



Faux Conservatism: Fox Gets It Wrong

On the November 14 segment of its five-part series, "The Right All Along: The Rise, Fall and Future of Conservatism," Fox News leveled a sustained blast at The John Birch Society, while bestowing accolades on the late William F. Buckley for "expelling" the Birchers from the conservative movement. Amidst old newsreel footage of the Cold War and interviews chronicling the rise of Richard Nixon, Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan, the Fox documentary resurrected hoary charges that seem to have obsessed Buckley for the better part of half a century.



Fox narrator Brit Hume informed viewers: "In the mid 1960s the loudest anti-communist voice in America belonged to Robert Welch, the candy mogul who invented the Sugar Daddy and who started the John Birch Society in 1958." However, averred Hume, "the organization soon became labeled as kooks when Welch claimed that the U.S. was dominated by a Communist conspiracy and that President Eisenhower was actually abetting it."

The program then featured a video clip of William F. Buckley stating: "The John Birch Society was only, quote, conservative, in the sense that it was anti-Communist, but it did the best that Mr. Welch could to discredit conservatism." Hume noted that in October of 1965, "Buckley dedicated an entire issue of his magazine [*National Review*] to savaging Welch and his followers." In quick succession, the program provided a series of bludgeons by Buckley's fellow attack dogs.

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Rich Lowry, current editor of *National Review* and frequent commentator on Fox, stated: "Looking back it seems like a very easy call, but there was a huge reaction among *National Review's* readers because there was an overlap with that element, and I think we lost ten percent of our readers or so. So this is something that took a lot of intellectual bravery to do."

An aged, raspy-voiced William Rusher, former publisher of *National Review* and sidekick of Buckley, declared: "I think that Bill was right, that in the long run The John Birch Society was a foreign substance that simply had to be extruded from healthy conservatism." ("Extruded" is an odd word choice, but perhaps he meant to say "excluded.")

Norman Pohoretz, editor-in-chief of *Commentary* magazine for three-and-a-half decades and one of the godfathers of neoconservatism, added: "Buckley actually had a huge hand in expelling unsavory elements from the conservative movement and this is one of his great contributions."

After more of the same from Lowry, Podhoretz, Fred Barnes, and others, narrator Hume opined: "By pruning the branches of conservatism, Buckley eventually helped the tree grow fuller."

"Pruning" or Ruining the Tree?

It may behoove folks who tend to identify as political conservatives to ask themselves, at this crucial juncture in our nation's history, what it is, precisely, that they hope to conserve. And the corollary to



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on November 21, 2010

this question is: Do William F. Buckley and his successors at *National Review* and the Buckleyite cheerleaders at Fox represent a reliable cadre of leaders for an authentic conservatism?

While Lowry, Rusher, Pohoretz, Hume, and company are positioning themselves as the new commanders of a seemingly ascendant conservative wave, the recent Republican landslide is anything but an affirmation of the philosophy and policies they have championed. In fact, the historic partisan sea-change effected by this November's congressional elections was a signal of clear rejection not only of the Big Government policies of Obama and the Democrats, but also, in large measure, a continuing repudiation of the Big Government policies of George W. Bush and the Republicans that was dished out by many of the same voters in the 2008 elections.

It goes beyond that. Not only conservative Republicans, but also Ron Paul supporters, Tea Partyers, Libertarians, and Independents of varied hues have come to realize that George W. and his GOP enablers in Congress are but the latest in a long line of Republicans stretching back to Eisenhower and Nixon who talked the talk but never walked the walk. That is, they never fulfilled GOP campaign pledges and party platforms concerning rolling back the statist accretions that have been plaguing our Republic, eroding our freedoms, and destroying our prosperity since (at least) FDR's New Deal.

