

Unleashing your inner Cheney: A guide for young conservatives

by Radical Randy

I write this after rereading several of my past *Post* articles, which may have reflected unfavourably on capitalism, corporations, and the American Empire. In the interests of fairness I have decided to dedicate an article to the political Right. The result is this short guide for up and coming young conservative politicians and those aspiring to join the corporate elite; a synthesis — a distillation — of past right-wing techniques and protocols for achieving and retaining power. Updating *The Prince* for the 21st century. Please, allow me be your Machiavelli — or at least your Karl Rove. Take my hand and we'll begin...

A matter of optics

Those of you new to conservative politics are reminded where your loyalty lies — with the rich. Whatever other issues may have brought you to the conservative fold pale in significance to your allegiance to the wealthy, the corporations and financial institutions they control and to the American Empire which embodies and advances the supremacy of capitalism and the Market. Unfortunately, the inconvenient truth is that there are far more poor voters than rich, so to win election a conservative politician must learn to be...creative.

The key, as any good prestidigitator knows, is misdirection. Addressing actual substantive issues is a no-win situation. When the opposition wants to discuss poverty or inequality, just stick to the tried-and-true mantra of limitless growth and meaningless trickledown platitudes—the more meaningless, the better. Is capitalism collapsing again? Well, anyone wanting something different must be a fan of the old Soviet Union, and we all know how that turned out, *comrade*. When all else fails, throw in an appeal to a few old timey traditional family values. Make it about something else.

Once in government you will frequently find yourself confronting threats to the corporate right to profits or to business as usual. Environmentalists with their hand wringing over global warming are becoming a major thorn for the oil industry, particularly in the Alberta tar sands (oops, oil sands). We can all learn from Stephen Harper's response to global warming: deny, deny, deny, stall, stall, stall. Now if only all those polar bears would just cut it out and quit pretending to drown.

Harper illustrates a basic principle for conservatives: when you find it necessary to lie to the public (on those rare occasions), it doesn't pay to be timid: make it a whopper. The Big Lie is the best lie. If in doubt on this point, consult Joseph Goebbels or George Dubya.

Weapons of mass distraction

Dissuade the public from analyzing politics, economics, and trade beyond mass media sound bites. Too boring, too dry, too complicated -- not worth the effort. Their time would be better spent watching hockey on TV. Don Cherry will be more than happy to provide them with all the political commentary they'll ever need.

America's industrial base may have been outsourced, eroding the country's ability to make things, but darned if they don't still know how to manufacture a good war or two. This is a fantastic tried and true method for transferring public wealth to big business and shoving a restive citizenry back in line, but beware of protestors. Some people have nothing better to do than spoil a perfectly good war for everyone else. If the unpatriotic should question why you're supporting an unpopular, discredited war, respond with the usual blather about our country's proud military traditions, our willingness to pay any price, stay the course, mustn't cut and run, our commitment to nation-building, support our troops yada, yada, yada. It is the sacred duty of the U.S. and its allies to invade and conquer countries and bring them the blessings of freedom (otherwise known as capitalism). We're on a mission from God. Under no circumstances should you let some conniving lefty trap you into a discussion of the real motives behind the war or any historical context for the conflict. *Never* discuss who benefits financially from the war.

The present Albertan and Canadian first-past-the-post electoral system is the perfect means for restricting power to mainstream and right-wing business parties and keeping the number of seats of smaller left or environmental parties well below what their share of the popular vote would dictate. Dangerous proposals for mixed member proportional representation that would remedy this must be ridiculed as unworkable and opposed at every turn. The last thing big business in this province or country needs is real democracy. John Jay, first Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, hit it dead centre when he observed, "The people who own the country ought to govern it." Or, as the Renaissance Medici banking family motto would have it: "Money to get power, power to protect money."

Your master's voice

As a right-wing politician you should always exude a certain diffident air and mild self-deprecation. After all you are only an anemic stand-in for our society's true heroes: the business leaders. Remember, their corporations' interests are the same as the country's. What's good for GM...

Be loud and proud as you constantly trumpet the supremacy of the capitalist market economy, the greatest system ever devised by man or God. Share the fantasy. There's nothing wrong with capitalism that a few minor adjustments can't solve: preferably the fewer the better—don't want to derail the gravy train.

