

Canadian Alliance's Stockwell Day and the charge of anti-Semitism

What is the right covering up?

By Guy Leblanc and Keith Jones
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Charges that Canadian Alliance leader Stockwell Day is an anti-Semite, or at least in the past promoted hostility to Jews, continue to circulate. During the Alliance leadership race Day tried to lay such allegations to rest, declaring a claim that he had said Jews were “children of the devil” was “1000 percent false.” Yet questions about Day's beliefs persist, and this for three reasons.

Day has a past association with James Keegstra, a holocaust denier and notorious anti-Semite. As a church school principal and spokesman for the Alberta Association of Independent Church Schools, Day promoted a Christian fundamentalist curriculum that included materials that denounced Jews, Muslims, and the purported, liberal-humanist fallacy of democratic government. And last but not least, there is the Alliance itself—its program and origins and the people it attracts.

The Alliance's predecessor, the Reform Party, frequently made Anglo-chauvinist appeals.

During the current federal election campaign, the Alliance has sought to depict the most impoverished and marginalized section of Canada's population, the native peoples, as a coddled minority. Unlike Reform, the Alliance does not expressly call for a sharp cut in immigration, but it suggests that the Liberals have been allowing the wrong type of people into the country and wants to strip refugee claimants of the protections accorded them by Canada's Charter of Rights. Several Alliance candidates have made even more blatant appeals to anti-immigrant prejudice. Calgary Center MP Eric Lowther has said Canadians could use the Alliance's scheme for citizen-initiated referenda to limit immigration. Betty Granger resigned as an Alliance candidate in Winnipeg after she spoke of an “Asian invasion” of Canada's West Coast and accused Sri Lankan Tamil immigrants of using Canada to support terrorism.

Earlier this month, the corporate media pilloried Liberal MP and Immigration Minister Elinor Caplan for claiming Alliance supporters “are Holocaust-deniers, prominent bigots and racists.” As proof, Caplan had pointed to a Calgary rally organized by the Western Canada Concept (WCC) in part to promote Day and a vote for Alliance in the November 27 federal election. The WCC, which advocates the secession of Canada's four western provinces, is an ultra-right wing outfit headed by Doug Christie, a lawyer notorious for his defence of Holocaust deniers and neo-Nazis.

As to be expected, Conrad Black's *National Post*, has led the charge against Caplan. It has accused her of smearing Day and the Alliance because she faces a strong electoral challenge from a Jewish Canadian Alliance candidate and in a riding with a large Jewish population. How can Day and the Alliance, be held responsible for the actions of a separate organization like the WCC, asks the *Post*. Didn't the Alliance leadership expel Christie earlier this year upon learning he had taken out party membership? Taking the offensive, the *Post* has charged the Chretien

Liberal government with pandering to anti-Semitism because it directed Canada's UN ambassador to vote for a resolution that blamed the Israeli government for the current upsurge of violence in the Middle East.

Here is not the place to discuss the *Post*'s defence of Israel's subjugation of the Palestinians, but two points need be made. Its charge of Liberal anti-Semitism is premised on the first principle of all Zionist propaganda, that to criticize the state of Israel is to be anti-Semitic. Second, the historical record shows that there is no inherent incompatibility between supporting the Zionist state and holding anti-Semitic views.

The *Post*'s vituperation has a definite purpose—to obscure its own refusal and even more importantly that of Day himself to come clean about the views he espoused and the associations he developed in the first half of the 1980s.

The *Post* portrays Day's relationship with Keegstra as that of a car-owner and his mechanic, a chance association arising out of their living in the same tiny Alberta town of Bentley. At best this is disingenuous. Keegstra and his associate Jim Green, a fellow anti-Semite and an official in the national Social Credit party, attended prayer meetings led by Day. Moreover, according to Keegstra, in 1983 and 1984 he and Day had chats about “freedom of speech issues” and Keegstra's own case.

This, it must be emphasized, was at a time when Keegstra was already notorious. In December 1982 he had been fired from his public school teaching job for using it to promote claims of a Jewish conspiracy for world domination. Thereafter, he was embroiled in a very public struggle with Alberta government authorities, first for reinstatement and then on charges of violating hate laws.

