

Cordon sanitaire

You might have heard in recent months that you should have nothing to do with Ross Wolfe, a former member of the Platypus Society and a PhD student at the University of Chicago, living in NYC. You might have asked one of us why that is, as he's attempted to distance himself fully from his former organization. Situating it in terms of the recent crisis of the revolutionary left that is spotlighted from time to time on his blog, the Charnel House, how could he be so terrible, in light of the scandals surrounding the IST and CWI? Well, in fact, Wolfe has been quite savvy in navigating this crisis-stricken terrain in order to make personal-symbolic gains.

For those unfamiliar with it, Platypus is a small sect, composed essentially of students and grad students, set up by former members of the Spartacist League. Its specificity (if we leave aside its theoretical pretensions, which mix together Adorno and orthodox Trotskyism in a totally incoherent fashion) is to reel in the rest of the Left with a combination of provocations ("The Left is dead", insults etc.) and flattery of certain leftist academics in order to persuade them to participate in its events and publish in its publication. Platypus calls this "hosting the conversation" and claim to have no particular "line". However, as revealed by the internal documents leaked onto the internet by a former member, it insults these same academics internally and has its own esoteric agenda which includes very dodgy politics on Israel/Palestine (close to those of the Antideutsche). To this duplicitous *modus operandi* we should add the very troubling cult-like discourses that surround its founder, Chris Cutrone. Wolfe was pushed out of Platypus finally, as he was too much of a liability for them, but has been scratching at the door to be re-admitted. **[I quit the organization in May 2013 because of disagreements with Cutrone, namely over cult-like mottos like "What Would Chris Do?" and other rubbish. He also ordered me to delete a large Facebook group of which I was an admin, but I disobeyed. Later I asked if I could rejoin the group. Cutrone rejected my request.]** (For more on Platypus, see blog posts by [Richard Seymour](#) and [Louis Proyect](#)).

At this point, the issue is less to do with what Wolfe has done as a member of Platypus and more what he has done in his political afterlife. As a soldier of fortune, Ross has the potential to be far more damaging than as a member of a disciplined political sect. He demonstrated this on his way out of Platypus by hacking his ex-girlfriend's social media accounts, holding them hostage in a bid to return to the fold. **[No, actually. What was hacked and "held hostage" was Platypus' Facebook discussion group, not my ex-girlfriend's social media accounts.]** Anyone seeking to reenter Platypus should be suspect, to be sure, but Wolfe, in invading the privacy of his ex-girlfriend and in demonstrating any hint of desperation in wanting to rejoin Platypus, went above and beyond. Now he has no one to be accountable to.

Whatever his stated misgivings with his former sect, he's gone after one of its former members with the sort of vigor you would expect from a current member. "Former Member" — who revealed Chris Cutrone's remarks about Palestinians being "anthropologically unlike us," in a statement that broke many of Platypus' sickening internal proceedings to the outside world — was one of Wolfe's main targets, despite that statement being signed by a broad layer of signatories. It is in keeping with his *modus operandi* of going after individuals who he perceives as being the most vulnerable. He published articles on his website that tied chat transcripts of FM's use of medication drugs to his vocation and to his current employer, which is reprehensible by any measure. Though these blog posts have been since deleted, for years, if you searched for FM's name and background as any employer would, you would find Wolfe's accounts of his misadventures in the second or third hit. **[None of this is true.]**

He also went after other individuals as a result of the Platypus statement via similar means. He managed to discover the identities of the other principal co-authors of this statement through methods we're not able to confirm at present. He uploaded personal photographs, including paintings done by the mother of one of the authors **[it was the dude's profile pic]**, to

the Charnel House, as a creepy means of intimidation. He particularly fixated on outing one signatory who is still a university student by his internet handle **[not even sure who this might be]**, potentially compromising his ability to be hired after his university studies.