Occasionally someone may attempt to engage you in an open, honest debate on economic issues. Not a good idea. Just follow the script. Government money given to the poor is a useless welfare program; money given to transnational corporations is an economic

stimulus package. Of course this must be presented as concern for jobs, not the business bottom line. Hint: when times are prosperous we don't need social programs and when there's a recession we can't afford them. The most difficult part of your job will be telling the working poor that tax cuts for the rich and slashing or privatizing public services will benefit them while maintaining a straight face. Practice in front of a mirror is recommended.

One major threat your business allies face is organized labour. Unions come between workers and employers, defiling the sanctity of the employment bond like an interloper in a marriage, turning the natural affection and gratitude of workers toward their bosses into suspicion and hostility. Use the politics of envy to play off non-unionized private sector workers against pampered civil servants living it up on their cushy salaries or private sector union boys with their fancy pensions and sick leave.

Surprisingly, giving a pretence of being an ally of workers and unions can actually benefit business. You may have problem with tree huggers continuing to squawk about environmental devastation or oil sands expansion poisoning people. Easily solved. Just spin it as jobs vs. the environment and accuse environmentalists of caring more about trees than people. Conservative politicians defending development are the true workers' champions. That said, it's good pr to occasionally support environmental legislation as long as it doesn't impact corporate profits.

All that glitters

There are several vital techniques you as a conservative politician must master. It never hurts to appeal to the old standards like patriotism. Canadian conservatives should make it a practice to wave the flag until their arm falls off, especially when concluding another free trade treaty selling out Canadian jobs or sovereignty.

Ralph Klein, Alberta's loveable folksy know-nothing redneck, had the right idea. During an election appeal to workers and the poor as just a populist good old boy. Clown around for the voters on the campaign trail. After you're elected, the joke will be on them. Alberta's Conservatives are reminded of their priorities: the only thing more important than rubber stamping the oil industry's demands is destroying Medicare.

Some voters may not be ready for your ideas and might misinterpret them as being contrary to the public interest so use glitter words or phrases. These shortcuts trigger well worn cognitive frames that have already been drummed into people's consciousness. ("Sustainable growth." "Tax relief." "Competitiveness." "Clean coal." "Compassionate conservatism.")

Speaking of glitter words, appeals to the "War on Terror" may still be useful to rile up the faithful, but many people have caught on, so be careful to monitor your audience— if they start rolling their eyes or giggling excessively you may be advised to change tack. A crisis evoking fear is always useful for stampeding the cattle: no time for thought just

action. Weapons of mass destruction so invade Iraq. Banks too big to fail so bail out Wall Street. Huge deficits so chop Medicare.

Reality-optional politics

You, the conservative politician, are a shining beacon of hope to the downtrodden: the billionaire suffering the indignity of squirreling away money in a Cayman offshore haven to avoid that thieving taxman. The oil sands executive frantically scrubbing off ducks to keep some eco-freaks happy. The CEO reduced to negotiating contracts with mere workers. The military officer nervously glancing over their shoulder before handing an Afghan detainee over for torture. It is your job as a conservative to champion these, the truly oppressed victims of our society.

Sure, some bleeding hearts may ask, “What about the poor? The casualties of war? The future generations left with a disintegrating economy and a looted, toxic, wrecked planet?” Screw 'em! You got yours! And you'll be rewarded once out of office by corporate largess with high paying consulting contracts or a board of directors sinecure. Don't worry, its not called bribery.

As someone who has willingly chosen this path you are unlikely to be burdened with anything so debilitating as a conscience, but should you find such an affliction beginning to develop don't despair. Just tell yourself you're changing the system from the inside while lining your pockets. If you find qualms concerning your career surfacing have courage, there are treatments available. One former Alberta premier recommends self-medicating with a bottle or two of the vino at the end of a hard day. Just be careful where you throw your spare change.

Well, there it is. I hope this finds favour in your eyes. I dedicate this updated version of *The Prince* to all the right-wing politicians and pundits and to the proud capitalists who own them. I hope this at least partially atones for my previous deprecation of the Right. I offer this guide to any budding conservatives in the hope it will help advance your career, aiding you in better serving the interests of wealth and privilege. Please freely accept this, my gift to you.
You're welcome.