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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Expose, Oppose, and Confront: The anti-racist movement against the far-right Heritage Front in Toronto, 1989 to 1995

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ABSTRACT: The conflict between anti-racists and the Heritage Front, a far-right organization, in Toronto, Canada, between 1989 and 1995, offers insight into the radical flank effect (RFE) on movement-countermovement dynamics. Through an analysis of media coverage, primary sources, and interviews with past participants, the study shows how Anti-Racist Action (ARA) functioned as a radical flank within the anti-racist movement, contributing to the collapse of the Heritage Front, in part by reorganizing relationships among less militant anti-racists. It reveals how, under certain conditions, radical organizations can remake the political field.

KEYWORDS: Anti-fascist, Anti-racist, Countermovement, Protest, Radical flank

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1. Introduction

I met Rodney Bobiwash in September 1992 on University Avenue, a wide thoroughfare in downtown Toronto. He was the race relations director at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto and was to attend a court hearing concerning hateful statements about Indigenous communities communicated via the telephone hotline of a new far-right group, the Heritage Front (or "the Front"). Bringing together experienced far-right activists and youthful new recruits, the Front promoted its disingenuous slogan "Equal Rights for Whites" through neighbourhood distribution of flyers and posters, recruitment at secondary schools, outreach to media, and provocative public appearances. Its hotline was one tool in its overall strategy, which briefly made the Front the most successful far-right formation in Canada since World War II.

I had heard an interview with Bobiwash a few days earlier on a local community radio station and called in after the show to offer my help. He had invited me, a young white woman, to join him that morning. We

introduced ourselves and chatted a bit awkwardly until he noticed a small crowd striding towards us, southbound on University Avenue. "Oh good, they're here," he said. About 40 mostly young people, dressed in black in punk rock fashion, were approaching. Some carried heavy wooden placards.

Together we headed across the street towards the courthouse. Then, suddenly, from my perspective, there was chaos: people running through bushes; police horses; fistfights. Just as suddenly, it was quiet again and the people in black regrouped. There was a speech or two about the threat of the far right and a sign-up sheet was passed around. I wrote down my phone number. As the group dispersed, I left and went to work. This was my introduction to what would later be called "antifa".

For the next decade, I was a participant in the movement against the far right, working with the Toronto activist group Anti-Racist Action (which I will refer to as ARA-TO), and then with a network of similar groups across the US and Canada. Over the course of my involvement, I saw the collapse of the Heritage Front and the end of the career of then-Toronto-based Ernst Zundel, one of the world's foremost Nazi apologists. Three decades later, with far-right and fascist populist movements on the rise globally, I am revisiting the campaign against the Heritage Front as a graduate student and researcher, using tools from the study of social movements to assess what made this campaign successful.

I begin this article with a brief review of key sociological concepts related to social movements and countermovements and, particularly, relationships between radical, moderate, and conservative actors. Next, I describe my methodology and data sources. In the case study, my data analysis will show how radical anti-racists from ARA-TO created challenges to the Heritage Front, both directly and via state institutions, and how their relationships with moderate and conservative anti-racists were impacted. Considering the findings, I address how radical flank theory can be applied to the study of countermovements and counterprotests.

2. Theory

2.1 Radical flank effects and opposing movements

Social movements emerge when organizers see opportunities to put forward their grievances. They draw upon a repertoire of culturally familiar forms of contention, including public meetings, demonstrations, marches, petitions, press releases, and so on. These activities demonstrate the "worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment" of their members, referred to as WUNC displays (Tilly and Wood 2015). In doing so, social movements find and create "cultural frames" within society, to "take advantage of the cultural familiarity of these forms of action and innovate around their edges to inspire the imagination of supporters and create fear among opponents (Tarrow 2011, 265). Framing of issues takes place within discursive opportunity structures (DOS), which include cultural components, alignment with widespread values and core beliefs, and institutional structures that define issues within public discourse, including legal systems and media organizations (McCammon 2022). The DOS determines to what extent the framing of an issue by a social movement resonates, both with potential recruits and the broader public.

Variation and diversity generally exist within social movements. In identifying the characteristics of conservative, moderate, and radical actors within social movements, sociologists Belinda Robnett, Carol L. Glasser, and Rebecca Trammell (2015) consider four dimensions of an organization: 1) its goals; 2) its strategic orientation; 3) its specific tactics; and 4) its social acceptability.[1] In the US context (similar to that of Canada), they view:

[1] Robnett et al. (2015) use "state inclusion" as a marker of social acceptability.

> … the most conservative flank as: seeking the shallowest systemic change; strategically oriented to work within existing institutions; employing only legal tactics; included by the state with a highly routinized role; and as enjoying large support from the general public. A prototypical moderate center is characterized as pursuing deeper systemic changes than those sought by the conservative flank but less than that of the radical flank. They are: strategically oriented to work both within the existing institutions but also outside of them; open to employing both legal and extralegal tactics; cautiously included by the state; and, marginally supported by the general public. At the other extreme end, the most radical flank is: comparatively the most demanding of foundational change; hostile to existing state institutions and works exclusively outside of them; only open to the use of extralegal tactics; excluded or repressed by the state; and disapproved of by a significant majority of the public (Robnett et al. 2015, 74 f.)

