It is a wonder that Tasha Kheiriddin and Adam Daifallah, the dynamic, young authors of Rescuing Canada’s Right: Blueprint for a Conservative Revolution, choose to live in Canada at all. After all, their take on our nation suggests that it’s less a country, more “a government-sponsored abstraction,”¹ where the innocent taxpayer is burdened by legal fees for gays, lesbians and women fighting to claim their rights, is brain-washed by a media that is “like pigs rooting for truffles,”² and lives in the throes of “a perversely elitist class distinction which prefers mediocrity to merit.”³ Who would want to live in a country like that?

We get it. The book is meant to be provocative. In fact, more than anything, that is arguably its best claim to fame. It would be ill-fitting for a book review to mince words then, but let’s not give up on logic just yet, as there is much that is admirable about the book.

Written in 2005, with an election looming and the country still reeling from the aftermath of the Liberal sponsorship scandal, the authors advocate for a “party of small, responsible, forward-
looking, non-interventionist government, as opposed to the big, wasteful, old-style, expansionist one. An eminently reasonable idea that, with the benefit of hindsight, tapped into popular sentiment and for the first time in 13 years helped Blue prevail at the polls. The authors take this a step further and contend that their battle is not about promoting a party, but it is about saving an ideology:

“Conservatism can survive a lack of leaders but it can’t survive a lack of conservatism. That’s to say, it’s a bonus to have a leader who’s the life and soul of the party, but first the party has to have a life and soul. A party can embody a movement, but it can’t be a substitute for it. That’s what this book is about.”

In their pursuit of effecting meaningful change, or at least providing a worthy political alternative to Canadians, the authors espouse conservatism of the small-c variety, defined broadly as “a political philosophy loosely based on the ideas of classical liberalism as outlined in the writings of John Locke, Adam Smith and more modern thinkers such as Friedrich Hayek. It emphasizes free markets, individual rights over collective rights, limited government, private property rights, and personal responsibility.” The book is rigorous in using this small-c lens to describe historical trends and prescribe policy outcomes - in itself, a commendable consistency that has been lacking in the Conservative Party. As discussed later, however, ideology can sometimes get in the way of sound policy.

Statism, contend the authors, is a malaise in modern Canada. It is a condition where the collective mind of an entire population has been turned off from individual effort and turned onto the state for resolution of social and moral problems. Our society has developed a parasitic reliance on political structures and is unable to stand on its own without the crutches of government handouts and social welfare. How did we get here? Planned propaganda by the Liberal Party, if one takes Kheiriddin and Daifallah at their word. They contend that the major beneficiaries of this system are not the disadvantaged but the “people who have political and organizational resources and the money to deploy them. In Canada’s case, that makes the Liberal Party the chief beneficiary of the ballooning size of our national government. The losers? Not just conservatives, but everyone who values democracy, freedom and a strong marketplace of ideas. By equating statism with nationalism, Liberals have made the expression of any dissenting view appear un-Canadian. This has not only helped keep them in office, but stifled the national debate on everything from culture to health care.”
To jolt Canadians out of their state-sponsored stupor, the authors recommend a strong dose of small-c conservative policies that will save the party and save the country. In the ensuing chapters, they lay out a detailed, disciplined blueprint of how to rescue Canada’s Right and frame the discussion into three linear spheres – the past, the plan and the policies.

The first section takes a candid look at the conservatives’ track record in government leading up to 2005. Apart from a singular high of Sir John A. MacDonald’s years on the conservative graph, the rest is presented as a revolving door of forgettable leaders advocating un-conservative policies on the back of a party torn by infighting among Red and Blue Tories on the one hand, and weakened by attacks from the Reform Party on the other.

