

Intelligencer

Political Cult Leader Lyndon LaRouche Dies at 96

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One of America's contributions to the 20th-century's rich legacy of dangerous political cult leaders, Lyndon LaRouche, has reportedly died at the age of 96. The native of New Hampshire was already in his 40s when he first made his mark as a Marxist New Left leader in the late 1960s who fought with other factions over the carcass of the once-influential Students for a Democratic Society. By the mid-1970s he had developed a tightly organized cult of personality that veered far right, and then became a pervasive if annoying presence from the street corners where LaRouche's ubiquitous pamphlets and publications were distributed, to the candidate debates where his "movement's" articulate if borderline-deranged apostles appeared for years in every corner of the country.

As a 1979 profile of LaRouche's U.S. Labor Party (as his "movement" was originally branded) in the *New York Times* reported, his devoted followers shifted rapidly in the 1970s into right-wing conspiracy theories and "intelligence gathering":

Beginning in 1976, the party voluntarily transmitted "intelligence" reports on left-wing movements to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and local police departments. In 1977, the group attempted to commercialize its intelligence network. According to former members, reports on anti-apartheid groups were prepared for South Africa, student dissidents were investigated for the Shah of Iran's Savak, and the anti-nuclear movement was examined for power companies.

Mr. LaRouche announces to the members several times a year that he is "targeted" for assassination by various conspirators. The latest, according to the candidate, include the Queen of England, "big-time Zionist mobsters," the Council on Foreign Relations, the Justice Department and Mossad, the Israeli security agency.

Originally in an effort to help Ronald Reagan by dividing his opposition, the LaRouche movement began depicting itself as a Democratic Party faction in 1980. LaRouche himself would run for president *seven times* as a pseudo-Democrat, despite promoting an ever-more-right-wing agenda. All over the country, journalists and voters alike were puzzled by LaRouche candidates in Democratic primaries who came across as calm, articulate, and *completely out of their minds* as they promoted some of their idol's favorite delusions, most notably the idea that Queen Elizabeth II was in charge of a global drug cartel.

The high point of this perpetual campaign of deception by LaRouchies posing as Democrats was in 1986, when, in a low-turnout primary in Illinois, LaRouche candidates won the Democratic nominations for lieutenant governor and secretary of state. They basically wrecked what had

been a promising year for Illinois Democrats, who had to create a separate ticket to avoid pulling these unwelcome parasites into office.

Eventually LaRouche was undone by his sloppy finances and deceptive practices, and served five years in federal prison on fraud and tax charges. But he made a comeback before eventually eating his own movement in the early years of the 21st century by trying to recruit a new cadre of young people via an attack on the very baby boomers who had followed him for so long. A suicide by the man who had long run LaRouche's publishing arm had a powerful effect on the group's membership and finances, though subventions from his devotees always kept LaRouche flush personally.

LaRouche had always maintained an organizational presence in Germany, and it's there that he last made waves, as *Foreign Policy* reported during a German national campaign in 2017:

A week before Germany's federal elections, Berlin is blanketed in a layer of campaign posters, from Angela Merkel and the Christian Democratic Union's bland slogan "For a Germany in which we live well and happily" to the far-right Alternative for Germany's proclamation of preferring bikinis over burqas.

But one set of signs are particularly bizarre, even cryptic.

"The future of Germany is the New Silk Road!" reads one pinned to a streetlight near Berlin's main train station.

"Cultural renaissance instead of barbarism," reads another. And, "Germans can stop world war!"

These posters, in a matching blue and yellow color scheme, all urge Berliners to "vote BüSo."

What the posters don't say is that BüSo — short for Bürgerrechtsbewegung Solidarität, or Civil Rights Movement Solidarity — is a political party founded and operated by eccentric American millionaire Lyndon LaRouche and his German wife, Helga Zepp-LaRouche.

LaRouche was seizing on the idea that a German-Chinese alliance could save the world. And there was a lot of evidence that his real audience wasn't in Germany but in Beijing:

"Journalists" associated with the LaRouche's news outlet, the Executive Intelligence Review, are regularly invited to Chinese government press conferences in Washington and are quoted extensively in Chinese state media, where they often parrot government propaganda ...

[T]here's the dangerous possibility that Chinese officials and academics actually think the LaRouche movement is a serious Western group. For a middle-aged Chinese official with little experience in or contact with the West, distinguishing between LaRouche's Schiller Institute and, say, the Brookings Institution, the Cato Institute, or other mainstream think tanks is tough.

Deceptive to the end, LaRouche passes from the scene having migrated from Marxism to quasi-fascism, and from fake Democratic to fake German allegiances. It's never been clear to what extent Lyndon LaRouche was a con man, or just a megalomaniac who drank too deeply of his own Kool-Aid. But he left a lot of damage in his wake. And in the end, the drug dealer Elizabeth II got the last laugh by outliving him.