Many scholars have sought to understand and theorize the radical flank effect (RFE) on a social movement. In his study of the relationship between Black radicals and the US civil rights movement, sociologist Herb Haines shows an association between the radical flank and increased funding for moderate groups (1984), and increased leverage for moderates in making their demands look more reasonable (1988). In analyzing the US civil rights movement, the AIDS movement, and the animal rights movement, Robnett et al. (2015) find that a positive RFE on a movement usually occurs in the early stages, before and up to the "peak" of activity. Positive RFEs may include drawing attention to an issue, focusing demands, and forcing authorities to grant concessions. During this peak period, greater connectedness between conservatives, moderates, and radicals appears to correlate with greater success for the movement as a whole, with each group playing a distinctive role.

Researchers have also documented negative RFEs. Studying the activities of the indignados in Barcelona, Jordi Munoz and Eva Anduiza (2019) find that an episode of rioting cost the movement public support. In an analysis of the relationship between aboveground and underground animal rights activists in the UK, Rune Ellefsen (2018) finds that an initially positive RFE evolved to a negative RFE for the whole movement following intensified state repression of the radicals. Robnett et al. (2015) also address temporal changes in the relationship between moderates and radicals. They find that, even in cases where the RFE is mainly positive, following the "peak" of activity, the state incorporates conservatives and sometimes moderates (by offering funding and increased access to decision-makers), while ousting the radicals and subjecting them to repression. Increasing distance between conservatives and radicals creates difficulties for the moderates, who are forced to choose sides and are no longer able to play a mediating role. Like Ellefsen, Robnett et al. (2015) find that if the moderates and even conservatives are unable to create enough distance between themselves and the radicals, repression may increase against the whole movement, resulting in a negative RFE overall.

This case study concerns the RFE in a movement-countermovement context, where opposing movements are engaged in a "tango of mobilization and countermobilization," as described by sociologists Mayer N. Zald and Bert Useem (1987, 247). While one or both sides may be engaged in making appeals to authorities and bystanders, they are also directly engaging their opponents. Zald and Useem highlight three possible strategies. First, movements or countermovements may raise the costs of mobilization for opponents, as exemplified by pro-nuclear groups in the United States who intimidated their opponents through surveillance, circulated negative media stories about them, and engaged in civil litigation. Alternatively, they may engage in pre-emptive strategies to undercut the moral basis of their opponents; the *satyagraha* movement in India and South Africa and the civil rights movement of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. are examples of this approach. Over the

longer term, opposing movements may also strive to persuade or recruit supporters from the other side (Zald and Useem 1987, 260-265).

Moreover, the activities of opposing movements contribute to an ever-changing political field, as described by sociologists David S. Meyer and Suzanne Staggenborg: opposing movements tend to "adjust their tactics in response to one another as well as openings created by authorities" (1996, 1651), striving to innovate and escalate in order to attract public attention. They seek to leverage "critical events" to focus attention on their issue; these can include state action or unexpected developments, or sometimes events created by the movement or countermovement itself. Critical events change the political opportunities for everyone involved (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996, 1638).

2.2 Anti-fascist countermovements

In studying the great social movements following World War II, sociologists tended to identify progressive forces (e.g., advocates of civil rights, animal rights, or access to abortion) as the "movements" who were making claims on government and their opponents as "countermovements". In contrast, I identify the far-right Heritage Front as the "movement" and the anti-racist response as a "countermovement" because, while anti-racist movements were making ongoing claims on authorities during this period (concerning employment, policing, immigration policy, and more), this manifestation of anti-racist struggle was a specific reaction to far-right organizing.

Before going further, a note on terminology. Today, the terms "fascist" and "anti-fascist" have entered common usage in North America; during the time explored in this study, this was not the case. In his definitive 1987 study of the Canadian far right from the 1920s to the 1980s, *Is God a Racist?*, anthropologist Stanley Barrett uses the terms "right wing", "fringe right", and "radical right" to describe his subjects; I have settled on "far right". Nonetheless, Barrett concludes that many of his subjects could be understood to be part of a "fascist" movement. Many identified as such, at least in private; they honoured Hitler and Mussolini and decorated their residences with Nazi emblems (Barrett 1984, 369). Moreover, in comparing the political programs of the main Canadian far-right groups with those of the "classic" fascist parties of Europe, he finds "the Canadian radical right shares with German national socialism and Italian fascism a commitment to the reversal of the fundamental, relentless direction of the Western society over the past several centuries: towards liberalism and egalitarianism" (1984, 374). However, Barrett notes one key difference between his Canadian subjects and the "classic" fascist regimes: the central role of racism within the Canadian fringe and radical right. "Racism, especially anti-Semitism, is not merely one among many elements in the belief systems of the Canadian organizations," he writes. "It is the key element" (1984, 372). Organizations and individuals active against the far right highlighted this element of racism in Toronto during the period of this study. As opposed to the term "antifascist" or "antifa", most used "anti-racist" to describe themselves; they were also described as such by the media and in popular publications of the time.

Toronto's anti-racist countermovement against the far right in the late twentieth century can thus be understood to be part of a broad anti-fascist tradition. As such, it was subject to similar tensions as anti-fascism in Britain, as studied by historian Nigel Copsey, who has remarked on "the historic divide between radical or militant anti-fascism with its emphasis on physical confrontation, and 'legal' forms of anti-fascism — a tactical division that has consistently influenced relations not only between but also within those forces actively engaged in opposing British fascism" (2017, xvii). In this study, I bring together Copsey's insight as a historian with the social movement concepts described herein, to define the radical flank of Toronto's anti-racist countermovement (represented by ARA-TO) as those who were willing to engage in physical confrontation

with far-right opponents. Moreover, ARA groups were a precursor to the North American "antifa" described by Stanislav Vysotsky (2021) and others.

