

Sovereign Citizens in Canada

Symposium

2140 rue Bishop, Annex D (SGW campus)

Concordia University, Montreal

May 3 2018

CEFIR



 **CÉGEP ÉDOUARD-MONTPETIT**

Schedule

10h: Welcome and introduction

10h30: **The Anti-authority Movement in Canada: Scripts and Strategies**

Dr. Barbara Perry, University of Ontario Institute of Technology; Dr. David Hofmann, University of New Brunswick and Dr. Ryan Scrivens, Concordia University

11h: **A Rebellion of Furious Paper: Pseudolaw as a Revolutionary Legal System**

Donald Netolitzky, Alberta Court of Queen's Bench

11h30-13h: Lunch

13h: **"Nostalgia for the Future?" Religion, Politics and Science in the Visionary Literature of Five Canadian Anarchists**

Susan J. Palmer, Concordia University

13h30: **Sovereign citizen movements in Quebec**

Gabrielle Lavigne-Desnoyers, Service de police de l'agglomération de Longueuil

14h00: Coffee break

14h15: **Survivalism, militia movements and the far right against the state: continuities and discontinuities.**

Martin Geoffroy, Centre d'expertise et de formation sur les intégrismes religieux, les ideologies politiques et la radicalisation (CEFIR)

14h45: **A Pathogen Astride the Minds of Men: The Epidemiological History of Pseudolaw**

Donald Netolitzky, Alberta Court of Queen's Bench

15h15: **General discussion**

Presentation abstracts

The Anti-authority Movement in Canada: Scripts and Strategies

Dr. Barbara Perry, Dr. David Hofmann, University of New Brunswick and Dr. Ryan Scrivens

We explore the contours of what we have come to describe as the anti-authority movement (AAM) in Canada. Contrary to popular images, the movement cannot be reduced to a focus on Freemen-on-the-Land, nor can it be understood as particularly violent. Rather, what our interviews and open source analysis uncovers is a diverse, very loosely connected number of individuals who share little more than a broad distrust of state and legal authority. While they may recite similar scripts, the rationales and strategies for engaging those scripts depart widely. Moreover, we also discovered that, in spite of law enforcement anxieties, the AAM has been involved in very limited violence historically. We conclude with some caveats relative to recent trends toward the rhetorics of militarization and gun rights reflected by small parts of the movement.

A Rebellion of Furious Paper: Pseudolaw as a Revolutionary Legal System

Donald Netolitzky

Pseudolaw is a collection of legal-sounding but false rules that purport to be law. Though pseudolaw is now encountered by courts and government actors in many countries worldwide, pseudolaw is remarkably constant, nation-to-nation.

This observation is explained by the crystallization circa 1999-2000 of a matrix of pseudolaw concepts interwoven with a conspiratorial anti-government narrative. This Pseudolaw Memplex was incubated in the US Sovereign Citizen community. The Memplex then spread internationally and into additional anti-government communities. That expansion either complemented or replaced other pre-existing pseudolaw systems.

The Sovereign Citizen Pseudolaw Memplex has six core concepts:

- 1) everything is a contract,
- 2) silence means agreement,
- 3) legal action requires an injured party,
- 4) government authority is defective or limited,
- 5) the “Strawman” duality, and
- 6) monetary and banking conspiracy theories.

Only the defective government authority component shows significant national- and community-based variation. This adaptation is necessary for the Memplex to plausibly operate with a new non-Sovereign Citizen host population. The “Strawman” duality is

second-order pseudolaw, in that the “Strawman” builds on and ties together the first four concepts for its operation.

Together, the components of the Memeplex cause a radical re-balancing of individual vs government and institutional authority. The Memeplex promises free money, immunity from legislation and government regulation, and grants an unprecedented authority for individuals to force obligations on others. The Memeplex also incorporates a powerful conspiratorial anti-bank and anti-state narrative. The Memeplex therefore promises both benefits and a justification for aggrieved anti-authority populations to take illegal action against perceived enemies.

“Nostalgia for the Future?” Religion, Politics and Science in the Visionary Literature of Five Canadian Anarchists

Susan J. Palmer

This study explores the eclectic sources and syncretic blending of political and biblical language found in the philosophical/utopian literature of some of the leading Canadian anarchists, self-described as “Natural Citizens”:

The curious student who surveys the ideas and futuristic visions, expressed on personal websites, and in “The Freeman’s Handbook”, “de-taxing” instructive material, or in Quantaloos interviews, will encounter a curious utopian bricolage of themes, ranging from a nostalgic longing for the simple, “back-to-nature” life of the early homesteaders to futuristic aspirations for an increasingly digital, high-tech future, or odd combinations of two seemingly incompatible realities. The question of the “religious” versus “political” orientation/motivation of Freeman leaders is addressed, and their quest for authoritative sources that negate or supersede state authority. Finally, their disparate strategies for achieving freedom for the individual, undermining what they perceive as the tyranny of the state, and ushering a new, egalitarian society are compared. Peter Berger’s notion of the social construction of “reality” will provide the theoretical framework for this comparative analysis of the ideologies of Natural Citizens in Canada.

