The Liberty Lobby's *Spotlight* newspaper superimposed Prouty's original thesis on its own con-

spiracy theory regarding Jewish influence in U.S. foreign policy." I have never written about "Jewish influence." In fact, comments I made at the Holocaust Memorial Conference in Washington have been reprinted in Jewish publications.

*The Spotlight* picked up comments of mine as any publication might. I have never belonged to, or paid a penny to, the Liberty Lobby. At an annual Liberty Lobby convention, I was asked to speak about banking, and I did. I was not paid one penny. Speaking at a convention on a dry subject such as banking is scarcely grounds for a charge of "conspiracism."

Berlet links me with Bo Gritz, Victor Marchetti, Mark Lane, Dick Gregory, Lyndon LaRouche, and David Duke, among others. I have met Gritz once. I know Marchetti from CIA days. I have met Mark Lane. I have never met Gregory or Duke.

After taking a madman's slam at Oliver Stone's movie *JFK* (I was an adviser to Stone—a role seriously limited by the fact that I underwent a complicated coronary operation during that period), Berlet writes, "The Right's conspiracy themes have been transported by Prouty and Mark Lane and presented to the political Left." Utterly preposterous. In today's world, I would not be able to define the distinction between Left and Right by the action I see.

Berlet writes, "While both Lane and Prouty say they don't agree with the views of the Liberty Lobby network, both minimize the network's record of bigotry and promote variants of the same paranoid themes." This is absolutely untrue. At no time have I either "minimized" bigotry or "promoted variants" of the same.

L. Fletcher Prouty  
Alexandria, Virginia

Chip Berlet is wrong when he accuses Craig Hulet of being anti-Semitic. If Hulet knows Willis Carto or anybody else who, in Berlet's opinion, is anti-Semitic, that is Hulet's business.

"Conspiracy" is a word, much like "liberal" or "Communist," that is used to cut off debate. Just label someone a "conspiracy theorist," shake your head, and walk away. This is, apparently, now the strategy of *The Progressive*. Yet anyone who has been involved in an organization with more than a few hundred members knows that the people at the top have agendas that differ from the version that trickles down to the troops.

That is, essentially, all that Fletcher Prouty, Bo Gritz, and Craig Hulet are saying. I believe they have become targets because of their association with conservative Christian groups. Holly Sklar was not singled out in *The Progressive* for writing about the Trilateral Commission, which is about as deep as you can go into "conspiracy theory."

The "magic bullet" theory of the Warren Commission is a fraud, and any research into the Kennedy assassination is valid and should not be ridiculed.

Wayne Wiley  
Huntington Beach, California

Periodicals I find helpful to search out the truth are *The Progressive*, *The Nation*, *Lies of Our Times*, *The Washington Spectator*, and—yes—*The Spotlight*. I am an avid reader of the last of these, and am at a loss to discern how it merits the sobriquet "Far Right" or "fascist." This goes for such related individuals and organizations as Willis Carto, Fletcher Prouty, Mark Lane, the Christic Institute, the Liberty Lobby, and the Populist Party.

It is strange that such ef-

forts are regarded as "Far Right." Am I missing some ominous threat of fascism lurking in these persons and groups?

Floyd Ellison  
Dearborn, Michigan

Readers of *The Progressive* might be interested to know that Robert M. LaFollette Sr. fought the Federal Reserve Act right up to the final vote in the Senate in 1913. LaFollette was a friend and political ally of Representative Charles A. Lindbergh. Far from being a Nazi, as Chip Berlet's article seems to suggest, the elder Lindbergh was a radical progressive, somewhat to the left of LaFollette. In 1918, *The New York Times* called Lindbergh "a kind of Prairie Bolshevik."

The Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota, which Lindbergh helped found, was a socialist formation. None of this is mentioned in Chip Berlet's article. What's going on? Have you considered the possibility that this Liberty Lobby outfit might be just one more CIA disinformation and discreditation front?

Mark Evans  
Santa Rosa, California

Chip Berlet confuses issues, causes, and allegiances, encourages divisiveness, and speaks of all conspiracy theories in such a manner as to dismiss them.

I not only think he is wrong; I think he is damaging people and causes which are driving at certain truths: Oliver Stone in *JFK*, Bo Gritz in regard to the U.S. Government's involvement in drug-running.

Each conspiracy theory deserves to be evaluated on its own merits. Just because there are so many of them does not necessarily mean they are untrue. If a conspiracy mania seems to be in the air, perhaps it is because there is so much evidence of wrongdoing. If we simply dismiss conspiracy theories,

as Chip Berlet would have us do, because there are so many of them, or because some of them come from the Right and some from the Left, we are missing the point: Let us hear the evidence.

The term "conspiracy czar" is a smear of sorts. What if the guy (in this case, Dennis Bernstein) proves right in only 50 per cent of the theories propounded? That's still half a picture more than we had before. (Furthermore, I suspect Bernstein knows whereof he speaks when he mentions attempts to silence him.)

Berlet also mentions Barbara Honegger's *October Surprise* revelations, which have yet to be investigated at the Congressional level or seriously aired for most people.