3. Methodology

To establish the sequence of events, I have relied upon documentary sources, including government publications, media articles, and published books. To categorize anti-racist organizations, I reviewed their publications. I then carried out interviews with individuals I identified in a stratified, purposeful manner, following the guidance of sociologists David A. Snow and Danny Trom:

> To understand the operation of one or more social movement organizations within the same social movement calls for consideration not only of the perspectives and concerns of movement leaders and activists but also the views and concerns of antagonists (e.g., countermovements), targets (e.g., those from whom concessions are sought), allies (e.g., supportive friends within the broader movement or the political system) and constituents (e.g., individuals/groups who are the beneficiaries of the movements' collective action campaigns) (Snow and Trom 2002, 154)

I did not issue a public call for research participation, but rather approached the interview subjects through personal connections, seeking to maximize diversity in terms of demographic identity, relationship to the events, and level and period of involvement. Most of those I interviewed were known to me from the time of my own involvement. In a few important cases, people I knew approached potential interviewees on my behalf. For this study, I rely on information shared by the following individuals:[2]

- Harry*, ARA-TO
- Judith*, ARA-TO
- Emmy, ARA-TO
- Mary Gellatly, Toronto Coalition Against Racism
- Soheil*, Toronto activist
- Bill Dunphy, journalist
- Elizabeth Moore, former Heritage Front

My intimate knowledge of the events as a past participant is also a rich source of data, although in view of the fallibility of human memory I have compared my recollection of events with the documentary evidence to ensure the greatest possible accuracy.

In analyzing the data, I first introduce the Heritage Front and its efforts to exploit political and discursive opportunities and raise grievances to the broader public. Second, I introduce the most prominent anti-racist organizations active against the far right between 1989 and 1995, categorizing them as conservative, moderate, or radical using the rubric developed by Robnett et al., and briefly describe institutional responses to the Front's growth. I then present a timeline of anti-racist challenges to the Heritage Front. In the discussion, I bring the data sets together and incorporate further insights from my interview subjects to determine how the radical flank contributed to the decline and collapse of the Heritage Front and impacted the political field.

[2] Asterix indicates a pseudonym.

4. The Case: Anti-Racist Action vs. Heritage Front

4.1 Actors and events

4.1.1 Growth of the Heritage Front

The Heritage Front was formally established in September 1989 by a small group of far-right activists in Toronto area, who had met through the Toronto-based Nationalist Party. The Front united far-right activists and recruits under the leadership of Wolfgang Droege, a former KKK organizer who had gained prominence in the fascist movement through his involvement in a scheme to launch a white supremacist coup in Dominica in 1981 (Bell 2008).

The Heritage Front strove to take advantage of political opportunities arising from the eroding position of the centre-right Progressive Conservative (PC) Party, both federally and provincially, in the 1980s. Support for the party in Ontario, where it had ruled for 40 years, collapsed in 1987; in 1990, the left-leaning New Democratic Party was elected for the first time and introduced various measures supported by the anti-racist movement, challenging discrimination in employment (Bakan and Kobayashi 2007), education (Pascal 2016), and policing. Federally, social conservatives in western Canada, who felt unrepresented by the national PC party, formed the Reform Party in 1987 and sought to expand into Ontario in the 1990s (Harrison 1995).

The Front's grievances included immigration from the Global South and the adoption of the Canadian *Multiculturalism Act* in 1988, which declared that "multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and… provides an invaluable resource in the shaping of Canada's future" (1985, sec. 3 (1) (b)). The Front claimed that white people were neglected or marginalized by official multiculturalism, and their slogan "Equal Rights for Whites" turned human rights legislation on its head, asserting that white people were facing discrimination based on race. The Front also objected to the Human Rights Commissions and Tribunals, which had been established at provincial and federal levels to challenge and investigate racism and discrimination within their respective jurisdictions, on the grounds that they violated "freedom of speech".

Early events in the life of the organization illustrate the Front's relatively broad network among both social conservatives and some of the most extreme right-wing organizers in Canada, the United States, and Britain. Droege introduced the Front to Canada's far-right movement at the 1990 conference of the Ottawa-based Northern Foundation, a network which brought together far-right activists with social conservatives and engaged many people involved in the electoral right wing, including, at one point, the future prime minister Stephen Harper (Harrison 1995). In November 1990, Nazi apologist Ernst Zundel invited the Front to provide security at an Ottawa speaking event featuring British Holocaust denier David Irving. In December 1990, the Front held a rally commemorating the death of Robert Matthews, leader of the US fascist paramilitary organization "The Order", killed by police in 1984. The Front's growth continued in 1991 with networking trips to western Canada and Germany.

In May 1991, a Front member joined the interim board of a Reform Party riding association and began to sign up other Front members. He organized Front members to provide security for Reform Party events in June and July; they provided personal security for leader Preston Manning (as they did again in early 1992) at the June event, which attracted 6.000 people. The Toronto Star published a profile of Droege, who said that the emergence of Reform brought him "hope" (DiManno 1991).

The Front held its first public political rally, inviting media, in September 1991. That fall, the Front set up a telephone hotline as a key organizing tool; callers would hear racist outgoing messages and could leave a message to get more information or become involved. In December, the Front published the first edition of its

newsletter, *Up Front*. In 1992, the Front held two rallies featuring international guests: the prominent fascist organizer Tom Metzger from the US in July and Holocaust denier David Irving from the UK in November. Also appearing at both events was a rock band called RaHoWa ("Racial Holy War"), fronted by George Burdi, the Canadian representative of a US-based white supremacist group, the Church of the Creator, and head of a Detroit-based record label distributing "racist rock". The latter exemplified the Front's efforts to recruit rebellious white youth, many of them following "skinhead" fashion.

