

The three witches

Canadians have entered the epoch of the witch hunt, and a trio of harmless men is our latest quarry



Pierre LEMIEUX

This is a tale of three different men. Bruce Montague is a labourer, a Christian and a family man who has strong and simple moral principles, lives in deep rural Ontario and hates blue cheese. Marc Emery is a political activist, pushy salesman, boulevardier-to-be, and former grey-market entrepreneur who lives in Vancouver. Conrad Black is a millionaire establishment figure, businessman, author and peer of England,

who lives in plush houses and who, perhaps, eats (or used to eat) Roquefort every day.

The current plight of these three men is also very different. Montague is a civil resister with the Canadian Unregistered Firearm Owners Association whose criminal trial is planned for this year. A seller of marijuana seeds, Emery has been arrested at the request of the U.S. government, which is seeking his extradition.

Black has been criminally indicted by the U.S. government for "wire fraud," "mail fraud," "racketeering" and such derived "crimes," plus obstruction of such justice. Montague and Emery admit civil disobedience, while Black adamantly denies that he broke any law.

Yet there are crucial similarities. The three men are attacked for crimes that did not exist a few decades or even a few years ago, before the state defined them as crimes. All three defended some aspects of our traditional liberties: Bruce Montague has fought the wicked gun controls directed against peaceful citizens; Marc Emery has campaigned for the right of adults to consume what they want; and Conrad Black, despite his association with liberticidal establishment figures, has given a voice to libertarians in the newspapers he bought or created.

The state is going after these men with its full force and enormous resources. They are all liable to spend several years in jail—decades in jail for the two who are prosecuted by the U.S. government. Their travel is restricted by court order; two of the men (Montague and Emery) even had to hand in their passports. Black and Montague have had property seized or frozen

before judgment. Black and Montague have been explicitly forbidden to have guns (as was Emery, but under a previous minor conviction), probably because guns are the ultimate symbol of the free man. Associates or friends of Black and Emery, and Montague's wife, have also been prosecuted. This is the state in all its glory.

Disclosure: I know personally two of the three persecuted men, and consider them friends. I met Conrad at George Jonas's birthday party in Toronto last summer, and again just the day before his indictment, at the Freedom Club, a Montreal salon hosted by Bob Bexon and me. I met Bruce at a conference I chaired in Montreal last summer. Marc Emery, I have been in direct contact with only for the purpose of this column.

There was a time in this fair land when Leviathan did not run loose. Victimless acts were not crimes or, at least, were not viciously hunted. Pot was legal until the

1920s, and then its criminalization was not really enforced until the 1960s. Anybody could buy, keep and, in many cases, carry all sorts of guns until the last two thirds of the 20th century. And a straight businessman could rest assured that state minions would not try to destroy him. Following the Americans, Canadians have entered the epoch of witch hunts.

Who would have thought that racketeering and

money laundering laws would be used against individuals like Bruce Montague and Conrad Black? Who would have thought that the criminalization of marijuana would allow the U.S. government to hunt a Canadian on Canadian soil? Answer: anybody who has observed, during the 20th century, the growth of the soft tyranny forecasted by Alexis de Tocqueville. Who will be the next victims?

A free society is based on a coalition of people who accept that others do peaceful things they don't like, provided that, in return, the others let them do what they like. If everybody insists on doing what he likes and prohibiting what he doesn't, we are headed towards civil war at best, hard tyranny at the worst.

The three men, and what's left of our liberties, may well stand or fall together. **WS**

There was a time in this fair land when victimless acts were not crimes, or at least were not viciously hunted