



Tea Party Poopers; Weakened Convention Set to Start Thursday

Three years after passage of the Tea Act by the British Parliament, colonists were fed up to the point of dumping 342 chests of the iconic British beverage into Boston Harbor and becoming thereby icons themselves. The men (estimates range from as few as 30 to as many as 130) refused finally to be placated by repeated promises of change and reform and, rather than wait for legislative response, they exercised the Lockean right of “self-defense” and defended their God-given right and constitutional rights.



It’s been a year since Barack Obama was elected president of the United States and the Democratic Party assumed majority control of both houses of Congress and there are those in the electorate who feel they have been precluded from participating in the direction the ship of state will sail and they have decided to protest this perceived exclusion.

The disparate coterie of groups confederated, loosely, under a giant “Tea Party” umbrella and they attracted devotees by the thousands. Scores of frustrated conservatives were drawn to the movement’s assimilation of the patois of 18th Century patriotism and they braved rain and rebuke and gathered in parking lots and municipal auditoriums to listen to speakers selected from the deepening pool of Tea Party celebrities zealously frothing the tea-tainted waters of dissent.

There’s more than animating speeches and busloads of steadfast supporters agitating the waters of Tea Party rebellion these days. Reports are coming in from all corners of the conservative landscape of disillusion and dissension in the rank and file of grassroots activists that are the heart and hands of the greater nationwide network of likeminded conservatives who felt abandoned by both major parties.

Despite the swelling cache of evidence pointing to the imminent implosion of the Tea Party and the consequent fraying of all the ties binding the far-flung pods of rebels together, the cadre of organizers (the identity of which is as fluid and ill-defined as the greater membership) united long enough to schedule a national convention to take place this week in Nashville, Tennessee. The mere fact that such a show is scheduled would indicate that the reports of the yet nascent movement’s impending self-destruction are predictable examples of the left-leaning media’s skill at turning molehills into mountains.

As much as conservatives would like to imagine that the rifts in the Tea Party banner are creations borne of media bias, there is quite a bit of fire supplying all the smoke. Unsurprisingly, the *New York Times* has chronicled the upheavals and defections within the Tea Party and the recent loss of key sponsors and speakers, participants whose loss will leave noticeable breaches in the wall of resistance.

The first prominent point of disagreement between the leadership and the ranks is the cost of attending the convention. An all-access ticket to the convention is priced at \$549, while a pass to attend the



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keynote address to be delivered by Sarah Palin is set at \$349. “It’s become clear to me that Judson [Phillips, one of the event’s principal organizers] and his for-profit Tea Party Nation Corporation are at the forefront of the GOP’s process of hijacking the tea party movement,” said Kevin Smith, a Tea Party activist from Nashville. “How can I honestly object to this same behavior in my government and demand they clean up Washington when I am unwilling to risk the personal and political injury it takes to expose the fraud, corruption, and deceit to which I am privy?” he asked.

There are bastions of like-minded grassroots members of the Tea Party, many of whom are suffering financially at the hands of conspiring elements of the Establishment bent on obliterating the middle class. The thought that such people, so critical to the potency and perpetuation of the Tea Party, would be asked to pay such an entrance fee is justifiably infuriating. Marry this insult to the injury of the reported \$100,000 speaking fee being paid by organizers to Sarah Palin and you have the makings of a rebellion inside a rebellion.

A second exhibition of the unraveling of the Tea Party’s cloth is the decision of several key sponsors and speakers to not attend the event in Nashville. Perhaps the most prominent of these erstwhile supporters is the American Liberty Alliance (ALA) — a free market, anti-tax group launched in March 2009. The leaders of this organization helped coordinate the original nationwide Tea Party protests. Mr. Judson Phillips was pleased to have the ALA’s good name attached to the National Tea Party Convention, so pleased in fact that he generously informed the ALA that it could promote the convention on its website and to its members. In return, it would become a “gold co-sponsor” of the convention, which would cost any other sponsor \$5,000.

When word of the exorbitant fee being paid to Sarah Palin and the outrageous cost of attending the event began their circuit from email inbox to email inbox, the head of the ALA, Eric Odom, couldn’t jump ship fast enough and by midnight of that same day, he informed Phillips that the convention could not count on ALA’s support. “When we look at the \$500 price tag for the event and the fact that many of the original leaders in the group left over similar issues, it’s hard for us not to assume the worst,” explained Phillips.

The ALA’s yanking of their sponsorship was a blow to the Tea Party Convention and it was only the first of many such shots. Soon after the departure of ALA, Philip Glass, the national director of the National Precinct Alliance (NPA), announced that the Tea Party Convention could no longer count on their participation. The NPA’s open aim is to fill the ranks of local and state Republican parties with its members and thus wrest control of the national party from the neo-cons and the “country club Republicans” they see as complicit and equally culpable as the Democrats in the nation’s decline. Mr. Glass complained that the fees and the atmosphere created by the convention’s organizers was one of profiteering and incompatible with the goals and attitude of the NPA.

“We were under the impression that TPN was a non-profit organization like NPA, interested only in uniting and educating tea party activists on how to make a real difference in the political arena. The entire NPA objective is to put the power of the precinct back in the hands of the people. Our organized effort to accomplish that goal is growing faster than we can keep up. So there is no benefit to wasting time and resources on meetings and conventions still hung up on defining the problem. It’s time for real action and real solutions. We are totally focused on the solutions. The people will figure all of this stuff out on their own. National Precinct Alliance will continue to focus on putting the people in control of their own destiny. The people can take it from there,” said Glass in the press release announcing his group’s departure from the roster of convention backers and presenters.



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As if the Convention was hemorrhaging enough, two prominent lawmakers who have identified with the Tea Party movement and its purposes have demurred and will now not be speaking at the event. Representatives Michelle Bachman (R-Minn.) and Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn) will not be speaking at the Tea Party Convention. The offices of the two legislators released separate statements with similar tone. Each statement included language suggesting that appearing at the convention might conflict with House ethics rules. Furthermore, both statements explicitly expressed concerns about the dubious financing and spending associated with the event and its organizers.

Representative Blackburn told Judson Phillips that the convention's questionable "for-profit status has put many of his speakers in an awkward position."

As for Representative Bachmann, her office adamantly insisted that her decision to not participate in the Tea Party National Convention should not be extrapolated as a wider comment on the goals of the grassroots movement itself, saying "Nothing could be further from the truth."

While the loss of speakers, supporters, and sponsors knocks an undeniable dent in the armor of the Tea Party Convention, there is the distinct possibility that the slate of speakers that has stuck with Glass and company is impressive and inspiring enough to offset the negative attention the event has attracted in advance of Thursday's "kick off" featuring former Colorado Congressman Tom Tancredo, a stalwart of the conservative wing of the Republican Party. Glass believes that the width of the fissures are exaggerated and the obituaries published in many of the nation's newspapers and on television are but an example of the media putting its heavy left thumb on the scales, hoping to prevent the balance of power from being shifted away from the Establishment of which it has always been such a reliable patron.

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