In 1992, the Canadian far right won a significant legal victory. Ernst Zundel, the Toronto-based publisher of literature denying the Nazi Holocaust, had previously been convicted of spreading false news through the mail. This conviction was overturned on appeal to the Supreme Court, which found the law unconstitutional. The court ruling was based on protections of "freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication", enshrined in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982, pts 1, 2(b)). This decision represented an important discursive opportunity for the far right, which they seized upon to cast themselves as defenders of free speech, and the Heritage Front embarked on an ambitious plan for growth in 1993.

4.1.2 The anti-racist countermovement

The anti-racist countermovement began to organize against the Heritage Front in 1991, utilizing all three of the broad strategies described by Zald and Useem (1987, 260-265): raising the cost of mobilization for the far right; undermining the far right's moral and political basis; and counter-recruiting. The anti-racist countermovement included conservative, moderate, and radical actors, classified according to three of the four categories outlined by Robnett et al. (2015, 74 f.): strategic orientation, tactics, and state inclusion.[3] (I have omitted discussion of each organization's overall goals and depth of their challenge to the status quo, beyond their role in the anti-racist countermovement, because research on these subjects was beyond the scope of my inquiry.)

At the time, conservative anti-racist organizations included three Jewish communal organizations, which monitored the far right and encouraged police and courts to prosecute and punish perpetrators of anti-Semitism, racism, and hate crimes: the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), the Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies (SWC), and the League for Human Rights of B'nai Brith Canada. While they each had a unique focus and style, all were strategically oriented toward advocating for state action against the far right, racism, and anti-Semitism. Joining them on the conservative flank was the Urban Alliance on Race Relations, which established the Anti-Racism Action Network (ARRN) in 1992 to share resources and information among social service agencies and community groups concerned with racism. Funded by the provincial government, the ARRN counted 160 organizations as "members" by 1995 (Anti-Racism Response Network 1995, 1).

The key moderate during this period was Rodney Bobiwash, an activist of the Anishinaabe Indigenous people who served as the Race Relations Coordinator at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (NCCT). Bobiwash founded a group called Klanbusters in or around 1992 to monitor and respond to Heritage Front activities, and he worked with conservative organizations to file complaints and advocate for state action. When threatened by the Heritage Front, Bobiwash accepted police protection. He was also well-known for using reasoned argument and humour to make his case; he spoke of those strategies being rooted in his Indigenous culture (Bobiwash 1997). At the same time, Bobiwash welcomed the support of militant Indigenous organizers (Dunphy 1993) and, later, organizers with ARA-TO. In 1992, he was part of a small group of Indigenous people who confronted the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) at their annual

[3] While Robnett et al. (2015) developed their framework to study large social movements acting across cities and over many years; this study is an opportunity to apply it to an episode in a single city over a shorter time period.

convention, publicly tearing down a racist poster display that promoted the OFAH's campaign against Indigenous hunting and fishing rights.[4]

Also contributing to the anti-racist countermovement in Toronto, and sometimes co-operating with the radical flank, were two moderate organizations in other cities: the Canadian Centre on Racism and Prejudice (CCRP) in Montreal and the Canadian Anti-Racism Education and Research Society (CAERS) in Vancouver. Each maintained a two-pronged strategy of advocacy for state action coupled with direct involvement in and support for community organizing.

Throughout 1992 and 1993, more political and community groups emerged or turned their attention to countering the far right in Toronto, including Citizens Against Racism, the International Socialists (IS), the Jewish Feminist Anti-Fascist League, and the Toronto Coalition Against Racism (TCAR). All promoted grassroots activity against the far right. They fall into the moderate camp, for the purposes of this analysis, because, while they co-operated with and endorsed radical events, they tended to eschew militancy.

The radical flank of the anti-racist countermovement in Toronto emerged in 1992, when young people organized the group called Anti-Racist Action (ARA-TO). The ARA name and organizing model were inspired by anti-racist skinhead organizing in Minneapolis, disseminated across the United States and Canada mainly through personal networks, as well as subcultural and anarchist publications (Clay, Lady, Schwartz, and Staudenmaier 2022, 183). One early ARA-TO member recalls: "ARA, as it formed, seemed to bring many factions of anarchists together, as well as some of the other left-wing formations, whether it was the Socialist Worker types and or various other Trotskyist groups … It was a big collection of disparate people, but almost all from political backgrounds" (Interview with Harry 2019). Some had a relationship with an employment program working with street-involved youth; others were involved with the punk scene.

ARA-TO staged counterprotests against the Heritage Front and its allies while organizing on a peer-to-peer level with youth. Many of the group's activities were consistent with the standard social movement repertoire of WUNC displays, and the group strove to maintain relations with a range of people, including civil servants and some elected officials. As a 1993 pamphlet explains, "ARA has been meeting with student, community leaders, teachers and the Toronto Board of Education. ARA has launched a campaign of counter-leafletting and counter-postering in schools targeted by the Heritage Front" (Anti-Racist Action 1993). At the same time, the group was committed to direct action, including physical interference in Heritage Front activities, so that "the neo-Nazis would not feel safe to have whatever action they were having" (Interview with Judith 2018). The vignette I shared in the introduction is an example of such direct action, and this sort of activity placed ARA-TO within the radical flank of the anti-racist countermovement in Toronto.

