

The Social Contract

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A Note from the Editor

The SPLC: Poisoning Public Discourse

As we go to press, Arizona's new law aimed at dealing with illegal aliens has propelled the immigration issue to national prominence. In addition, grassroots Tea Party activists are challenging the far left's social and political agenda.

Instead of debating the issues on the basis of facts and reason, opponents of the Arizona law and the Tea Partiers are engaging in a campaign of defamation. In the forefront of efforts to choke off rational debate is the Southern Poverty Law Center.

The SPLC is the creation of Morris Dees and fulfills two roles: First, it serves as a cash machine for Dees and his close associates. Building upon the George McGovern presidential campaign contributors lists, Dees has become one of the most successful direct mail fundraisers in history. Easily scared leftists have contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to the SPLC and it now has a fat endowment. Various Charity Watch Lists, such as that of the Colorado Secretary of State, recognize the SPLC as among the most dubious non-profit organizations currently soliciting funds.

Second, SPLC spokespersons Richard Cohen, Heidi Beirich, and Mark Potok serve as attack dogs of the far left. As contributors to this special issue of *TSC* note, the SPLC smears law-abiding citizens while ignoring real terrorist threats. For example, since 9/11, there have been more than 20 Islamist terrorist plots aimed at the United States, including the deadly mass shooting by U.S. Army Maj. Nidal Hasan, the recent Times Square bombing attempt, the Christmas Day effort to destroy a Delta-Northwest Airlines flight into Detroit, and the Fort Dix, New Jersey, effort to kill military personnel, among others. Yet the SPLC dishonestly insists that Tea Partiers and "militias" are the real danger. As Jesse Walker writes in the current issue of *Reason* magazine: <http://reason.com/archives/2010/05/05/the-myth-of-the-menacing>

Like the better-known Red Scares, but pointing rightwards rather than leftwards, a Brown Scare both exaggerates the threats at hand and obscures the distinctions between genuinely violent plotters, radical but peaceful activists, and members of the mainstream.

You can see such a mindset at work in the SPLC's watch list.

Critics of the SPLC cross the political spectrum. We urge *TSC* readers to bring this issue to the attention of opinion leaders they are in touch with. The online version is easily accessible. ■

Wayne Lutton, Ph.D.