When you consider that at one point he claimed on his blog that it was acceptable for the FBI to prosecute Freedom Road Socialist Organization (Fightback!) for their political connections to the PFLP in Palestine and FARC in Colombia, it makes his self-styled outings of these comrades seem all the more disturbing. **[I've dealt with these completely abhorrent opinions I held back in 2010 (and since publicly retracted) on numerous occasions now. Needless to say, it was a stupid position to take even in passing.]** It is clear that Ross Wolfe wants to go beyond the usual sectarian heresy-hunting and monomaniacal one man 'crusades', and actually cause material damage to the lives of activists in the movement. This is only one of the reasons why we should not humor any of his attempts to 'campaign' via his blog or Facebook.

The other involves perhaps the most fraught issue in our movement of late. Wolfe has systematically pursued disenchanted members and former members of the International Socialist Organization (US) and Solidarity-US in trying to harvest sensitive organizational materials around cases of adjudication of gendered violence. **[Former members of these organizations contacted me, and others such as Louis Proyect, independently and without me soliciting any information from them. I was also contacted by the victim in the case of the ISO, and she asked if I might publish her story (which I did).]** In these two very different organizations, he has tried to make noises about 'cover ups' and other sinister means of handling alleged incidents of sexual violence. This is a pretext. He has released sensitive documents about the proceedings of the ISO under the cover of 'information wanting to be free,' which have nothing to do with this political question. We believe it is nothing more than self-aggrandizement and wanting to sow division and distrust in an already fragmented milieu.

On top of this, he has continued the Platypus practice of "hosting the conversation" with a 'big tent', including Antideutsch ideologues **[several of these supposed "ideologues" work for Verso or have book contracts with *Historical Materialism*, incidentally]** and trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) in consolidating a front of "people who will mildly tolerate Ross." **[Uh, with over 4,500 Facebook friends, more than 1,500 Facebook followers, and upwards of 16K followers on Twitter, I think I'll be fine.]** Obviously, assembling this curious coalition involves including bigots and morons, but we ask, why would Ross resort to this? What does this have to do with the political legacy he claims, whether it is the writings of Karl Marx or the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party?

So what, you might ask? OK, Platypus might well be very distasteful and Wolfe might well be a shit-stirring troll, but no more than other people in this milieu. The Left attracts more than its fair share of weirdos, mythomaniacs, and narcissists, so why pick out Wolfe particularly, especially if his blog might have the occasionally useful post?

One response might be that Wolfe's oxygen is publicity: his constant sallies to attract opprobrium and then sidle up to people is all a self-reinforcing process so that people will talk about him — whether in shocked tones or those of approval — share his posts etc. It is what he *lives* for. Shunning him, and those who publicize him, is a way of depriving him of that attention he craves. Perhaps, at some point, he will get a life and move on.

More importantly, however, is that he has recently proved that he is more than an irritant — he can be an actively malicious and dangerous presence. When some former members of the organization Solidarity left after a failed attempt to get the organization to deal with sexual assault within the organization, Ross Wolfe wrote a blog post implying that one of the women had failed to make the issue public due to a desire to cover it up. In fact, the matter was not made public because the victim(s) expressly wished not to. Wolfe's apparent motivation was his displeasure at rejection of his paper proposal by the HMNY conference. **[Actually, no. She had told me that the information was going to go public "soon" anyway, so I wondered what the holdup could have been. My proposal hadn't even been sent off for review by that point, so**

it had no bearing whatsoever on my decision to publish it.] This episode demonstrated that Wolfe was prepared to rake up and put into the public domain information against the express wishes of the victim(s) just in order to serve his endless desire for being the center of attention and settling personal scores.

Anyone who feels even the slightest stake in laying the groundwork for radical or revolutionary political organization in the United States should shun someone like Ross Wolfe. When he feels politically rejected, he resorts to either creating FB 'sock puppets' to screenshot or copy and paste people's writing on the internet to listen in, or to employ proxies to do the same. If you value your professional or personal security online, you'll have nothing to do with him and help us create a *cordon sanitaire* around him.