In May 1983 the Tory Premier of Alberta, Peter Lougheed, felt it necessary to deliver a prepared speech to the provincial legislature that condemned Keegstra's views as “unequivocally racial, religiously prejudiced, historically inaccurate and distorted.” He pledged the province would undertake a review of the curriculum and classroom monitoring to ensure “greater tolerance and respect for minority groups.”

Reputedly, Day first met Keegstra in 1983, after Keegstra, who had been fired from his job at the Eckville public high school, moved to Bentley so he could work as an auto mechanic. Earlier this year, Green told freelance journalist Gordon Laird that Day “had said he wanted to be one of the first ones in there when Keegstra opened his garage.” (Laird's two-part article, “Bentley, Alberta: Hellfire, Neo-Nazis and Stockwell Day” can be accessed at <http://www.straightgoods.com/item313.asp>)

In Bentley, Keegstra continued his fascist political activities. He won election to the post of second vice-president for Alberta of the national Social Credit Party and with Green founded the Christian Defence League to raise funds for his battles with the Alberta government and courts. In 1984, the neo-Nazi Ernst Zundel made the pilgrimage to Bentley to

solidarize himself with Keegstra, while WCC leader Christie served as Keegstra's lawyer at a preliminary hearing in June 1984 and his 1985 trial.

Green says that Day never voiced support for his and Keegstra's anti-Semitic views. The then assistant pastor of the Bentley Christian Center and current Canadian Alliance leader told them that his church teaches the Jews are God's chosen people. But not even Clare Hoy, one of Canada's best-known social conservative journalists and the author of a promotional biography of Day, can point to a definite rupture between Day and Keegstra.

Significantly, while Keegstra and Green were trying to wrap themselves in the banner of free speech, claiming a democratic right to preach racial hatred, Day was involved in his own battle with the Alberta government over the rights of religious schools to set their own curriculum. In the course of this battle, Day declared, "God's law is clear. Standards of education are not set by government, but by God, the Bible, the home and the school." Today the Canadian Alliance leader claims he does not and never has subscribed to this view, but that his position as spokesman of the Alberta Association of Independent Church Schools obligated him to voice the opinions of all of its member schools.

It might appear strange that someone like Day, who was involved in his own struggle with the government and interested in making a career in politics, did not take pains to disassociate himself from fascists like Keegstra and Green.

But anti-Semitism has long had a popular base in rural Alberta, where it has fed off two distinct but intertwined traditions—Protestant fundamentalism and right-wing populism.

From 1935 to 1971, Alberta was ruled by a party that drew its name and initial political inspiration from the doctrine of Social Credit. "Bible Bill" Aberhart, the preacher who founded Alberta's Social Credit Party, did not endorse the claims of social credit's originator, C.H. Douglas, as to the existence of a Jewish financial conspiracy to dominate the world. But he did make openly anti-Semitic speeches and, as a concession to the social credit ideologues in his party, founded a government board to disseminate social credit propaganda, principally Douglas's writings. In 1947-48, Aberhart's successor as Alberta premier, Ernest Manning (father of Reform Party founder and Alliance MP Preston Manning), purged the party's leadership of anti-Semites and closed down the Social Credit Board. But the writings of Douglas continued to circulate among the Social Credit periphery and feed into the religious intolerance promoted by Protestant sects.

In 1980s Alberta, anti-Semitic views were not the exclusive preserve of the remnants of the Social Credit party. One reason Alberta Premier Lougheed publicly denounced Keegstra was that one of his own Tory MLAs had given a press interview in which he claimed he had never seen any evidence Jews were subject to mass extermination or even persecuted under the Nazi regime.

Keegstra is a product of rural Alberta's right-wing religious/political tradition. Day, by contrast, was drawn to Bentley, which has been called the buckle in Alberta's Bible belt, by his increasing commitment to religious fundamentalism. While Day reportedly disagreed with Keegstra and Green about their virulent hatred of Jews, he gravitated to the very milieu of fundamentalist religion and political reaction from which they emerged. Moreover, Day, whether because of sympathy or political calculation, saw no reason to vigorously disassociate himself from them.

For their part, Keegstra and Green continue to express admiration for Day, thus further underscoring that their parting, such as it was, was amicable. As the freelance journalist Gordon Laird has noted, Keegstra and Green perceive themselves as a persecuted minority and suspect almost all politicians, including even Preston Manning, as too close to the "new world order" and "Jewish world government." This only makes their continuing admiration for Day all the more troubling.

