

News Spread

The two faces of Paul Fromm

Racist Paul Fromm guards his public image, but we're getting to know him better by the company he keeps

|By Enzo Di Matteo

Paul Fromm, wannabe eminence grise of the far right, has made a career of being innocuous. Right down to the cheap suits, faux leather shoes and the frazzled look of the nutty professor he wears in public. The quaint shot posted on his Web site --- Fromm in plaid shirt reading by the fireplace --- recalls Norman Rockwell. Ask Fromm and he's liable to tell you he's a "radical populist," a civil libertarian even.

But this positioning is stale-dated. From the moment the video camera caught him speechifying to a roomful of skinheads shouting "Sieg heil" a few years back and the Peel board of education yanked him out of the classroom, his mild-mannered cover was blown.

Now, as others on the far right like Holocaust-denier Ernst Zundel and former Heritage Front leader Wolfgang Droege grow weary of their sloggng efforts to build mass intolerance in Canada, Fromm is emerging as the pre-eminent voice of racialism.

By means of his Canadian Association for Free Expression, he's been able to net a living from benefactors while he spreads his word in the shadowy milieu of those hostile to non-white immigration.

And while in the past Fromm has been cautious about where his name gets bandied about, south of the border he publicly cavorts with southern separatists pining for Dixie and the likes of former Ku Klux Klan grand wizard David Duke. That air of legitimacy the "free speech" activist worked so hard to cultivate? Now just a puff of smoke.***It's an elderly crew that's come out this Friday morning to watch Fromm do his thing at a Canadian Human Rights Tribunal hearing convened to hear a complaint against Zundel's Web site.

Fromm's organization has intervenor status at the hearing, and he's trying to rewrite a little history --- it's what revisionists do.

Today he's pulled a circa-80s grey suit from the closet, but playing Philadelphia lawyer is no easy task when real lawyers representing "special interests" (namely B'nai Brith and the Canadian Jewish Congress) keep objecting to his line of questioning. Fromm's here to defend Zundel's hard drive from the "enemies of freedom."

Should the tribunal decide that the Internet falls within the Canadian Human Rights Act section prohibiting the promoting of hate through "telephonic" means, then Fromm and others like him will be denied their strongest weapon and recruitment tool.

Zundel is already using a U.S. provider for his Web site to get around anti-hate laws here. And two weeks ago, citing some \$140,000 in legal costs, he jumped out of the hearing.

He's out of country and couldn't be reached for comment.

So Fromm's left to rally the troops. He's put Droege on the stand along with Ron Gostick, founder of the Canadian League of Rights, which sponsored speaking tours in Canada featuring a pro-apartheid organizer, among others. Books sold by the group include titles that question the Holocaust.

"We don't question that the Holocaust occurred," says Gostick. But "I think it's been somewhat exaggerated and used for political purposes."

Gostick and Droege are here to tell the tribunal that their unpopular political views have cost them their livelihood. It all sounds very decent, especially when Droege demurely talks about how "freedom in this country comes at a cost."

It's easy to forget that Droege used to wear a white hood and spent seven years in the slammer for trying to overthrow a regime in Dominica and other charges. Now, he tells me he's making connections with nationalist forces in the Arab world and even Japan, and has just returned from a fruitful trip to Moscow. Anywhere, it seems, where anti-Semites lurk.

"I don't give a damn about their orders," he tells me after testimony at the tribunal wraps up. "If I have to say something, I'll say it."

If Droege and Gostick are Fromm's aces at this hearing, his coup de grace is John Beattie, former head of the

Canadian Nazi party.

It's a fantastical conspiracy that Fromm's trying to weave. Yes, it's true that the Canadian Jewish Congress hired a private investigator to infiltrate the Canadian Nazi party back in 65.

The "Nazi scare," Fromm wants to prove, was whipped up by said "agents for the Canadian Jewish Congress," all the better to force the passage of anti-hate laws.

The CJC's Bernie Farber says Fromm's "taking a grain of truth, and building on it. What else is new?"

It all seems a little unworthy of Fromm, who's always passed himself off as being a cut above the skinheads and crackpots who tend to occupy his political sphere. But there it is.

Beattie, however, never does take the stand. He was supposed to have testified that he was a "patsy" and a "dupe" and that the Nazi party, "everything from his group's name to its major activities, was suggested and quarterbacked by persons acting as agents or reporting to the Canadian Jewish Congress." At least that's what Fromm's press release charges.