Through the past six decades, Buckley and *National Review* have been the chief enablers of this ["revolution within the form"](#) inside the Republican Party and the Establishment-approved "conservative movement." This may be difficult to believe for those who are still unduly captivated by Buckley's repertoire of sesquipedalian expressions, his quirky, affected style, and his celebrity status. But it is an easy call for genuine conservatives who have paid attention to the ideas, candidates, policies, philosophies, causes, and personalities promoted by Buckley and his comrades over the decades at *National Review*, and now at Fox.

In one of his earliest public essays, "A Young Republican's View," Buckley proffered a very unconservative (even anti-conservative) overarching argument. Since America and the West were faced with a dire existential threat from the Soviet Union and Communism, said Buckley, "we have to accept Big Government for the duration — for neither an offensive nor a defensive war can be waged ... except through the instrument of a totalitarian bureaucracy within our shores."

Unfortunately, this deranged view was not simply a passing theoretical hiccup from a recently minted and still callow Yale graduate; as we shall see, Buckley continued to hew to this line over the decades, though he learned to camouflage it in acceptable conservative-sounding rhetoric most of the time.

In order to fight communist totalitarianism, according to Buckley, one must accept Big Government and adopt totalitarian ways. Which is precisely what Arthur Schlesinger and other members of FDR's brain trust and the enlightened dons of Harvard and the *New York Times* had been arguing, albeit in a "liberal" idiom, to liberal-left audiences. This, of course, was anathema to the "Old Right" conservatives as represented, for instance, by Senators Robert Taft, Pat McCarran, and Joseph McCarthy, as well as intellectual pillars such as John T. Flynn, Garet Garret, Frank Chodorov, and Robert Welch. To them, Buckley's nutty political vaccine theory was a sure prescription for national suicide by iatrogenesis. Would not embracing Big Government totalitarianism necessarily amount to adopting Communism ostensibly to fight it? To (badly) paraphrase Shakespeare: "What's in a name? That which we call totalitarianism by any other name would kill as complete."

Robert Welch was indeed a bonafide and well-informed anti-Communist, but contrary to the Buckley interview quoted above in the Fox program, that wasn't the only attribute that qualified him as a



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conservative. Nor did he "discredit" conservatism, as Buckley charges, though Buckley himself did much in word and deed to discredit the conservative movement he so successfully co-opted. (More on that score follows below.)

Mr. Welch was more comfortable with the labels "Americanist" or "constitutionalist" than with "conservative," since the conservative-liberal dichotomy was, and is, a nebulous and relative one that is constantly changing and has been emptied of most of its meaning. Welch was passionately interested in conserving the U.S. Constitution and its checks on the expansion of governmental power, as well as conserving our national sovereignty, the American free enterprise system, morality, and, as he put it, "Christian-style civilization." He recognized that the external Soviet menace was not the only — or even the chief — existential threat to America; immorality, irresponsibility, and the steady promotion of Big Government — whether under the label of communism, socialism, fascism, New Dealism, etc. — presented perils as great as the Red Army or Soviet missiles.

Kooks and Spooks

But what about Welch's "kooky" charges about Eisenhower abetting Communism? Ah, yes, this is one Buckley and the rest of the faux conservatives (along with the liberals, leftists, and Communists) always throw up as if it is the dispositive evidence that proves the "conspiracy whacko" charge against Welch and the Birchers. After all, Eisenhower was a conservative Republican and the "great general" of World War II, right?

At least that is the popular cover story created for him by the political fixers inside Franklin Roosevelt's administration, who catapulted Ike from a lowly lieutenant colonel with no battlefield experience, to three-star general, in a span of less than two years. And then, in less than 10 months after that, he was leap-frogged over hundreds of experienced and better-qualified officers to be made Commander in Chief of the Allied Forces in Western Europe. He was a political general and his meteoric military rise (and subsequent political ascent) had been orchestrated by many of the same individuals at the top levels of the Roosevelt administration who were so enthralled by our wartime "ally" Joe Stalin, and who were busy giving "Uncle Joe" everything he wished for, including placing his agents in top positions of the federal government. Tragically, despite the occasional high-profile scandals and exposures of these Communist moles, extensive Soviet KGB and GRU networks of cells, as well as their auxiliary networks of fellow travelers, continued into the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, with catastrophic results to our national security and to the millions of people throughout the world who perished under the iron-heeled jackboots of Communist tyranny.