The last word I would use to describe these theories is "irrational." The reason they won't go away is that they hang together so well. Berlet would have us give up the pursuit of the criminals and the evidence.

Dwight Stone

Chip Berlet writes, "Some followers of the Christic line began to work with persons from the Far Right. A West Coast affiliate of the Christic Institute sells *The Guns and Drugs Reader* edited by Prevailing Winds, a conspiracy-peddling group that distributes material from mainstream, progressive, and Far Right sources."

This is not the first time Berlet has slammed Prevailing Winds Research or inferred that it is right-wing. Usually we don't pay much attention to his work because he distorts facts to make his point.

The dangers of such name-calling came up recently when Julian Feldman from the Canadian magazine *Now* called us for information on John Judge for an upcoming article. "I hear John Judge has right-wing leanings," said Feldman, and he added that

Berlet was the source of his information. Judge has a long history of working for progressive causes, and is anything but right-wing. Nonetheless, Feldman's article turned out to be a vicious attack on Judge.

As Berlet reported, we distribute material from mainstream, progressive, and Far Right sources. What he did not say is that of more than 200 books, reprints, audio and video cassettes that we distribute, two are from so-called right-wingers and six from the mainstream. That leaves more than 190 works by progressives.

As a small nonprofit organization, we hope we can provide an important social service, preserving and making available scarce and important information. We believe people should have access to all the materials necessary for educated analysis and decision-making.

Berlet raises some valid points, especially concerning anti-Semitism and racism. One problem with labeling and name-calling, however, is that such institutions as the Federal Reserve, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Trilateral Commission, which have been analyzed primarily by right-wingers, become taboo in discussions with the Left, and are not touched for fear of coming under attack by people like Berlet.

Patrick F. Ourmy  
Prevailing Winds Research  
Santa Barbara, California

What is not discussed clearly in Chip Berlet's article is an emerging debate between those who favor a conspiratorial paradigm and those on the Left who have a more structuralist analysis.

For instance, John Newman's book on Kennedy and Vietnam has drawn fire from both Left and Right because of his thesis that Kennedy was planning to withdraw U.S. forces from Vietnam and that this may have been

a motive for the assassination. Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, Alexander Cockburn, and others who should know better have argued that Kennedy's death made no real difference in American history, and that the idea that he might not have been a Cold War hawk is romantic disinformation.

For fear that "the system" will not be seen as the engine driving all the evil that is done, these and other progressives argue that any focus on Kennedy's death must imply a romanticization of his life or politics. They worry that this might lead some to conclude that capitalism might be better run by a "good President." But for the people of Vietnam and others, JFK's demise meant a great deal, for in fact he had planned a full withdrawal by the end of 1965, and those who killed him put into effect a ten-year war.

I think legitimate conspiracy research is being smeared by structuralists and intellectual elitists who lump all such analyses together.

I have had the privilege of knowing Fletcher Prouty as a fellow researcher, and he is no fascist, nor even a "right-wing critic." He has never, in my experience, said a word against any racial or religious group. But Prouty got little or no attention from the Left press, which has wrongly eschewed information on assassination conspiracies. Prouty was carried in the pages of *Gallery* (a flesh magazine), *Freedom* (a Scientology publication), and *Spotlight* (a right-wing showcase for the Liberty Lobby), without sharing the implicit or explicit views of these publishers. A major press published his book, *The Secret Team*, long before the reprint was issued by Noon-tide Press. Prouty was generous after it went out of print in allowing reprinting by anyone interested.

As a movement activist

and antifascist, I have scrupulously avoided forming any coalition with reactionary forces. I won't publish in their magazines or attend their conferences. This did not stop the LaRouche forces in Ohio from trying to enlist me and falsely claiming I was part of their organization. It did not stop Bo Gritz from lifting transcripts of my lectures on the Kennedy assassination into the text of his book, *Called to Serve*. Similarly, Liberty Lobby has listed the names of several researchers, including Prouty and Sherman Skolnick, on advisory boards without their permission.

There is an inherent elitism in censorship, assuming that we know better than the public. Bias needs to be identified, context is important, and disinformation needs to be challenged. But Berlet goes further by demanding that others hold to his own standards of purity. He would do better to drop his focus on guilt by association and work instead on association by guilt.

