



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on March 7, 2013

Leftist SPLC Bemoans Growing Influence of The John Birch Society

The largely discredited Southern Poverty Law Center, a self-styled “civil rights” group based in Alabama described by critics as ultra-leftist, just released its latest so-called “[Intelligence Report](#),” warning of an [alleged surge in right-of-center organizations](#) concerned about an [out-of-control federal government](#). Among the prominent “Patriot” groups attacked in the SPLC report was [The John Birch Society](#), with an [entire article](#) about the JBS devoted largely to complaining about the liberty-minded organization’s supposed growing influence in the conservative movement and the Republican Party.



In its report on the JBS, entitled “[Bringing Back Birch](#),” SPLC commentator Don Terry, perhaps trying to add some credibility to his piece, does help dispel some of the more absurd accusations hurled at the organization over the last five decades by its critics — that it is secretly racist, or anti-Semitic, for example, both easily debunked. JBS CEO Art Thompson explained to Terry in an interview that members who are found to harbor racist or anti-Semitic views are immediately expelled from the society.

However, the SPLC report goes on to mock the group in a half-baked attempt to discredit its mission using sarcasm. “The arch-conservative John Birch Society is still waging its Cold War-era crusade against the Red menace and American ‘insiders’ who, in the society’s view, are hell-bent on handing the country over to the socialists at the U.N.,” the writer notes, apparently oblivious to the fact that [communism](#) and [tyranny are flourishing](#) throughout much of the world, even as elements of the American establishment [continue their bid to erode U.S. sovereignty](#).

“At least some Americans appear to be buying what the Birchers are selling,” the report continues. “Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney raised more than a few eyebrows during the 2012 campaign when he said that Russia — not Iran, not North Korea — was, without question, America’s No. 1 geopolitical foe. Anxiety about Russia is straight out of the John Birch Society playbook of fear.” It should be noted that, despite the SPLC’s insinuations, Romney’s positions were largely at odds with the constitutional values promoted by the JBS, as this magazine [documented extensively](#).

The report also claims that, at one point, the JBS was exiled from the conservative movement by establishment figure and *National Review* editor William Buckley — an allegation that even one of the sources interviewed for the SPLC piece helped debunk. “Being banished from the conservative movement and being banished from the *National Review*-approved conservative movement are not the same thing,” noted senior editor at the libertarian-leaning *Reason* magazine [Jesse Walker](#) in the SPLC’s piece.



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“John G. Schmitz ran a basically Birchite third-party presidential campaign in 1972 that got over a million votes,” Walker added. “That’s a lot of people who don’t take their marching orders from Bill Buckley.” The author of the SPLC report, meanwhile, goes on to claim that “in recent years the John Birch Society has been invited back upstairs and has even hosted a dinner party or two. In 2010, the society was a co-sponsor of the annual Conservative Political Action Conference.”

The John Birch Society, an affiliate of this magazine and a group that is regularly attacked by the SPLC, is also dubbed a “Patriot” organization in the latest report — a designation that is often considered a badge of honor among conservatives, Christians, and libertarians. The latest edition of the “Intelligence Report” devoted a whole article to the Wisconsin-based group, tying it to everything from the Koch brothers, whose father became a member of the original John Birch Society council over 50 years ago, to modern, mainstream conservative thought.

While the report acknowledges that many of the smears leveled against the JBS are unfounded, the SPLC bemoans the fact that the society and its influence have continued to grow in recent years. It also picked up one opinion column written by an occasional contributor to *The New American*, taking parts of it wildly out of context to try to argue — [dishonestly, as the piece’s author explained in a just-published response](#) — that the JBS may find itself marginalized if it continues to publish similar opinion columns.

Surprisingly, however, rather than simply regurgitating SPLC claims, several major “mainstream media” reports offered some balance in their approach to reporting on the latest “Intelligence Report.” *USA Today*, for example — the largest newspaper in America by readership — quoted JBS spokesman Bill Hahn’s reaction to the latest SPLC report attacking conservative organizations, and the society in particular, in an honest and accurate manner that should be considered standard among journalists.

“The Southern Poverty Law Center uses its extremism report as a way to raise funds, says Bill Hahn, a spokesman for the John Birch Society, a conservative, anti-communist group based in Appleton, Wis, that advocates limited government,” *USA Today* [reported](#), adding that the JBS was included on the SPLC’s list of “anti-government” groups. The center “is very adept at creating the specter that armed groups will overthrow the government or that the continuously dying supremacy movement is lurking behind every rock,” Hahn added. “The SPLC will continue to utilize fear to fill their bank accounts.”

As Hahn also noted in his statement to *USA Today*, the JBS has always opposed violence, racism, and extremism. The society, he added, simply urges its members across the country to become active and responsible citizens to restore and preserve constitutional freedoms, offering educational materials and organizational leadership to achieve more freedom, less government, and — with God’s help — a better world.