But while the Conservative Party is complicit for its lack of conservative conviction, it is not to blame for its own failure. The blame, in the authors’ opinion, lies squarely with liberal propagandists that have usurped every ideological inch open to influence in this country and coloured it red – conservo-phobic educators churning out little liberals by the thousands in the public education system, a judiciary that sells its judgment to the highest political bidder, ill-read, lazy journalists and the left-leaning CBC that promotes the status quo, petulant feminists and civil rights groups that drain taxpayer monies and fracture the conservative appeal among value voters, and of course Quebec, the kryptonite that thwarts any conservative majority drive from the west straight to Ottawa.

It is against these actors that Kheiriddin and Daifallah’s blueprint directs its unscrupulous designs. Inspired by the “Powell Memorandum,” the book brazenly echoes its call for a “four-pronged plan of attack, focusing on academia, the media, politics and the courts,” to create a conservative infrastructure with a Canadian twist, whereby Quebec, immigrant diasporas and family values are thrown in to complete the list of usual suspects. “Seeding a thousand think-tanks to develop and disseminate conservative policy and counter the propaganda of the left.” A conservative club on every university campus. A Conservative photo-op in every ethnic language newspaper. A tax cut for every family. Limited discussion on abortion and gay-marriage rights and the party positioned as pro-family instead. Devolution of federal power to let the provinces, especially Quebec, take greater control over their own affairs. These are the suggested policy remedies to correct our national malaise and inject conservative back into the system.
The plan is valuable for its transparency and brazenness, if nothing else. The “Hidden Agenda” is hidden no longer. We no longer have to fear what we don’t know about the Conservatives. We can now fear what we do know. No one and nothing are off-limits in this brand of conservative blitzkrieg.

Kheiriddin and Daifallah’s plan will certainly give the party life. But where is the soul?

The ideological fog around the policies is so dense that rationale blurs into rhetoric. The authors decry, for instance, the bad press Prime Minister Harper received upon introducing a transit rebate tax for city commuters in order to discourage driving. The press argued that this was not the right incentive to cause a significant shift in commuter habits. The authors argue that it was a sound policy that would save commuters $153 to $485 a year and that the press cried foul only because the proposal was advanced by a Conservative. But what about the intent of the policy? Reducing driving? Even the most basic research would show that carbon taxes, or tolls even, are more effective at reducing driving than commuter rebates which mostly benefit people who are already taking public transit. This is one example. There are many more in the book that cause one to take pause and lament an opportunity lost – this book could have been a call to action that won support on both sides of the aisle because it put the best interests of citizens first. Instead, as one reads along to find an unrelenting litany of political graffiti smeared across national leaders like Trudeau (who is seldom used without the words “disaster,” “alas,” or “unfortunately” in the same sentence) and national symbols like the Healthcare Act (we know it’s broken, but bulldozing over it with a constitutional reading that considers it a violation of one’s right to life?) for no other purpose than their liberal origins, one realizes that the threshold of healthy opposition was crossed long ago. How can the book ask of its audience what it fails so miserably at doing itself – looking at the other side as an ideological opponent, an alternative, an equal. Not an enemy.

Acknowledged or not, the debate in this country has shifted away from the far left and the reports of the Right’s demise greatly exaggerated. We do not like deficits. We are jaded with big government. We question who should get EI. We tolerate debate on religious rights and racial profiling. We struggle with homelessness and child poverty. Healthcare, federalism, the environment, education and welfare. Canadians are faced with some tough choices and are in need of good counsel. They are in need of parties that stand for real ideas, not ideology-driven rhetoric posing as policy. They are in need of a robust marketplace of public debate that engages with the
problems of today, and is not concerned with the settling of old political scores. *Rescuing Canada’s Right* is a persuasive call to action for conservatives of all stripes. But it is not a call that will raise the level of debate in this country. It is just a call that will add more conservative noise to it.

If that is how elections are won, then this is your book for the long haul. But to all Canadians – buyer beware.
ENDNOTES

1. Page xvi
2. Page 204
3. Page xvi
4. Page 43
5. Page x
6. Page 4
7. Page xvi – xvii
8. Page 51
9. Page 254