Each organization in this countermovement described itself as "anti-racist", as noted earlier. Most also used the term "hate" to describe the problem they were addressing, with the conservative organizations often framing the issue as a campaign for public safety and prevention of "hate crime". In contrast, the moderate groups and ARA-TO often utilized a discursive opportunity structure that was more inflammatory and likely to provoke a strong emotional response. Bobiwash called his group Klanbusters, similar in spirit to the Jewish Feminist Anti-Fascist League. ARA-TO framed its struggle as "anti-racist/anti-fascist" and called their opponents "nazis", invoking the dangers of the National Socialist Party of fascist Germany, while using the lower case "n" both to distinguish modern-day adherents from the historical party and to express disrespect. Street art, flyers, patches, pins, and t-shirts produced by ARA-TO reinforced this framing in the day-to-day

[4] Bobiwash's anti-racism went well beyond challenging the far right. He had been arrested twice in blockades defending the Temagami forests from logging and advocated for broader change, including at the international level. He publicized the struggle of Indigenous people in Columbia and was organizing a Zapatista-inspired international gathering, the "Third Global Encounter for Humanity", when he passed away in 2002 (Thomas 2002).

life of participants, as well as in specific neighbourhoods and locations (e.g., popular bars), much as Vysotsky (2021, 105-127) describes is the case among more recent antifa.

4.1.3 Institutional actors: Media, government, police

Analysis of media coverage of the far right and the anti-racist resistance could be the subject of inquiry all to itself but, in the context of 1990s Toronto, the work of journalist Bill Dunphy stands out. While he was personally anti-racist, he wrote for the *Toronto Sun*, a tabloid with a decidedly right-wing orientation. As a *Sun* reporter, he was able to get close to Heritage Front leadership, while also having access to detailed newsroom files about far-right organizers (Interview with Bill Dunphy 2020). The first significant challenge to the Front's growth was a story by Dunphy in early 1992, in which he exposed the involvement of Heritage Front members in the Reform Party. Following an internal investigation, Reform expelled several members (Security Intelligence Review Committee 1994, sec. IV, 5).

Local government and state institutions responded to the threat of the Heritage Front and its allies, often after lobbying by anti-racists. The City of Toronto's Mayor's Committee on Race Relations made public statements criticizing the Heritage Front, while the Access and Equity Centre of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto convened an advisory committee on race relations to foster information-sharing and coordination among agencies and grassroots groups. The Toronto District School Board, and school boards in adjacent areas, developed a response to Heritage Front leafletting and recruitment in secondary schools (McCaskell 2005, 175 f.). The 519 Church Street Community Centre, a key social service agency in the LGBTQ+ community, became very involved in tracking far-right activities, supporting victims, and collecting data.

Many police agencies were involved in monitoring the far right. In Toronto, the hate crime unit had the lead responsibility. Dunphy says, "The agencies would come together in an informal roundtable to handle this. There was an awful lot of sharing — off the books, person-to-person sharing — that isn't captured by legislation or file systems or Freedom of Information," (Interview with Bill Dunphy 2020). Other agencies involved included the Peel Regional Police, Ontario Provincial Police, Canada Customs, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Also deeply involved was the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS). Between 1989 and 1993, acting on information provided by CSIS, authorities detained and deported three international visitors who had traveled to Toronto to speak at Heritage Front events (Security Intelligence Review Committee 1994).

4.1.4 Timeline – Anti-racist challenges to the Heritage Front

Conservative and moderate anti-racists began to mount challenges to the Front in 1991. In September 1991, Bobiwash made a deputation to a municipal committee concerning the threat of the far right; as a result, the committee published an advisory to banquet halls, discouraging them from renting venues to the Front. In March 1992, the community group Citizens Against Racism held a rally denouncing the Heritage Front at the provincial legislature, with support from League for Human Rights of B'nai Brith (Wong 1992). Also in 1992, efforts by the Canadian Jewish Congress, along with the NCCT and others, sparked a Ministry of Education investigation into Heritage Front ally Paul Fromm, a teacher. On the basis of evidence presented by anti-racists, the Board of Education removed Fromm from the secondary school classroom in March 1993 (Downey 1993), a major blow to the far right.

In May 1992, Bobiwash and the NCCT sparked a headline-grabbing series of events when they filed a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission against the Front's telephone hotline, based on outgoing messages that maligned Indigenous people. The federal court granted an injunction against the Front

in September, prohibiting them from "delivering further hot-line messages like those of the subject complaint until the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal had ruled on them" (*Canadian Human Rights Commission v. The Heritage Front and Wolfgang Droege(*1993). The injunction had little immediate effect; the Heritage Front continued to operate their hotline. However, in preparing for the court appearances, Indigenous solidarity groups had also "put out the call" for support, which led to the formation of ARA-TO (Interview with Judith 2018).

Beginning with the initial courthouse skirmish in September 1992, described earlier, ARA-TO staged a series of rowdy anti-racist protests. Moreover, street-level conflict escalated as Heritage Front activists targeted anti-racists with relentless threats and harassment through what they called "the 'It' Campaign" (referring to a game where children tag each other as "It"). Arson attacks at a youth shelter and the home of a Jewish activist in nearby Kitchener were widely attributed to the Front, as were acts of vandalism at synagogues and the NCCT (Anti-Racist Action Toronto 1993). In January 1993, anti-racists organized a rally at a high school and prevented Front activists from disrupting it. Soon after, a second courthouse confrontation between the Front and ARA-TO ended in a melee, with mounted police charging the anti-racist crowd to clear passage for Front members.

