

Fighting ‘Hate’ for Profit and Power

The SPLC’s Political Agenda Up Close

By JOHN VINSON

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) recalls an observation about the Holy Roman Empire, i.e., it was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire. Aside from its location in Alabama, the SPLC is about as southern as William Tecumseh Sherman. It has little to do with assisting poor people and much to do with enriching its already well-heeled directors. And as for law, its strident advocacy on behalf of illegal aliens suggests that the rule of law is not exactly one of its top priorities.

The SPLC’s founder is lawyer Morris Dees. When he began his career his business partner, Millard Fuller, remarked, “Morris and I ... shared the overriding purpose of making a lot of money. We were not particular about how we did it...”¹ In 1961 Morris earned cash by doing some legal work for the Ku Klux Klan.² Shortly thereafter, he claims, he had a conversion experience against racial prejudice. Even so, he did not start the SPLC until 1971, when, as many observers have noted, it was clear which side had won the civil rights struggle.

With Dees’ tireless self-promotion, the SPLC’s influence and fundraising capacities grew considerably. Its modus operandi was scaring little old liberals into thinking that Klansmen were lurking under every bed and bed sheet, and then pitching them for money. And the money kept on coming, even into the nineties, even when it became obvious to most folks that the Klan was a spent force of marginalized ne’er-do-wells often led by government informants.

After the SPLC set up operation in Montgomery, Alabama, it had a friendly relationship with the staff of the local newspaper *The Montgomery Advertiser*. “We parroted their press releases,” said Jim Tharp, the editor of the *Advertiser*. In time, however, Tharpe and others found that “things were amiss” at the SPLC, which led to an investigative series of articles.³ The *Advertiser*’s research found that the SPLC had amassed a huge

amount of money using, in some cases, what Tharpe described as “questionable fundraising tactics.”⁴

“There was another problem,” said Tharpe, “with black employees at what was the nation’s richest civil rights organization.... Twelve out of 13 black current and former employees we contacted cited racism at the center, which was a shocker to me.”⁵ Perhaps Dees’ conversion from Klan shystering to civil rights wasn’t as complete as he had led people to believe.

Despite the SPLC’s “questionable” activities, many news outlets report its press releases, particularly about the numbers of alleged “hate groups,” as if they were gospel. One who doesn’t share this faith is Laird Wilcox, a respected researcher of left and right extremist groups. As a veteran of the civil rights movement and a member of the ACLU, one can’t easily dismiss him as a right-wing apologist.

Commenting on an incident where the SPLC claimed that a town in Kansas harbored a “hate group” of Klansmen, because someone rented a post office box there for a bogus Klan group, Wilcox observed,

This was pure disinformation and an example of the terrible things the SPLC does in the campaign to keep the money rolling in from frightening liberals and blacks. Several years ago with minimal effort I went through a list of 800-plus “hate groups” published by the SPLC and determined that over half of them were either non-existent, existed in name only, or were inactive.⁶

Confirming Wilcox’s assessment are those fairly rare occasions when reporters, instead of taking SPLC claims at face value, actually research them. In 2002, the *Cleveland Scene* did an investigative report on the claim published by the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* that Ohio had become a “stomping ground” of hate groups. It cited an estimate of 73 groups by the Center for New Community and 40 groups by the SPLC.

The *Cleveland Scene* concluded that, “while a few groups on the monitors’ lists warrant attention, most have dissolved or amount to little more than a guy with a copy of *Mein Kampf* and a yahoo! account.” The report

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quoted Ted Almay, the superintendent of Ohio’s Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation, who said, “I don’t think there are 73 people in Ohio, let alone 73 groups.”⁷⁷

In 2007, the SPLC claimed that there was an active chapter of the Ku Klux Klan in Rutland, Vermont. But an investigative reporter for the *Rutland Herald* found no confirmation of this claim after checking with local law enforcement and civil rights groups. SPLC spokesman Mark Potok countered, in the *Herald*, “that just because the Klan, which refers to itself as the ‘invisible army,’ can’t be seen, that doesn’t mean it isn’t there.”⁷⁸ Potok did not explain how he and the SPLC acquired the clairvoyance to see the unseen.



Mark Potok, director of the SPLC’s “Intelligence Project,” said on CSPAN, April 6, 2010, that “there isn’t much of an extreme Left” in the U.S. In June 2006, he gave an interview to SocialistWorker.org. Presumably Potok considers avowed Trotskyite socialists as part of the political mainstream.
http://socialistworker.org/2006-2/593/593_07_MarkPotok.shtml

Just as problematic as the SPLC’s counting of hate groups is how it defines hate groups. To be sure, many of the organizations it so describes are malicious and disreputable. But since the mid-1990s or so, the SPLC has ventured beyond its obsession with dwindling bands of cross burners and nightriders. One reason, quite likely, was cash flow. It was just getting harder and harder to scare contributors with Klan tales and convince potential contributors that a tiny cluster of white-robed villains threatens America’s national security. A new “menace” had to be found.