Fromm says Beattie couldn't testify because of a scheduling problem.

But when I reach Beattie in Minden the next day, he's miffed at Fromm. Apparently, he hadn't seen the statement Fromm released to the media. Beattie says he wanted no part of the Jewish thing.

"It turns out I was going to be used again," Beattie says. "I'm leading a quiet life now. I've got nothing to do with politics."***But if Fromm's Beattie caper has fizzled, he's having more success networking with a nefarious mix of Klansmen and anti-government extremists south of the border.

In March, for instance, Fromm shared the stage with former Klansman David Duke, who now heads something called the National Organization for European Rights. The encounter occurred at a meeting of the Falls Church, Virginia-based American Friends of the British National Party. This group stands for the promotion of what it calls "western Christian culture" and describes anything outside that sphere as "evil forces."

And Fromm has also found favour with the St. Louis, Missouri-based Council of Conservative Citizens, a reincarnation of the white citizens councils of the segregated 50s and 60s. He began attending the group's meetings two years ago.

During the recent flap over the flying of the Confederate flag in the U.S., the Council distributed flyers proclaiming that "South Carolina has whiter beaches now that African Americans are boycotting South Carolina over the Confederate flag. Whites can enjoy a civil liberty that has been denied to them for many years at hotels, restaurants and beaches --- the freedom to associate with just one's own people."

The flyer urges college students to spend their vacation in South Carolina "and get a taste of freedom that your generation was denied but your grandparents enjoyed...."

And Fromm's Web site is getting clearer about who he really is. With a click, you can hear the "immigration invasion" ramblings of Council of Conservative Citizens CEO Gordon Lee Beam, a former Duke underling.

Fromm, of course, doesn't think his appearances in these circles convey anything in particular.

"The David Duke of 18 years ago is different than the David Duke of today," he tells me. "I was asked to talk about immigration in Canada. I don't think there's any contradiction there.

"I've always said I'll speak to any group that will have me," he continues, peering through wire-rims. "I'd talk to the Communist party if they'd invite me --- as long as it wasn't a set-up."

When he's asked how he's managed to survive without a full-time job all these years, he tells me, "It's an interesting question."

Before he can elaborate, though, a white-haired chap in his entourage, the one who earlier passed the guy next to me a letter to the editor about the Nuremberg trials, leaps to Fromm's defence.

"That's a totally inappropriate question," he says. Maybe. But you can't blame a reporter for being a little curious when Fromm been driving a 2000 Honda worth about \$25,000.

Beattie, who's in the mood to spill the beans, also tells me about the monarchist and meat-packing magnate out west who left Fromm a six-figure inheritance.

"He lives off this conspiracy that the new world order is going to get you," Beattie says. "He's skilful."

Of course, Fromm might say Beattie is bitter and that his talk is nothing but the ramblings of a has-been who admits to having had a beer-drinking problem in the past.

We'll never know for sure, because Fromm is not returning telephone queries on this count.

But he does send e-mail on an unrelated matter --- B.C.'s efforts to discourage the use of the word "squaw." "Yet another minority-concocted hoax to cheat us of our money and debase our language," Fromm writes.

He seems to have endless time to hone his racist rhetoric, and doesn't appear to be hurting financially.

There's the new car, a comfortable home in a nice neighbourhood a stone's throw from a golf and country club in Mississauga. And vacations in Costa Rica.

He tells me part-time tutoring and various other unspecified gigs he does on the side help to make ends meet.

But call Don Andrews, another old friend of Fromm's from the Western Guard, and the plot thickens.

He says Fromm has several benefactors, not to mention the support of a former developer of some means down the 401 in London.

He's referring to Martin Weiche.

Weiche comes across on the phone as someone who doesn't mince his words, but he's reluctant to give a straight answer when asked if he's one of Fromm's financial backers. "I haven't got him in my will," says Weiche. "I'm not signed out yet."

It seems Weiche opened his cheque book to Fromm a few times in the past. Now, though, he has apparently soured on him. Weiche says, "He doesn't have the guts" to tell it like it really is. The "Nazi scare," Fromm wants to prove, was whipped up by said "agents for the Canadian Jewish Congress," all the better to force the passage of anti-hate laws. The

