

The Reform Party's nasty secrets

• OPINION •

They're popular, they have bold new ideas and they hate the Tories. The Reform Party has attracted thousands of Canadians with a populist approach to politics. But, as York student David Camfield observes, they're not what they seem.



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Ontario Reform Party bigwig Michael Dear delivers his pitch to a Toronto audience on May 15. Left: Protester Colin Isaacs grills Dean

bearpit

by David Camfield

Canada is in the midst of an economic and political crisis. The Tory government is supported by a mere 14% of Canada's recession-hit population. Quebec and Native peoples are demanding self-determination and have been met with an often racist backlash.

Many English Canadians are turning to the Reform Party because of its anti-Tory rhetoric, pledges of integrity and populist calls for a "New Canada." The party has broken out of its prairie stronghold and reached 16% in national polls.

While the Reformers bask in the light of media attention, the actual nature of their politics is overlooked. This is dangerous, since the party is not the innovative force it claims to be. Rather, it is a racist pro-business party trying hard to mask its real face.

In the May issue of *The Reformer* the Reform Party's chief policy officer warns that members must learn from the mistakes of the Western Canada Concept, Confederation of Regions and Christian Heritage parties—all very right-wing—so that the Reform Party's agenda appears "free of extremism." However, the truth is hard to hide.

The party is led by Preston Manning, president of a management consulting firm for 20 years. Preston's father Ernest was the Social Credit premier of Alberta for 25 years.

"I guess I subscribe to my father's philosophy," says Manning, and this should provoke alarm. The Reform Party's "free market" policies are similar to those of the Social Credit party and the P.C. party's right wing.

Reform Party members, like Tories, talk endlessly about the need to reduce the deficit at any expense. Diane Francis writes in *The Financial Post* that "Manning would cut Ottawa spending 10% to 15% through massive civil service layoffs."



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York students show their disapproval at a May 15 Reform Party gathering. The protest included members of unions, black community groups, pro-choice coalitions and Queer Nation.

He would also "untie" transfer payments between the federal government and the provinces, used for health care and education. These funds would then be spent on deficit reduction.

The cost of such actions, both in human terms and through the reduction of essential services, would be enormous.

The Reform Party opposes universal social programs and increased child-care funding. Its statement of principles affirms "the importance of strengthening and protecting the family unit," a phrase whose intent is clear to supporters of feminist, youth and gay movements.

The party's racism is explicit. Although it no longer explicitly calls for an end to "Third World" immigration, it opposes "any immigration policy . . . designed

people from the Third World. The low blacks, the low hispanics [sic]. They're going to take over the province."

The party's all-too-popular opposition to "special status or a special deal for Quebec" and to official bilingualism stems from a recent wave of anti-Quebec sentiment in English Canada.

This same racist trend fuelled such anti-French groups as the Alliance for the Preservation of English in Canada, and encouraged many Ontario municipalities to pass "English-only" resolutions.

This is the real content of the Reform Party's vision of a "New Canada."

Thankfully, recognition of the Reformers' real agenda has sparked the formation of the Coalition Against the Reform Party (CARP) in Toronto.

On May 15 CARP organized a picket as the Reform Party held one of their first downtown Toronto meetings. The party's speakers were vigorously challenged by members of unions, pro-choice coalitions, black community groups and AIDS rights organizations.

More activism will be needed to widely expose the Reform Party's politics and stop the party's growth. Many York students and staff actively expressed opposition to racism, imperialism and the big business agenda this year. They should follow CARP's lead both on and off campus.

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