Apropos to this issue, a recent news story notes that a top Eisenhower cabinet officer shared Robert Welch's "kooky" concerns about Red influence inside the administration. The *Salt Lake Tribune* reported on November 16, 2010 (see [here](#) and [here](#)) that documents just released through a Freedom of Information Act request show that Ezra Taft Benson, who was Eisenhower's Secretary of Agriculture throughout the full eight years of his administration, repeatedly warned FBI director J. Edgar Hoover of Soviet infiltration of the federal government and in one letter said Eisenhower was being "effectively used as a tool to serve the communist conspiracy."

Although Eisenhower was his boss and his friend, Benson told Hoover: "This story must be told.... The stakes are high. Freedom and survival are the issues." Benson said of Eisenhower:

I presume I will never know in this life why he did some of the things he did which gave help to the [communist] conspiracy. It is not my divine prerogative to know the motives of men. It is



easier, however, to judge the consequences of man's actions.

One of the dire consequences that so agitated Benson was the administration's crucial support for Fidel Castro, which Benson had futilely tried to get the State Department to withdraw after Agriculture Department attachés in Cuba alerted him to Castro's Red pedigree and warned that Castro would drive Cuba into communism. Which, of course, is precisely what happened. Benson also knew that his own Agriculture Department had been a hotbed of Communist activity, as the Agriculture Adjustment Administration had provided the original spawning ground for the notorious "Ware Cell," the large Soviet apparatus of which [Alger Hiss and Whitaker Chambers](#) were the two most well known agents.

Alger Hiss had been repeatedly protected by higher-ups in the Roosevelt administration and instead of being fired and prosecuted was repeatedly advanced through the ranks until he was FDR's top State Department advisor, accompanying him to the infamous Yalta Conference with Stalin. Hiss later was placed in charge of the founding conference of the United Nations. He was finally prosecuted a decade after his Soviet ties were first exposed and eventually convicted (of perjury) and sent to prison, where he served 44 months, small retribution for the treason he had committed and the enormous harm he had done.

Among the other important Soviet agents inside the U.S. government were: [Harry Dexter White](#), who became a top Treasury Department official and head of the Bretton Woods Conference that created the International Monetary Fund and World Bank; [Virginius Frank Coe](#), the Treasury official who became first Secretary of the IMF; Harry Hopkins and Lauchlin Curry, confidential White House assistants; Lawrence Duggan, Noel Field, Victor Perlo, John Carter Vincent, Judith Coplon, William Ullman, Nathan Silvermaster — and many others.

In addition to the alarm caused by his own extensive experience with subversion inside the Washington Leviathan (where he served longer than any other Eisenhower cabinet official), Ezra Taft Benson was extremely impressed by the case against the Eisenhower administration presented in Robert Welch's detailed and extensively documented study, [The Politician](#).

This important 500-page book had begun in 1954 as a private manuscript that Welch had circulated to a few close friends who were also knowledgeable and well-read anti-communists. Benson called it a "shocking volume." He told Hoover: "While I do not agree with all or the extent of some of the author's conclusions, one must agree that the documented record makes the thesis of the book most convincing." And it was vital information, he said, of which "our people need to be alerted and informed."

Buckley violently disagreed and did his best to help the Eisenhower administration and its friends in the Establishment media smother the book and smear the author. Although Robert Welch has been the recipient of the most vicious and sustained attack from Buckley's Politburo at *National Review* (and the echo chambers it feeds), other conservatives, including many of that magazine's former top-drawer writers and editors — L. Brent Bozell, Ayn Rand, Medford Evans, M.E. Bradford, [Sam Francis](#), [Joseph Sobran](#), John O'Sullivan, Pat Buchanan, [Paul Gottfried](#), Murray Rothbard, and [Peter Brimelow](#) — were similarly purged. They were replaced by neocoservatives such as Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, Midge Decter, Peter Rodman, Garry Wills, Michael Lind, Joan Didion, William Bennett, Karl Rove, Paul Gigot, Richard Lowry, Kate O'Beirne, Jonah Goldberg, and Ramesh Ponnuru (Wills, Lind, and a few others have since migrated to the far liberal-left).