Before considering what in many respects is the most revealing aspect

of Day's political record, one further point should be made. Stockwell Day does in fact have a close family tie—in the person of his father—to the ultra-right-wing Western Canada Concept. At least as late as 1996, i.e., long after Doug Christie had become infamous for his support for anti-Semites and neo-Nazis, Stockwell Day Senior was among the small band of WCC enthusiasts.

On the WCC web site one can find a 1996 letter from the Canadian Alliance leader's father that reeks of racial prejudice. Relating a conversation he had with an immigration officer, Day Sr. says he told the officer he found it "curious that this person is not welcome. She is a New Zealander with no criminal record; she looks like us; she prays like us. Yet when we came through the waiting room, it gave me the impression that we were at a family reunion for the Harlem Globe Trotters. What the hell is going on?" (<http://www.westcan.org/august96.htm>)

Of course, Day cannot be held responsible for the political beliefs of his father. But they are germane, especially since in his biography of the Canadian Alliance leader, Hoy tells us that it was his parents, both Ayn Rand devotees, who schooled him in his right-wing, free market politics. Day's mother, Gwen, told Hoy, "there was so much discussion about politics in the Day household that 'the children didn't have a chance. They had to be interested in politics.'"

Day's successful struggle to secure legal recognition for 15 unlicensed Christian schools, including his own Bentley Christian Training School, helped precipitate his entry into party politics. In this fight, Day vigorously advocated before various government bodies the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum prepared by the Texas-based School of Tomorrow. He even said that he was prepared "to go to jail, if need be" to uphold the right of his school to choose what it taught.

The ACE curriculum propagated the views of the US religious right, and arguably its more extreme elements. The curriculum was criticized by an Alberta government Committee on Tolerance and Understanding as promoting "a degree of insensitivity towards blacks, Jews and natives." According to Ron Ghitter, the Committee's chairman and a Tory of Jewish decent, "ACE schools were schools of dogma ... the kids who came out had sort of a twisted Christianity with anti-Semitic overtones."

Ghitter found ACE materials that argued "all kinds of Buddhists and Muslims are evil."

An ACE workbook said the Jews had "followed their father, the devil," then asked students to answer the following question: "The Jewish leaders were children of their father, the devil (true or false)?"

The ACE curriculum dismissed evolution and espoused "creation science." Science booklets instructed, "Not all sickness is caused by demons, but some sickness is."

Democracy was condemned, while Ian Smith, the prime minister of the white minority-led Republic of Rhodesia, Ian Paisley, Northern Ireland's anti-Catholic demagogue, and Chilean military dictator Augusto Pinochet were lauded. Democracy, declared an ACE publication, "represent(s) the ultimate deification of man, which is the very essence of humanism and totally alien to God's word."

From its perusal of the public record, the *World Socialist Web Site* has found no evidence of Day ever having repudiated the ACE curriculum. When confronted with overtly anti-Semitic and bigoted statements from the ACE curriculum that he promoted, Day will say the materials in question were never used in his school. What he and his apologists deny is that there is any connection between these statements, and the curriculum as a whole—its espousal of creationism, denigration of secular society, and promotion of political reaction.

This stance is doubly significant, since a key plank in Day's political program is federal government support for religious schools. This promise was a key reason he won the support of the religious right in his bid to win the Canadian Alliance leadership and has since been incorporated in the Alliance election platform.

The WSWS would never deny that people's views evolve and change. But Day and his supporters in the corporate media steadfastly maintain that there is nothing in his past from which he needs to disassociate himself. Instead, they believe the best defence is to launch a scathing attack on anyone who raises questions about Day's past conduct and beliefs.

Why? Obviously, there is the difficulty of explaining how a man purportedly free of antipathy to Jews simultaneously found himself keeping company with virulent anti-Semites and fighting for the right to use a school curriculum which included anti-Semitic materials. More fundamentally, Day's defenders are most anxious that his fundamentalist beliefs and the right-wing political tradition from which he emerges not be made the object of public scrutiny, because they recognize the vast majority of Canadians will find them abhorrent.

If not anti-Semitism per se, certainly intolerant attitudes toward natives, homosexuals and other historically marginal groups are integral both to the Canadian Alliance and the political-religious make-up of Stockwell Day.

That powerful sections of big business are promoting such a figure as prime minister must be taken by working people as a sharp warning of the assault on democratic and workers' rights that is in preparation.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>