It’s a mistake, however, to think that money is the only thing, or even the main thing, that motivates the SPLC. As revealed by its focus and rhetoric, that mutation of classical Marxism known as “political correctness” is a primary engine of the organization’s

zeal. Its bias is unmistakable; on the SPLC’s website is a section called “Hate Watch,” which carries the caption “Keeping an Eye on the Radical Right.” No mention there of the radical left.

And as far as the SPLC is concerned, it seems, just about any person or group to the right of the late Ted Kennedy is radical right. This is the new menace. Part of it, according to the SPLC, is the immigration control movement. The major groups in the movement, says SPLC, are either “hate groups” or groups compromised by their ties to “haters” and “racists.”

Interestingly, the hatred and racism charged to these groups seldom if ever involve anything they have said or done as official policy. All publicly deplore violence



against immigrants, legal and illegal. None use insulting racial language; they have multi-racial memberships, and they affirm commitment to racial harmony, by stating that the “diversity” brought about by excessive immigration increases division and misunderstanding.

All that means nothing to the SPLC. It concedes no gradations or subtleties in its accusations. An organization like the liberal and environmentalist Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) is just as much a “hate group” as any Death’s Head Aryan Militia in the backwoods of Idaho. To make its case against the immigration control movement, the SPLC cites alleged links and ties of restrictionists, a tangled web of conspiracy theories and ad hominem attacks.

Against immigration restriction “haters” the SPLC has declared total war. Mark Potok vowed “to destroy,

completely destroy them”—an odd goal indeed for an organization dedicated, in its own words, to “teaching tolerance.”⁹ This scorched earth rhetoric recalls the propaganda strategy of Soviet dictator I.V. Lenin: “We ...must write in a language which sows among the masses hate, revulsion [and] scorn ... toward those who disagree with us.” Perhaps Mr. Potok knows something of that Soviet leader. He once did a congenial interview with the Socialist Workers Party, which, on its website, endorses the goals of Marx and Lenin.¹⁰

While bashing restrictionists, the SPLC gives a free pass to pro-immigration groups, no matter how blatant their racial and hateful agendas may be. Take, for example, the National Council of La Raza (the Race), an alleged “civil rights” group, which the SPLC endorses.¹¹ La Raza labors endlessly to reward illegal immigrants with amnesty and other benefits while fighting any measure to enforce immigration law.

What this has to do with civil rights is anyone’s guess. The black civil rights movement, whose mantle La Raza wishes to claim, stressed the importance of citizenship and the rule of law. La Raza belittles both, in pursuit of its apparent goal of building numbers and racial clout for Hispanics at the expense of other Americans. The name of the organization says it all, despite its absurd claim that La Raza doesn’t really mean “The Race.” Any legitimate Spanish-English dictionary will lay that evasion to rest.

Despite its name, La Raza claims respectability, and the press generally takes that at face value. But if the media bothered to probe any further, they would find that La Raza funds Hispanic separatist charter schools, and on at least one occasion it funded a branch of MEChA, a Spanish acronym meaning the Chicano Students of Aztlan.¹² Aztlan is the territory, comprising our southwestern states, that Hispanic separatists want as a country of their own.

John Leo, a columnist for *U.S. News and World Report*, had this to say about MEChA:

A MEChA...slogan translates as “For the race everything. For those outside the race, nothing.” El Plan de Aztlan, a founding document carried now on many MEChA Internet websites, talks of the need to reclaim the Southwest (Aztlan) from “the occupying forces of the oppressor.” As if the Nazi-like call to the power of the blood is not scary enough, Miguel Perez Cal State MEChA raised the issue of ethnic cleansing. Once Aztlan has been taken over, he said, non-Chicanos “would have to be expelled” and opposition

groups quashed “because you have to keep the power.”¹³

To the question of why SPLC does not list MEChA as a hate group, Potok stated,

We have not listed MEChA [as a hate group] because, despite...characterization of it as “a hard-left Hispanic group,” we have found no evidence to support charges that the organization is racist or anti-Semitic.¹⁴

Though able to see the invisible, he seems to miss the obvious.

Supporting racialism (at least for one color) seems an odd thing for an organization that professes to oppose it. Strange too is an organization supporting mass immigration when its name suggests concern for poor people. If the SPLC truly cares about impoverished black and Hispanic citizens, as it claims to, why does it support a policy that drives down their wages and keeps them ghettoized? And the effect is the same on immigrants themselves if their numbers prevent assimilation and upward mobility.