For this service, as well as his support for key liberal positions and institutions (gay rights, "pro-choice"



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on abortion, gun control, the United Nations, the Federal Reserve, NAFTA, WTO, UN treaties, etc.), Buckley became the favorite "conservative" of the liberal-left Establishment in America, and his *National Review* was anointed as the acceptable mouthpiece of "respectable" conservatism. The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), which has never been friendly toward any real conservative, provided him with the ability to beam his *Firing Line* television interview program into millions of homes. For more than three decades he used that venue, as often as not, to promote the likes of Norman Mailer, Gore Vidal, Henry Kissinger, Allen Ginsberg, Jesse Jackson, Jimmy Carter, and Jack Kerouac. Marxist Noam Chomsky, Black Panther revolutionary Huey Newton, LSD promoter Timothy Lear, and Playboy porn peddler Hugh Hefner were all welcome guests (and were genially treated by Buckley) on *Firing Line*, but not Robert Welch and other conservatives whom Buckley deemed beyond the pale.

The liberal *New York Times* was an influential Buckley promoter. He became chummy with many of the *Timesmen* and a regular lunch pal of *Times* executive editor Abe Rosenthal (Buckley served as pallbearer at Abe's funeral). He was a longtime friend and skiing buddy of socialist economist John Kenneth Galbraith. He was the "house conservative" at the [Council on Foreign Relations](#). He was a decades-long friend of Henry Kissinger and is credited with helping get Nixon to appoint Kissinger as his national security advisor, surely [one of the most baleful appointments in our nation's history](#).

Big Government Neocons

In an August 15, 2003 op-ed defending George W. Bush, entitled, "[Big-Government Conservatism](#)," Buckley disciple and *National Review* contributor Fred Barnes made the amusing claim that "the case for Bush's conservatism is strong." Barnes, who edits Rupert Murdoch's neoconservative journal *The Weekly Standard* and regularly appears in the pages of Murdoch's *Wall Street Journal* and on the programs of Murdoch's Fox News network, wrote: "Sure, some conservatives are upset because he has tolerated a surge in federal spending," etc., etc., and "fashioned an alliance of sorts with Teddy Kennedy on education and Medicare." Barnes continued:

But the real gripe is that Bush isn't their kind of conventional conservative. Rather, he's a big government conservative. This isn't a description he or other prominent conservatives willingly embrace. It makes them sound as if they aren't conservatives at all. But they are. They simply believe in using what would normally be seen as liberal means — activist government — for conservative ends. And they're willing to spend more and increase the size of government in the process.

It should not need saying (but unfortunately it does) that "Big-Government Conservatism," hymned, practiced, and defended as it is by the Barnes/Buckley/Bush choir, is beyond oxymoronic; it's simply moronic. As well as being immoral, since it baldly states that the ends justify the means. But what kind of "conservative" would subscribe to either the ends or the means proposed by Barnes? Answer: a neoconservative, such as Barnes, who provided one of the derogatory remarks about Robert Welch — a true, constitutionalist conservative — for Brit Hume's "The Right All Along" program on Fox.

The Big-Government Conservatism of Barnes/Buckley merely recapitulates the neocon canon, as explained by Irving Kristol in his 1995 book, [Neo-conservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea](#). In it Kristol said of himself and his fellow neoconservatives (many of whom, like him, are former socialists and Trotskyite communists who have retained much of their collectivist impulses):

We accepted the New Deal in principle, and had little affection for the kind of isolationism that then permeated American conservatism.



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In an earlier essay Kristol defended the idea of "a conservative welfare state," which, he said, "is perfectly consistent with neoconservative perspective."

