

Our Opinion

Racism emerging as the global bogeyman

There have been a number of disturbing events in Germany over the last little while, culminating in the murder of a 51-year-old Turkish grandmother and her granddaughter who's crime was not being members of the 'master race.' Their murderers were members of the re-emerging neo-Nazi party, who have tapped into latent German prejudices. Violent acts against German citizens and refugees who aren't of European descent have developed as the dark side of German reunification.

But don't think this is just a German shame. All over Europe, extremist politicians spouting racist doctrines are crawling out of the sewers they lived in during the Cold War. For example, the conflict in the former Yugoslavia has added 'ethnic cleansing' to the English language. In France, far right politicians have risen to prominence on the platform of expelling non-Europeans.

Even Canada is not immune. Last week I received a press release from a group calling themselves the "Canadian Intelligence Service." The group is outraged that "famous research-historian" David Irving was deported when he came to Canada.

In case you're not familiar with Irving, he's what called a "revisionist" historian, which means he wants to change what's written in history books about WW II. In particular, he claims that the Nazi death camp in Auschwitz, Poland, was not really used to kill Jews at all, but was changed to look that way after the war. Irving also claims that the number of Jews killed by the Nazis has been greatly exaggerated—although exactly what he thinks happened to the six million Jews that used to live in Europe, I'm not sure.

Irving's good friend is Ernst Zundel, another Holocaust denier who was convicted under Canada's hate laws and who wears a hard hat because people have a habit of throwing bricks at head.

But our very own "Canadian Intelligence Service," which is based in High River, Alberta, argues that Irving was deported because of "the national political machine known as 'Zionism.'"

"Our political and bureaucrat masters," the article continues, "can't have the Canadian people getting access to information or ideas which have not passed through the federal censorship gestapo. After all, this is . . . the true North Strong and Free!"

The only really good thing about the Cold War was that the West could safely define itself as better than the Soviet Union. The sort of "us versus them" consisted of "us," the moral and free West, versus "them," the totalitarian and evil Eastern Block. It's similar to the way Canadians like to define themselves as just a little bit better than Americans. It just makes us feel good.

But now that the Iron Curtain is open, we need someone else to make us feel good, and there is a global trend toward painting the evil "them" as members of other races—the Japanese, Africans, East Indians, etc. Racism has stepped in to fill the void left by the collapse of communism.

We must be extremely careful not to define ourselves as better than other races. Unless we put racist thinking back in the sewer where it belongs, the cold war may be replaced by hot and violent race wars.

Darren MacDonald



Does ring around the collar really represent progress?

Can you remember wool? Do you go back as far as cotton and flannel and silk?

Are you venerable enough to remember REAL fibres manufactured by actual flesh-and-blood sheep and mandible-to-the-grindstone silkworms and sturdy, upright cotton plants photosynthesizing like troopers, row on downy-headed row?

Yesterday's threads, I'm afraid. Irish linens, Harris Tweeds and Egyptian cotton are as out of date as brass cuspidors and whalebone corsets. Today, our clothes are more likely to trace their pedigree to a row of test tubes or some obscure Erlenmeyer flask in a chemical research lab. Today's clothes spring from plastics—weird and soulless polymers with Star Trekkish monikers like Lycra, Neoprene, Fibranne and Polypropylene.

It all goes back to a fateful day in the 1870s, when a New England manufacturer of billiard balls offered a \$10,000 prize to anyone who could come up with a cheaper substitute for his increasingly expensive ivory imports. A young printer from Albany, New York, won the money with a flexible, transparent substance that he called "celluloid."

In Biblical fashion, celluloid begat bakelite, which begat cellophane, which begat acetate, which begat . . . well, suffice to say that by the Dirty Thirties, the developed world was awash in vinyl, plexiglass, Melmac, styrene, formica and polyester.

Then, in 1940 the Dupont Chemical Company announced the development of yet another new plastic "passing in strength and elasticity any previously known textile fibre." In fact, early claims promised that a pair of women's stockings made from this "magical synthetic" would "last forever."

The new plastic was nylon and predictions of its immortality were somewhat optimistic. But it was still a smash hit when it landed on the Notions Counters of New York department stores on May 15, 1940. Dupont researchers allotted 72,000 pairs for the test marketing. Sales were limited to two pairs per customer. They sold out in eight hours.

The nylon stockings should have been utter failure. They developed ladders, runs, rips and tears faster than cobwebs in a hurricane.

But women loved them. They lined up for them faster than Dupont could turn them out.

That opened the floodgates for plastics manufacturers. For the first time in 100,000 years man wasn't taking nature's raw material—rock, wood and animal fibre—and turning it into something serviceable. For the first time he was playing God—taking long chains of molecules and bending them to his will.

Which begat whole new textile mutants. Banlon. Orlon. Viyella.

And rayon.

Rayon is my nomination for Synthetic From Hell. Rayon shirts for men came out in the 1950s. The big selling point was you could wear a rayon shirt all day long, wash it out in a motel sink at night and in the morning—hey presto—ready to wear.

