



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on May 17, 2010

Attack on John Birch Society Backfires

The recent article in Politico.com by Charles Postel hinting at “dark forces” influencing the Tea Party is another in a recent and growing series of unsuccessful attacks on The John Birch Society. Rachel Maddow’s attacks on the JBS were exposed when she issued falsehoods and innuendos last December, and Karl Rove gave the back of his hand to the Society in a recent op-ed piece in the Wall Street Journal.

Having run out of false claims and fraudulent accusations about the Society — [such as](#) 1) asserting that the JBS campaign to Impeach Earl Warren in the ‘60s being based upon its opposition to *Brown v. Board of Education* when, instead, it was the Court’s abrogation of constitutional limits that galvanized the Society’s campaign; 2) claiming that the Society’s characterization of Nelson Mandela as “a communist terrorist thug” was implausible, and then ignoring the hard data garnered from from Mandela’s own words: “We communist party members are the most advanced revolutionaries in modern history;” 3) attributing the Society’s opposition to fluoridation of water supplies as being based on claims that it was “a communist plot” when in fact it was the Society’s opposition to the mindset that government could assume the power to do such a thing in the first place; and 4) claiming JBS Founder Robert Welch charged that Dwight Eisenhower “was a communist” when, in fact, [The Politician](#), written by Robert Welch *before* the founding of the Society, provided more than ample evidence that Eisenhower served as a convenient “agent” for those promoting communist tyranny — other fabrications and distortions of history were called for. For the interested and open-minded reader, there is additional information about these sensational and misleading charges [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).





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Postel's attempt to sully the name of the Society by trying to link it to the Liberty League, a "dark", sinister, "right-wing" organization that flourished briefly in the 1930s backfires, however, when a closer look is taken of that organization. He tells his readers that this was a "right-wing citizen's group organized ... in the 1930s to overturn President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal." He writes, without proof, of the League's "association with shadowy corporate conspiracies" which he then somehow equates to "the John Birch Society's [alleged] reputation for secrecy and extremism." He even gets the League's name wrong.

The [American Liberty League](#), founded in 1934 in the midst of the Great Depression "dared to attack the whole philosophical basis of the New Deal." After reviewing its beginnings, David Pietrusza wrote that "this was clearly not some fringe organization ... it was respectable ... and believed that it could topple the New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt." In its articles of incorporation, the League stated that its "particular business and objects shall be to defend and uphold the Constitution of the United States and to gather and disseminate information that (1) will teach the necessity of respect for the rights of persons and property as fundamental to every form of government and (2) will teach the duty of government ... to protect individual and group initiative and enterprise, to foster the right to work, earn, save and acquire property, and to preserve the ownership and lawful use of [such] property when acquired."

The League's opposition to Roosevelt's New Deal is eerily reminiscent of some of the Tea Party's, and the Society's, positions. Pietrusza writes that its "opposition ... is based on an improper use of the Constitution's interstate commerce clause and an intrusion on the right of contract." The League opposed Roosevelt's Agricultural Adjustment Act as "economic and political quackery," which the Supreme Court later found to be unconstitutional. In his book, *The Revolt of the Conservatives*, author George Wolfskill said that the League "believed that the New Deal was a threat to the Constitution and represented a danger of tyranny via centralization; that it was based on coercion, deceit, and false economic principles: that recovery [from the Great Depression] was in fact retarded by government intervention; that government ... controls were 'a cure worse than the disease'; that the New Deal combined aspects of socialist and fascist economic systems; that private enterprise was being damaged; that deficit financing and high spending threatened the nation with inflation; and that the banking community was now under the political control of the federal government."

Remarkably, statements by spokesmen for the American Liberty League charged that planned economies would lead to "lower living standards, national decay and the sacrifice of liberty ... whether the dictator is a *usurper* by force or is elected under the forms of popular government." (Emphasis added.)

Wolfskill went on to point out that the most effective part of the League's education efforts were pamphlets which "represented ... the most concise and thorough summary of conservative political thought since the Federalist papers."

Five million copies of these pamphlets were distributed to the public, which resulted in 200,000 articles about the League and its efforts appearing in the nation's newspapers. The parallel to the use of the Internet by constitutionalists such as the Tea Party and the Birch Society to promote its political and economic positions is clear and profound.

The influence of the League on politics in the United States was [huge](#). Following the 1938 elections, conservatives "stalemated New Deal legislation, using Liberty League themes of opposition to government spending [and] taxation," according to Answers.com. The League funded conservative



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scholarship and university forums on public policy issues which “prefigured the creation of [present] conservative think tanks.” In summary, the League “has been vindicated by history and is posthumously triumphant.”

In his attempt to belittle and marginalize The John Birch Society and warn of the dangers of it getting too close to the Tea Partiers, Postel instead makes clear that the philosophical and political battle currently being waged has in fact been going on for years. And his effort to divide the attempts by the Society and the Tea Party in their ongoing efforts to restore limited Constitutional government serves only to reveal his bias towards increasingly tyrannical and interventionist government policies without regard to constitutional limitations. Postel is an assistant professor of history at San Francisco State University and won the Bancroft Prize in American history for his book *The Populist Vision*. He also wins the “booby” prize for selecting an example from history to prove his point, which, upon closer inspection, blows up in his face.

Photo: A visitor from Seton Hall University at the JBS booth at the 2010 CPAC event in Washington, D.C.



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