Perfectly consistent, yes, with a deceptive, oxymoronic "neoconservative perspective" — but certainly not consistent with any reasonable, coherent, traditional meaning of conservatism. Neocon defector Michael Lind notes that "in its origins neoconservatism was a movement of the center-left, not of the right." It is, said Lind, "a defense of New Deal/Great Society liberalism at home and abroad."

Nathan Glazer, co-editor with Irving Kristol of *The Public Interest*, wrote of himself and fellow neocons in 2005: "All of us had voted for Lyndon Johnson in 1964, for Hubert Humphrey in 1968, and I would wager ... continued to vote for Democratic presidential candidates all the way to the present. Recall that the original definition of the neoconservatives was that they fully embraced the reforms of the New Deal and indeed the major programs of Johnson's Great Society."

In an adulatory tribute to Buckley published in 2008 in *National Review* ("[Man of Manifold Marvels: WFB and his mighty pen](#)"), Norman Podhoretz wrote: "Bill's youthful version of conservatism had almost imperceptibly mutated into a perspective not all that distant from the neoconservative position to which I had at my own pace been gravitating since the late 60's."

And, that's the point that self-identifying "conservatives" have got to come to grips with. The Buckley/*National Review*/Fox neoconservatism is a steadily mutating creature that is the very antithesis of authentic conservatism. It is whatever Buckley (and now his colleagues/heirs — Irving Kristol, Bill Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, John Podhoretz, Fred Barnes, Rich Lowry, Jonah Goldberg, et al) says it is. There is no solidity, no permanence, no adamant adherence to eternal verities and moral absolutes, no steadfast loyalties to God, family, country, tradition, creeds, canons, or the Constitution — except insofar as it is useful for promoting, in Fred Barnes' words, "activist government — for conservative ends."

Like President Obama, Nancy Pelosi, and the liberal Democrats they deride, the neocons readily invoke the Constitution, the Founding Fathers, and the "rule of law." But, as with Team Obama/Pelosi, it is all rhetorical window dressing. As with Team Obama/Pelosi, the neocons have no intention of being bound to the "few and defined" powers delegated to the federal government by the Constitution — no matter that they may have taken an oath to uphold and defend it. The Constitution, to them is a totem to be summoned for ceremonial and propaganda purposes, but a "***damned" nuisance when it gets in the way of their activist "governing." Along with their hero, George W. Bush, they yell, "[Stop throwing the Constitution in my face. It's just a ***damned piece of paper!](#)"

Which helps explain why the Buckleyite neocons at *National Review* and Rupert Murdoch's tabloid empire can tolerate Marxists, socialists, Maoists, militant atheists, Trotskyites, Castroites, perverts, pornographers, prostitute sex columnists, and pro-abortionists — but not, not, *not* Rep. Ron Paul, constitutionalists, authentic Tea Party patriots, or (Heaven forbid!) Robert Welch and those "discredited" Birchers.

So, if one wishes to celebrate William Buckley's fabled intelligence, his polysyllabic lexicon, his salacious novels, or his "wicked humor and sly wit," his "panache," his "brio," his "charm," his "inimitable style," his "elegantly insouciant manner"... or simply to celebrate his celebrity, one can join the ranks of those who regularly do so at the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Foreign Affairs*, PBS, *National Review*, the *Weekly Standard*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and Fox News. But if one is a conservative in a meaningful political, social, and moral sense — i.e., one who is working, fighting,



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hoping, and praying for, the recovery, restoration, and conservation of limited constitutional government, sound money, and a Christian ethos that permeates our society and culture, — one would be wise to seek guidance from someone outside the neocon corral tended by Buckley's acolytes and Murdoch's minions.

Those who are interested in a more complete examination of Buckley and the tremendous influence that Trotskyism and collectivism (not to mention crass opportunism) have exerted on the neoconservative "Right" are encouraged to read [William F. Buckley, Jr., Pied Piper for the Establishment](#), by John F. McManus.



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