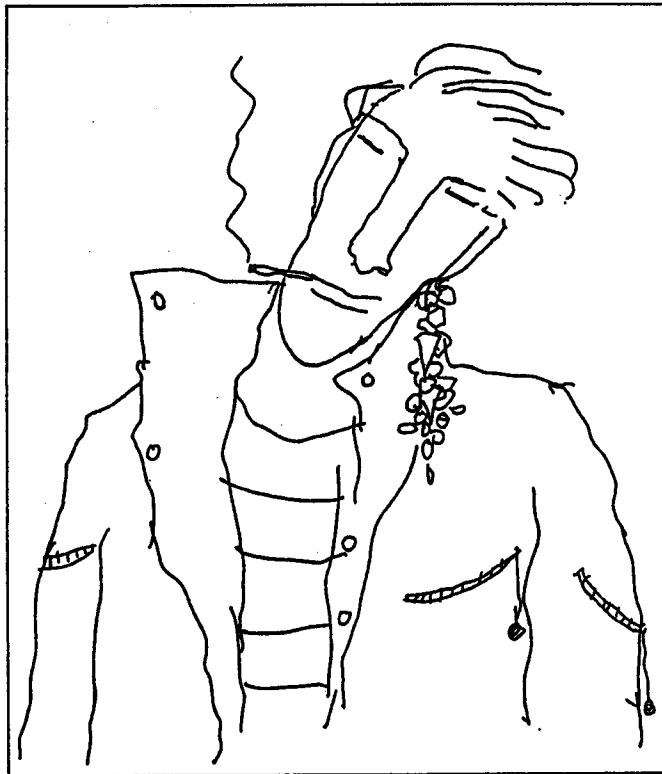
John Judge  
Washington, D.C.

**The author replies:**

Liberty Lobby, *The Spotlight*, Noontide Press, the Institute for Historical Review, the Populist Party, and the LaRouchians are accurately described as ultra-Right or fascist. This has been documented at great length.

Real criminal conspiracies do exist, and illegal government and right-wing activities involving covert action and political repression pose a serious problem, especially in communities of color and in the Third World. I did not mean to denigrate this harsh and sometimes murderous reality.

My argument is that lurid and heavily hyped unsubstantiated conspiracy theories circulated on the Left have pushed aside serious and well-documented investigations. A credulous constituency has been built among many progressives who now respond to demagoguery as if it were logical



BRAD HOLLAND

argument based on proven facts.

These people are now happily harvested by the fascist Right, which has long used radical-sounding language mixed with scapegoating conspiracy theories to bash the Establishment. It is immoral and, frankly, stupid to work with fascists, given their alarming tendency to devour their allies.

Prevailing Winds Research "recommends" tapes by fascist standard-bearer Bo Gritz and the vicious Jew-baiter Eustace Mullins as "important exposés." I have criticized John Judge's lunatic and undocumented conspiracy theories as "sincerely motivated but misguided." I am deeply troubled by Judge's promotion of Fletcher Prouty. I have never called Prevailing Winds or John Judge right-wing, nor did Toronto's *Now* magazine in its accurate and devastating article on Judge that quoted both Jane Hunter and me as his critics.

I believe that while they are prodigious researchers, John Judge, Mark Lane, Daniel Sheehan, Dave Emory, Barbara Honegger, Dennis Bernstein, and the

late Mae Brussell are seriously flawed, frequently fail to meet minimal standards of logic, and are, on balance, unreliable. This criticism, though harsh, hardly constitutes censorship.

Briefly: Holly Sklar's work on the Trilateral Commission avoids the conspiracism that infects much writing about this group. I have never called Craig Hulet an anti-Semite. I wrote about flaws in the Warren Commission's research as long ago as 1977. I have read Prouty's book. I am not now, nor have I ever been, an agent of any Government agency. There is copious documentation for my charges in my 40,000-word monograph, available from Political Research Associates.

I mentioned that Noontide Press carries Charles Lindbergh Sr.'s book on the Federal Reserve not to imply that he was a Nazi, but to illustrate the fascist Right's fascination with banking conspiracies and the Fed. Most progressives eventually distanced themselves from the fascist wing of isolationism.

Finally, Fletcher Prouty has forged a solid alliance

with fascists and has drifted toward right-wing conspiracy theories. His topic at the opening session of the Liberty Lobby's 1990 convention was "The Secret Team." Prouty assured the audience it was an "enormous privilege" to have his book republished by the Institute for Historical Review, a group, Prouty claimed, that keeps people "from revising history."

Prouty thanked Willis Carto and Tom Marcellus of IHR for the "guts and good sense" to republish his book. Following Prouty to the podium was Eustace Mullins, who spoke on "Secrets of the Federal Reserve." Another speaker was Bo Gritz, who claims that "eight Jewish families virtually control the entire Fed." The unvarnished thesis of Liberty Lobby is that traitorous Jews control our economy and foreign policy.

Prouty has been a guest at least nine times on Paul Valentine's Radio Free America program—syndicated by Liberty Lobby. An ad in *Spotlight* for a tape of Prouty's January 23, 1991, interview reads: "Was Bush's war [against Iraq] actually a 'Secret Team' operation? Colonel Fletcher Prouty, expert on this government within a government, argues that it has all the earmarks." I questioned Prouty about the obviously bigoted material circulated by his current publisher. Prouty refused comment.

I asked whether Prouty had asked that his name be removed from Liberty Lobby's Populist Party Action Committee Board of Advisers list. Prouty said he had not—and would not.

Prouty, who has also spoken at LaRouchian conferences, has compared Lyndon LaRouche to Socrates.

Chip Berlet  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

The editors welcome correspondence from readers on all topics, but prefer to publish letters that comment directly on material previously published in *The Progressive*. All letters may be edited for clarity and conciseness.