These events were widely covered in the media. Building on their notoriety, the Front sought to expand beyond Toronto with a rally and concert in Ottawa, the Canadian capital, in May 1993. This event drew an anti-racist protest of several hundred organized by local groups, including ARA-Ottawa; a contingent of about 50 ARA-TO members also attended. Police deployed pepper spray — the first use of this weapon at a political demonstration in Canadian history — to control the unruly anti-racist crowd (Wood 2014, 97). The event culminated in a Heritage Front march to the national Parliament. While this event was a high point of Heritage Front visibility, it also sowed the seeds of the group's decline. George Burdi was one of two Heritage Front leaders arrested that day, charged with aggravated assault for kicking a young member of the Ottawa ARA group in the face, breaking her nose.

Days later, in Toronto, following a Heritage Front concert at a bar, one attendee viciously attacked a Tamil-Canadian man who sustained severe injuries. ARA-TO countered with a militant demonstration of about 300 people. They misled police and marched unimpeded on a "nazi centre of operations" — the home office of Gary Schipper, who managed the Heritage Front hotline. On reaching their destination, a smaller group vandalized the building with abandon (Clay et al. 2022). Efforts by Front members to retaliate that night, outside a bar frequented by ARA members, resulted in injuries on both sides and the arrests of Droege and two other Heritage Front militants on charges of aggravated assault (*The Globe and Mail* 1993). Droege was released on bail only on condition that he not associate with or speak publicly on behalf of the Front. Soon after, the Toronto Coalition Against Racism organized a larger anti-racist march of 2.000 people.

More challenges were posed by the radical flank. In November 1993, Elisa Hategan, a young Heritage Front member who had been groomed for leadership, publicly turned against the Front. She had had a change of heart after meeting ARA-TO activists in person, who had then introduced her to Bobiwash and Martin Theriault of CCRP (Hategan 2014). The Front also faced other internal difficulties; several Front members were arrested for robbery, while two others were charged with threatening a younger member they suspected of betraying the group (Dunphy 1999).

Plans for a Front event in April 1994, celebrating the birthday of Adolf Hitler, were scuttled by a combination of ARA organizing and police action (Duncanson 1994). In June, Hategan testified against the Heritage Front leadership in a contempt of court case arising from the NCCT human rights complaint against the Front's hotline. As a result of her testimony, Droege was sentenced to six months in jail. Then, in August, Bill Dunphy published an explosive story exposing a leading member of the Front, Grant Bristow, as an agent

for the Canadian Security Intelligence Services (CSIS) (Dunphy 1994). His scoop eroded the credibility of the Front's leadership and further accelerated the Front's decline. The CSIS spy operation was investigated by the Security Intelligence Review Committee; the Front sought to capitalize on media attention and shift responsibility to Bristow for its more unsavoury activities, without much success (Interview with Elizabeth Moore 2019).

In 1995, a second prominent member of the Front, Elizabeth Moore, defected from the Front. The publication of Up Front ceased. While some activists attempted to salvage something from the wreckage, and the Front reconstituted to a limited extent in the early 2000s, utilizing online organizing tools (Burstow 2003), it never recovered the public profile or dynamism of its first years of activity.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Impact of the radical flank on the Heritage Front

The Heritage Front experienced sustained growth for three years, from its founding in 1989 to the end of 1992. This changed in 1993, at the peak of radical anti-racist activity. The following table lists concrete challenges made by the anti-racist countermovement to the Front between 1993 and 1995 and demonstrates that the radical flank raised the costs of mobilization for the Front both directly and indirectly and contributed to counter-recruitment. Coordination between the moderates and radicals was key to this success, with one example being the shared efforts of Rodney Bobiwash, CCRP, and ARA-TO members in supporting Elisa Hategan when she left the Front, then testifying against Droege and others at great personal risk.

Figure 1: Anti-racist challenges to the Heritage Front, 1993–1995

Challenge	*Organization(s)/ Individual(s)*	*Type of organization*
Paul Fromm removed from secondary school classroom by Toronto Board of Education (1993)	CJC, NCCT, and 21 other organizations	conservative
George Burdi charged with assault on ARA-Ottawa member (1993); convicted and jailed (1995)	ARA-Ottawa	radical
Wolfgang Droege and Peter Mitrevski charged with assault on ARA-TO member after Schipper demonstration (1993); convicted and jailed (1995)	ARA-TO	radical
Elisa Hategan publicly leaves Heritage Front after meeting ARA-TO members (1993); Droege convicted on contempt of court charges and jailed because of Hategan's testimony (1995)	ARA-TO, Rodney Bobiwash, CCRP	radical, moderate
Heritage Front event shut down by police to avoid confrontation (1994)	ARA-TO	radical
Two stores owned by far-right organizers shut down following ARA-TO boycott campaign (1994-1995)	ARA-TO	radical
Elizabeth Moore publicly leaves Heritage Front (1995)	CJC	conservative

I identify the "Schipper demonstration" and ensuing street brawl of June 11, 1993 as a "critical event" in this overall sequence. As Meyer and Staggenborg (1996, 1638) observe, "by creating or amplifying critical

events, movements alter political opportunities". Here, the conservative flank of the anti-racist counter-movement, along with elected officials and civil servants, leveraged the activities of the radical flank to reinforce their demands for more aggressive state action against the Heritage Front. In the immediate aftermath of the Schipper demonstration, Bernie Farber of the Canadian Jewish Congress told the media:

> The problem is […] the police and the attorney-general's office have not been co-operating. They have not used (anti-hate) legislation as a means to stop hate-mongering. Young people […] understandably get very frustrated and wrongly take the law into their own hands. I really hold the people who are in the positions of authority responsible at this point because they have chosen to do nothing (DeMara 1993)