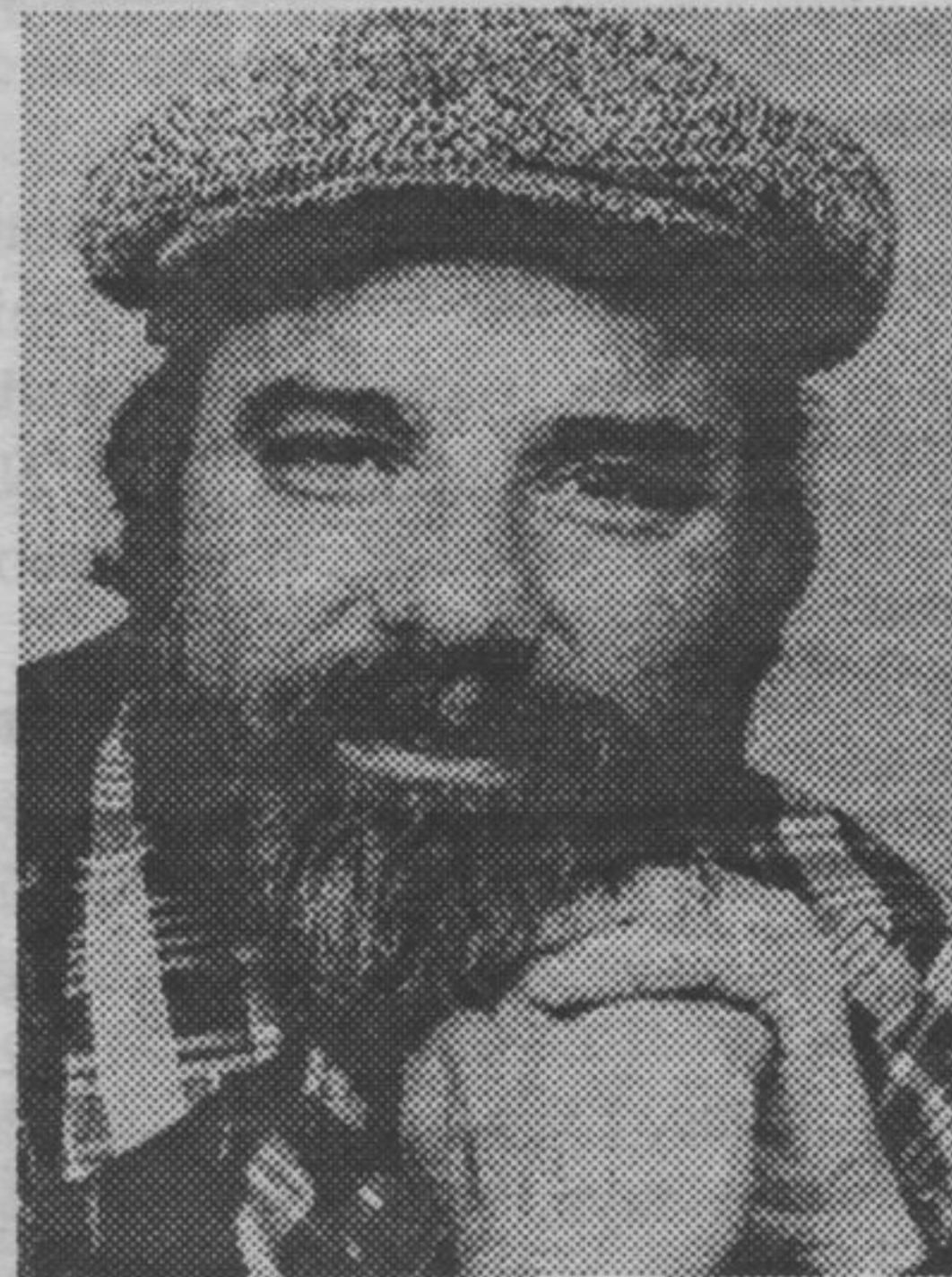
Which was true, I guess. But there was a penalty. In the winter, a rayon shirt was so cold it welded to

your nipples. In summer, to wear a rayon shirt was to have your own portable sauna.

And the smell. Phew! Without getting too graphic, let's just say that the odours rayon coaxed from the human armpit were such that you pretty well HAD to wash those shirts in the motel sinks every evening. Lunchtimes too, if possible.

Not that the revulsion of rayon detracted from the popularity of synthetics. People still lined up to buy the stuff. Which is why today we have such mutations as Lyocell, Ultra-suede, Viscose and my favourite—Spandex.

Spandex. That's the elasticized, second-skin garment that looks like it came out of a spray can. You see Olympic gymnasts and bicycle couriers wearing it. Which would be fine if they were the *only* folks who donned Spandex, but inevitably you see it on folks who look like a sackful of bowling balls. Not that I'm making fun of them. Hey—me? Make fun of fat? That's me over there in the shadows. Wearing the tweed muu muu.



Arthur Black

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