Still, the SPLC makes clear in its reports that it is not happy with the society’s [steadfast and increasingly successful opposition to the UN’s “Agenda 21,”](#) a so-called [sustainable development](#) scheme. The “civil rights” group also suggested that JBS-led educational efforts have resulted in the [national GOP adopting a plank in its platform opposing the global scheme as a “socialist” and “communist” threat,](#) and have led to [state laws banning the controversial UN program in places such as Alabama.](#) Indeed, [bi-partisan opposition to Agenda 21 is surging nationwide.](#)

“Another factor driving the expansion of the radical right over the last decade or so has been the mainstreaming of formerly marginal conspiracy theories,” SPLC “Senior Fellow” Mark Potok [claimed](#) in a statement. “The latest and most dramatic example of that may be the completely baseless claim that



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Agenda 21 — a United Nations sustainability plan that was signed by President George H.W. Bush but has no mandatory provisions whatsoever — is part of a plan to impose socialism on America and strip away private property rights.”

Potok was clearly upset about the national effort to stop Agenda 21 and its increasing success.

Conversely, analysts say it is hard to imagine why radical leftists and rabid UN supporters would be so obsessed with attacking opponents of UN Agenda 21 if, as the SPLC and other supporters of the global plan allege, it is merely a harmless document that does nothing.

The UN actually offers a very concise summary of the “sustainability” plan on its own website, so readers can judge for themselves whether it ought to be adopted in the United States.

“Agenda 21 is a comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally and locally by organizations of the United Nations System, Governments, and Major Groups in every area in which human impacts (sic) on the environment,” the UN summary [explains on its website](#). “The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was created in December 1992 to ensure effective follow-up of UNCED, to monitor and report on implementation of the agreements at the local, national, regional and international levels.”

When one considers the fact that the UN claims carbon dioxide — a gas exhaled by humans and required for all plant life — [is a “pollutant,”](#) the true scope of Agenda 21 becomes clear. Anyone who has read through UN documents, which call for everything from a [world currency](#) to an [end to private land ownership](#), understands that its vision is incompatible with the U.S. Constitution and American traditions of self-governance and liberty.

Plus, as critics have noted, most UN member governments are ruthless dictatorships or at least totalitarian-minded governments. Why American policy should be guided by such an organization is never explained by the SPLC or Agenda 21 supporters, who simply throw around the word “conspiracy theory” as if it were enough to prevent rational individuals from even thinking about the idea, a way to end the debate using emotional reactions rather than facts.

“Now, it seems likely that the radical right’s growth will continue,” Potok continued in his report, deceptively implying that concern over lawless government and politicians seeking to strip Americans’ fundamental rights were linked to the fact that Obama is half black. What the SPLC fails to mention, of course, is that the vast majority of “Patriot” groups, including JBS, have supported the Constitution and opposed attacks on it all along — it has nothing to do with the race of the current occupant of the White House, a matter that concerns only collectivists and race-mongers interested in superficial characteristics such as skin color.

The number of groups targeted by the SPLC for attack may indeed be larger now than in the past and be increasing, but that is likely attributable to the fact that, as John F. McManus, the publisher of *The New American* and president of The John Birch Society, succinctly said: “Anyone the SPLC hates is a ‘hate group.’”

The SPLC, which has become largely a discredited laughingstock for trying to smear its political and ideological foes using hysteria and deception, also likes to claim that it is under attack from the “far right.” In reality, some of its most vocal critics are on the Left. Even prominent civil rights attorney Stephen Bright, president of the Southern Center for Human Rights, for example, has criticized the SPLC and its discredited co-founder.



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“[SPLC founder] Morris Dees is a con man and fraud, as I and others, such as U.S. Circuit Judge Cecil Poole, have observed and as has been documented by John Egerton, *Harper’s*, the *Montgomery Advertiser* in its ‘Charity of Riches’ series, and others,” Bright [explained](#) in a letter. “He has taken advantage of naive, well-meaning people — some of moderate or low incomes — who believe his pitches and give to his \$175-million operation. He has spent most of what they have sent him to raise still more millions, pay high salaries, and promote himself.”

As has become the norm, the SPLC continues to try to [push its discredited propaganda on law enforcement, targeting loyal Americans and patriots](#) as potential threats. Recently released documents even showed the extremist group was [working closely with the Justice Department](#), headed by an attorney general who is currently [facing criminal contempt of Congress charges](#) for covering up the Fast and Furious gun-trafficking scandal. The Obama administration operation involved [arming certain Mexican drug cartels](#) with heavy weapons, with [official e-mails showing](#) that the resulting violence was intended to be used to push for more gun control.

However, despite garnering some attention from the [increasingly discredited “mainstream” media](#), with each new report, the SPLC becomes more and more irrelevant and discredited, according to analysts. This year, even the establishment press has helped expose that fact. Indeed, as “Granny Warriors” leader Linda Hunnicutt, 74, [suggested to CNN](#), being on an SPLC “Patriot” list is seen as an honor — proof that an organization is working effectively to preserve freedom. Trying to link loyal, liberty-loving, patriotic Americans with true hate groups, conservatives and libertarians say, is now starting to very publicly backfire.

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