Roger Hollander, city councillor for the ward in which Zundel lived, published a statement supporting ARA-TO, in which he characterized the vandalism as "unfortunate excesses" paling in comparison to the threat of fascist organizing, writing:

> The reason that the young and militant ARA activists have adopted a strategy of direct confrontation with the hate groups is that they have seen government, police and the courts acting as if they are virtually powerless to do anything to stop fascists from organizing in their communities. My god, it took nine years of painful litigation to reach the conclusion that Ernst Zundel has the "right" to turn his Carlton Street residence into a world-wide centre of the distribution of hateful Nazi propaganda. How would you react if Hermann (?) [sic] Goebbels was living and carrying out his mission in your neighbourhood? (Hollander 1993)

At a press conference held days after the event, the acting chief commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission warned of increasing far-right recruitment and attacks on youth of colour. "If agencies of government don't take strong action, people will be frustrated," he said, "and they will take — or try to take — the law into their own hands, which will lead to another kind of unfortunate situation" (Tobin 1993).

While the state never did "take strong action" by prosecuting the Heritage Front under available anti-hate laws, Front members faced a series of criminal charges and convictions after June 1993, including charges for violations of injunctions or bail conditions, which might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

Moreover, the Schipper demonstration was followed by the larger march led by moderate anti-racists in TCAR, who were already concerned about the rising tide of racist violence. Organized by anti-racist feminists working with activist groups in Toronto's Black and South Asian communities, TCAR was committed to fostering leadership by people of colour and others directly targeted by the far right (Interview with Mary Gellatly 2020). Journalists covered the march favourably, which reinforced the importance of challenging racist violence, even as articles often compared the "peaceful" TCAR favourably with the "violent" ARA-TO (DiManno 1993).[5]

This sequence of events can be more deeply understood and can illuminate how the radical flank functions in a movement-countermovement context if we apply the concept of the radical flank to the Heritage Front itself. According to Dunphy, the Front's strategy had been "to push the needle on any of their issues that they can, to exercise power, to have that influence, and in their dreams to elect some leaders" (Interview with Bill Dunphy 2020). The discursive opportunity structure (DOS) of the period supported their efforts to position

[5] By late 1993, 50 community, labour, and women's groups had endorsed TCAR ('Toronto Coalition Against Racism: What is TCAR?', 1994), which turned to challenging systemic racism.

themselves as defenders of aggrieved white people who were being left behind and of freedom of speech; they were initially invited to publicly present their point of view at several venues.[6]

However, while the Front sought respectability on the one hand, it sought to recruit rebellious young people and militants on the other. Thus, a conflict emerged between the Front's overall strategy and its tactics: "While tactically it makes good sense for them to start up something like the 'It' campaign [harassing anti-racists], strategically it's not what they want, it's not where they're going, it's not what they are aiming to do. But tactically it's important to stir things up, to encourage those kinds of tensions and difficulties that cough up commitment and members" (Interview with Bill Dunphy 2020). And, paired with the human rights complaint laid by the NCC, confrontation played a major role in the Front's decline. "They didn't have the abilities, resources, timing to flip that, ju-jitsu-like, to 'see how the state is oppressing us,'" says Dunphy. "They weren't able to get away with that. Because they also had the criminal things which lose them support, ultimately. Those things in Canada still seem to be death for you, politically. You don't get to have thugs in the street as part of your [political] party" (Interview with Bill Dunphy 2020). The conflict between the Front's overall strategy and its tactics undermined the Front's framing of the issues and made them more vulnerable to the anti-racist countermovement.

4.2.2 Impact of the radical flank on the anti-racist movement

In "stirring things up", the Front found a willing adversary in ARA-TO, which utilized a DOS focused on the militant and physically dangerous side of the far right. ARA-TO was determined to undermine the moral and political basis of the Heritage Front by exposing the Front's fascist and violent nature. One ARA-TO slogan was "The Heritage Front is a Nazi Front – Smash the Heritage Front!"

In doing so, ARA-TO drew upon the experience of young people targeted by the Front either as potential recruits or as victims. Judith, an early ARA-TO leader, recalls the fights between nazi and anti-racist punks in bars and other social spaces as "where the war on the street began" (Interview with Judith 2018). Harry, another early leader, was most concerned about the militants from the Church of the Creator, and felt it was important to be prepared to engage them physically:

> They were clearly prepared and revelled in a great deal of violence and had completely dehumanized marginalized populations in the worst kind of way. There was no appeal to be made to them. And when you know that, you know, that you will be fighting them and potentially defending yourselves against them (Interview with Harry 2019)

While Harry and Judith were white, the lived experiences of ARA-TO members and friends who were people of colour informed and reinforced this perspective. Says Emmy, a mixed-race, street-involved woman who was part of ARA-TO, "My friend and I got kicked off Yonge Street by this group of nazis. They told us, 'This is our territory, you go to Queen Street.' So I just remember being aware of a nazi skinhead presence. Definitely, I had some trauma around racism, and I wanted to address it" (Interview with Emmy 2019). Soheil, a friend of ARA-TO, recalls a time he was threatened by Front members:

> Meeting ARA felt good, like I actually had people out there, that had my back as a person of colour. That was a big, big thing. Because there was a big fear, and I think that the fascists really operated as a terror organization

[6] These venues included, but were not limited to, the TV station MuchMusic, a University of Toronto classroom, and a campus-community radio station.

