



Written by [Gary Benoit](#) on May 9, 2010

The Anti-government Epithet

Though President Obama did not actually hurl the “anti-government” epithet in his May 1 Ann Arbor speech, his meaning was unmistakable and the Associated Press was not really wrong in describing it that way. “[Obama] took direct aim at the anti-government language so prevalent today,” said the AP account of the President’s University of Michigan commencement address.



But what “anti-government language” is “so prevalent” in America today? Are Tea Partiers and other political opponents of Obama’s big-government policies claiming that the U.S. government should be eliminated and replaced with — nothing? How about champions of the Constitution such as Ron Paul or John Birchers? Do they too want an end to government? That is not what the AP or the rest of the mainstream media are claiming, of course. But that has not stopped the media from broadly applying the “anti-government” label to almost anyone who dares to exercise his right to free speech and peaceful assembly in opposition to government run amok.

Nor did it stop President Obama from [saying in Ann Arbor](#): “What troubles me is when I hear people say that all of government is inherently bad.” One wonders how often Obama hears people say that. Or if he recognizes that government, even a constitutional Republic such as ours, is inherently dangerous, owing to the nature of man and the corrupting influences of power. As [James Madison wrote](#) in *The Federalist Papers* (No. 51): “If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.”

In pointing to man’s inherent nature, Madison was not expressing an anti-government sentiment. Just the opposite, in fact. In *The Federalist Papers*, Madison was arguing for ratification of the Constitution, and so instrumental were his labors to give birth to and breathe life into the Constitution at the Convention of 1787 and afterward that he became known to history as “the father of the Constitution.” Yet similar sentiments about the necessity of controlling government are often dismissed today as “anti-government” rantings by our political and media elites.

The President also said in Ann Arbor: “Throwing around phrases like ‘socialists’ and ‘Soviet-style takeover’ and ‘fascist’ and ‘right-wing nut’ — [laughter] — that may grab headlines, but it also has the effect of comparing our government, our political opponents, to authoritarian, even murderous



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regimes.” Ah, there’s some of that “anti-government language” the AP said the President targeted! But putting aside for the moment the question of whether such accusations against today’s big-government agenda are warranted, how does being against socialism or fascism or Soviet-style takeovers necessarily make one anti-government? Of course, one could conceivably be against the Total State and also be against any government whatsoever — the ideal that Madison said was impossible owing to the flawed nature of man. But one can also oppose the Total State without being anti-government.

No one would accuse President Obama of being anti-government. His policies suggest that he views government as inherently good, and though he did not go so far as to say that in Ann Arbor, he did use the occasion to defend government as a force for good.

But how often in history, one might ask, has government been a force for good? How often has government secured and safeguarded the freedoms of its citizens? How often has government been benevolent or at least benign in terms of what it does for — or to — its citizens? Now consider the dark side of the historical ledger: How often has government enslaved and tortured and murdered?

It is indeed tragically ironic that those who want us to place our trust in big government would frantically warn that the so-called “anti-government” rhetoric against their policies could lead to anti-government violence, without being at least equally concerned about the violence government will inevitably commit if the restraints and limitations on government power are cast aside. Every violent act against an innocent victim is a tragedy, but rulers possessing complete and absolute power can and do commit crimes against humanity on a much larger scale than other evil-doers are capable of accomplishing outside of government — as the many millions of innocent lives claimed by dictators like Stalin or Hitler make clear.

America has been the beneficiary of the greatest experiment in liberty the world has ever witnessed because of the limitation and division of government power. But if the restraints on government are eliminated, then our Republic will metastasize into an “authoritarian, even murderous” regime, just as a fire intended for warmth will burn down a house if it somehow escapes the confines of the fireplace and is allowed to spread. This is true irrespective of the intentions of those now clamoring for more government power as the means for solving our nation’s ills.

Working to prevent such a nightmare from ever befalling our great country is not anti-government; it is anti-totalitarianism and pro-Constitution.



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