Why would a supposed “civil rights” group pursue policies that undermine the law and promote creation of a growing and alienated underclass? Perhaps the answer is that this is no accident, but actually, despite its professions, the real intent of the SPLC. In his book, *Importing Revolution*, former congressional staffer William Hawkins solidly documents that the radical left in America has a passionate interest in immigration, but not for the sake of immigrants.

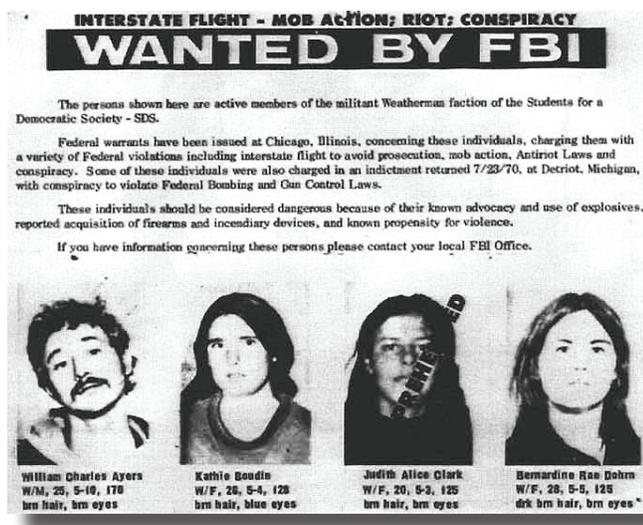
The goal is to import masses of immigrants and use them as a socio-political battering ram against existing society. The resulting upheaval and chaos, the radicals hope, will provide them with opportunities to seize power. Certainly a key to success is to demonize opponents so that the real aims remain hidden. In revolutionary Russia, Lenin and Stalin used words like “class enemy” and “kulak” to discredit their foes. Today the radicals employ words like “racist,” “hater,” and “xenophobe” for the same purpose.

In a free society, the SPLC and similar groups have the right to say what they want. But they don’t seem inclined to uphold that right for others. One of the SPLC’s most questionable activities is trying to incriminate groups it doesn’t like with law enforcement agencies, even when those groups are not breaking any laws. Each quarter it sends out its “Intelligence Report,” to local, state, and federal police with shrill and lurid commentary about “hate groups.”¹⁵ The SPLC tries to equate “hate” with hate crimes, and evidently hopes that police

will do the same.

Liberal activist Barbara Dority commented that the SPLC campaigns for laws that will effectively deny free speech and free association to certain groups of Americans on the basis of their beliefs.... [T]he Center reports its findings to over 6,000 law enforcement agencies; then with no discernible irony, it goes on to justify its Big Brother methods in the name of tolerance....¹⁶

Randall Williams, a former SPLC employee, described his experience with the organization, “We were sharing information with the FBI, the police, undercover agents. Instead of defending clients and victims, we were more of a super snoop organization, an arm of law enforcement.”¹⁷



The SPLC’s interest in law enforcement is most ironic, given its efforts to undercut the rule of law with respect to immigration. Ironic too, in this regard, is the endorsement of an unrepentant terrorist by SPLC’s spin-off group, tolerance.org. The person in question is Bill Ayers (yes, the same one who’s President Obama’s friend). According to tolerance.org, Ayers has “a rich vision of teaching that interweaves passion, responsibility and self-reflection.”¹⁸

This is the same man who admitted planting bombs to protest the Vietnam War. He avoided prosecution only because of legal technicalities. In an interview with *The New York Times* in 2001, he stated, “I don’t regret setting the bombs. I feel we didn’t do enough.”¹⁹ Ayers and his radical companions, according to FBI informant Larry Grathwohl, planned for a communist revolution which, in their estimate, required the extermination of 25 million Americans.²⁰ Tolerance indeed.

As the SPLC aims to work with police, one wonders for what ultimate purpose. Perhaps a police state? From psychology we learn of the tactic of “projection,” whereby one who obsessively accuses others of faults is often himself far more guilty of those vices. When an organization proclaims its mission to “destroy, completely destroy” opponents, men of goodwill should inquire into the character and depth of its own hatred. ■

Endnotes

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4. *Ibid.*
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7. *Cleveland Scene*, White Power Outage, March 3, 2002.
8. *Rutland Herald*, June 12, 2007, Gordon Dritschilo.
9. Mark Potok Speech One: Google: Mark Potok Speech One Completely Destroy Michigan youtube.
10. Socialistworker.org, June 16, 2006
11. SPLC Hate Watch, June 10, 2008.
12. Townhall, July, 12 2006, Michelle Malkin; National Council of La Raza 990 Form, 2002.
13. *U.S. News and World Report*, September, 15, 2003, John Leo.
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