> on the streets. I can actually touch on those feelings, thinking back. Beyond the politics. Beyond my understanding. And I couldn't be the only one who felt that way (Interview with Soheil 2020)

Giving voice to and channelling the fear and anger of young people into situations of potential confrontation was "the challenge of leadership" for ARA-TO, remembers Judith. While she has "mixed feelings, in retrospect" about physical violence, she says "I think that what we achieved internally was a remarkable balance between being willing to be physically confrontational, and also organizing in an above-ground, acceptable kind of way" (Interview with Judith 2018). While ARA-TO maintained relationships with moderates and continually engaged in public outreach and education, the group was not strategically oriented toward achieving success in the mainstream. "Our whole point was we never really sought acceptance, or permits [for marches]," says Harry. "We were trying to encourage people that if you feel strongly about something and you want to oppose it, or advance something, that you just do it. You organize with your neighbours or your friends and not worry about respectability" (Interview with Harry 2019). In this way, ARA-TO was able to challenge and make visible the radical flank of the Front — the militant or street-involved participants — in a manner that did more damage to the Front than to the anti-racist movement.

As could be expected, the conservative flank and moderates publicly distanced themselves from the property damage and physical fighting by ARA-TO members at the Shipper demonstration. Some did so privately; for example, the IS and several other groups wrote a letter to ARA-TO criticizing the Schipper demonstration. The media also gave voice to a few ARA-TO members concerned about what they viewed as increasing violence (for example *Canadian Press* 1993).

Thus, we see here the general pattern identified by Robnett et al., wherein the radical flank was most effective leading up to the peak of activity, its impact linked to the strength of its relationships with moderates. Following the peak, the radical flank was subjected to state pressure, with close to twenty ARA-TO members charged with various criminal offences by the end of 1993. Most charges were dropped, but heavy police presence at ARA-TO counterprotests continued for years, coupled with investigations by federal police and security forces. This dissuaded many people from participating, and some moderates and conservatives pulled away from the radicals, but the damage to the Heritage Front had been done and the RFE on the movement was positive overall.

4.2.3 "The Heritage Front Affair"

One of the final blows to the Heritage Front was the revelation by journalist Bill Dunphy that Grant Bristow, a leading member of the Front, had been a CSIS agent since the organization's inception. "I knew there had to be someone," Dunphy says. "It is always the case, in the right-wing organizations anyway, that the state is successful in infiltrating them on a fairly high level" (Interview with Bill Dunphy 2020). Through careful observation over months, he determined that Bristow was the spy. During the final fact-checking on the story:

> I got a call from an intelligence officer. He never said Bristow was an agent, never acknowledged it at all. Just said 'I understand you're working on a story. What can we do to make you not do that? And here's another [story], we'll give you another one that's better.' That was the only confirmation I had. So that's all I needed. That was enough for our lawyer (Interview with Bill Dunphy 2020)

The article ran on the front page of the Toronto Sun (Dunphy 1994).

Anti-racists were shocked to learn of Bristow's role, believing him to be a paid Front staff person who had helped to make the organization larger and more effective than it would have otherwise been, while leading

campaigns of harassment against individuals in the anti-racist movement. The federal government quickly convened an investigation into "the Heritage Front Affair", which exonerated Bristow and his handler and thanked them for their services (Security Intelligence Review Committee 1994).

This study shows that few concrete challenges to the Front's functioning can be attributed to Bristow's activity. Instead, the revelation of his role (which CSIS sought to prevent) caused serious damage to the Front's internal culture. Says Elizabeth Moore, "After that a lot of people's hearts weren't really in it… I know it hit Wolfgang hard, it hit Gerry Lincoln [another leading figure] hard. Losing him was not easy. Of course, they tried to brush it off" (Interview with Elizabeth Moore 2019). She likens the impact to "one of a thousand cuts" and says:

> They would have been permanently crippled from Grant Bristow one way or the other, but they could have continued if it was just Grant Bristow. But the fact that ARA was preventing them from having any meetings, they couldn't get people out, they couldn't get fundraising happening, they couldn't have concerts, they couldn't rally the troops, they couldn't have any cohesion. Canada Post was checking some of our mail… There was the mounting legal costs, people ending up in jail. Just everything (Interview with Elizabeth Moore 2019)

Rather than the CSIS operation, the anti-racist movement, coupled with careful journalist work, brought down the Heritage Front.

5. Implications, limitations, and directions for further inquiry

In summary, based on evidence from multiple sources, this study finds the radical flank of the anti-racist countermovement played a major role in the collapse of Toronto's Heritage Front by 1995. Furthermore, the radical flank coordinated with moderates but was well-differentiated, contributing to a positive RFE overall.

Moreover, this case study offers an opportunity to extend theory concerning the RFE within the movement-countermovement dynamic. By provoking the radical flank within the far-right movement, through words and deeds, ARA-TO prevented the Front from maintaining a disciplined and unified message within the political and discursive opportunities available to them. This allowed anti-racists to assert a DOS that was less favourable to and more costly for the Heritage Front. As proposed by Meyer and Staggenborg, the opposing movements each engaged in innovation and escalation of tactics. Moreover, ARA-TO's creation of a "critical event" (the "Schipper demonstration" of June 1993) was important both in terms of its impact on the Front itself and its compelling other anti-racist actors and the state to react to the threat posed by the Front.

It appears that the relatively large number of anti-racist actors in Toronto, and the interest of journalists, were key factors in the outcome of this case. Opportunities for future research could include a comparison with cases in other cities where the anti-racist movement is smaller and/or less well-differentiated, to see how the radical and conservative flanks are able to work together with moderates and with each other.

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