Sovereign citizen movements in Quebec

Gabrielle Lavigne-Desnoyers

Phénomène méconnu il y a quelques années, l’intérêt pour les citoyens souverains semble avoir émergé depuis peu. La Gendarmerie royale du Canada, les tribunaux et certains services fédéraux et provinciaux prennent des mesures pour contrer l’impact des actions criminelles qu’ils commettent. Malgré tout, le nombre de recherches empiriques sur le sujet est assez limité au Canada. Sans structure ni carte de membre, les adhérents à ce mouvement sont difficiles à identifier et peuvent aussi faire preuve de méfiance envers ceux qui s’intéressent à eux. La présente communication vise à exposer le processus d’adhésion à ce groupe au Québec. Par induction analytique à partir du témoignage de plusieurs membres du groupe recrutés initialement via Facebook, il a été possible de

dégager les étapes de la création d'un filtre moral chez les adhérents au mouvement. Cela a permis de poser l'hypothèse que l'exposition sélective aux théories du complot est ce qui transforme progressivement les cognitions, la représentation du monde dans lequel les individus évoluent et, par le fait même, le filtre moral duquel émergent les alternatives perçues. Les résultats de cette recherche permettent de mieux comprendre comment ces individus viennent à « percevoir non seulement comme légitime, mais surtout moralement nécessaire » le bris des normes morales de la société (Ducol, 2015).

Survivalism, militia movements and the far right against the state: continuities and discontinuities.

Martin Geoffroy

In this presentation, I will expose the links between survivalism and militia movements such as the 3 percenters in the US and Quebec. I will also talk about groups such as the Soldiers of Odin and La Meute to explain that they have a power structure and engagement strategies that could well be described as military and how these could eventually lead them to form a militia of their own. I will also describe the common denominator to all these militia-style groups with survivalism and the far-right, which is their complete aversion for the state and their profound desire to live outside of its control.

A Pathogen Astride the Minds of Men: The Epidemiological History of Pseudolaw

Donald Netolitzky

Pseudolaw is a collection of legal-sounding but false rules that purport to be law. Pseudolaw has independently emerged in different countries and communities on multiple occasions. Despite that, modern pseudolaw world-wide is remarkably similar, despite that pseudolaw host populations have extremely different political, cultural, and historical profiles. What is common among groups that endorse pseudolaw is: 1) an anti-government and anti-institutional orientation, and 2) a conspiratorial world perspective.

Modern pseudolaw has spread, starting from the US Sovereign Citizen population, and then infected a succession of other communities. This progression was facilitated by key individuals and can be tracked, host group to host group.

Modern pseudolaw was introduced into Canada by one individual, Eldon Warman, who reframed its concepts to better suit a Commonwealth rather than US context. Warman's pseudolaw variation spread into several Canadian communities with very different social objectives. The leftist anti-government Freeman-on-the-Land then seeded pseudolaw into the UK, the Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, and several European countries. Some of the resulting groups were stillborn, but in the UK pseudolaw has

thrived, but principally as mechanism to attack debt collection, rather than to challenge government authority.

US Sovereign Citizen pseudolaw has also directly spread into the culturally distinct urban black Moorish community, and the German and Austrian right-wing Reichsbürger groups. Australia is unique in that its pseudolaw culture incorporates US Sovereign Citizen, Canadian Freeman, and domestic concepts. In other countries, the appearance of modern pseudolaw drove other pre-existing variant law schemes into extinction.

Biographies of authors

Martin Geoffroy

Martin Geoffroy is Professor in sociology at cégep Édouard-Montpetit and director of the *Centre d'expertise et de formation sur les intégrismes religieux, les ideologies politiques et la radicalisation* (CEFIR). He is a specialist of extreme right and Catholic integrist movements. He also has worked on cults and fringe socio-religious movements. His current research explore the survivalist networks and their intellectual connections both with cultic groups and religious eschatology.

David Hofmann

Dr. David Hofmann is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of New Brunswick, a Research Fellow with the Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society, and a Senior Research Affiliate with the Canadian Network for Research on Terrorism, Security, and Society (TSAS). His funded research focuses upon terrorism and political violence, illicit and criminal networks, threat assessment, far-right extremism, and leadership within terrorist and criminal networks.

Gabrielle Lavigne-Desnoyers

Gabrielle Lavigne-Desnoyers completed a certificate in psychoeducation and a Bachelor degree in criminology. She then studied the process through which individuals go to enter sovereign citizen movements. After working for several years as an educator for the *Centre jeunesse de la Montérégie*, she joined the *Service de police de l'agglomération de Longueuil* as an operational analyst.

Barbara Perry

Barbara Perry is a Professor in the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology. She has written extensively on social justice generally, and hate crime specifically. She has published several books spanning both areas, including *Diversity, Crime and Justice in Canada*, and *In the Name of Hate: Understanding Hate Crime*. She has also published in the area of Native American victimization and social control, including one book entitled *The Silent Victims: Native American Victims of Hate Crime*, and *Policing Race and Place: Under- and Over-enforcement in Indian Country* both of which were based on interviews with Native Americans (University of Arizona Press). She was the General Editor of a five volume set on hate crime (Praeger), and editor of Volume 3: *Victims of Hate Crime* of that set. Her work has been published in journals representing diverse disciplines: *Theoretical Criminology*, *Journal of Social and Behavioral Sciences*; *Journal of History and Politics*; and *American Indian Quarterly*. Dr. Perry continues to work in the area of hate crime, and has made substantial contributions to the limited scholarship on hate crime in Canada,

including work on anti-Muslim violence, hate crime against LGBTQ communities, the community impacts of hate crime, and right wing extremism in Canada. She is regularly called upon by local, national and international media as an expert on hate crime and right-wing extremism.

Donald Netolitzky

Dr. Donald Netolitzky (B.Sc. Zoology & Microbiology, Ph.D. Microbiology, LL.B. Law) is a legal counsel for the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench. He has published five journal papers on the pseudolaw phenomenon, and developed pseudolaw-oriented research, security, and court resources in that topic area.