

*After being targeted by the Southern Poverty Law Center as the “puppeteer” behind what they characterize as a malicious immigration reform movement, John Tanton placed a well-reasoned response on the website of The Social Contract Press. This is the first time it has appeared in this journal. We feel the essay is a fitting explanation of Tanton’s purposes in launching The Social Contract, now concluding its fifteenth year.*

# Puppeteer Responds

## *Publisher answers his critics at the Southern Poverty Law Center*

by John H. Tanton

*Audacter calumnaire semper aliquid haeret*  
(slander boldly, something always sticks)

I only wish that all the nice things were true that the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) wrote about me in their Summer 2002 *The Intelligence Report* profile, “The Puppeteer.” Having suffered the slings, arrows, barbs, insults, cheap shots and body blows that have come as a result of taking a position in opposition to mass immigration, I would certainly have no reservations about claiming credit for being the guy secretly manipulating U.S. immigration policy.

For the record, when I first became concerned in the 1960s about the impact of a new wave of immigration to the United States, we were admitting in the neighborhood of 300,000 people annually. After nearly three decades of supposedly pulling strings, creating organizations and participating in countless conspiracies to bring down the levels of immigration to the U.S., legal immigration now exceeds 1 million per year and net illegal immigration is at least 500,000 annually.

I guess it’s lucky I didn’t spend the last 30 years trying to reduce the size of the hole in the ozone layer, or we’d all have been fried to a crisp by now.

### **Strange Bedfellows?**

As long as I’m in a confessional mood, let me cop

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to a few other charges. There are doubtless some misguided people who also want to see immigration to the United States restricted. One of the hazards of holding opinions is that there are always going to be some confused folks who share those views. It doesn’t matter what the belief or opinion is, I guarantee somebody will appear who you will wish didn’t agree with you. The only fail-safe remedy for this type of unfortunate occurrence is to forswear all opinions.

The fact that there may be some misguided people who want to cut immigration, however, does not mean it is an inherently bad idea, any more than Mussolini’s getting Italian trains to run on schedule serves as an argument against well-run railroads. The overwhelming majority of Americans, according to virtually every reputable poll conducted over the past 30 years, want to see immigration levels reduced. Surely, even the most ardent supporters of open immigration could not argue that so many millions of people could be motivated by irrational views of the world.

What the vast majority of us who want to limit mass immigration are guilty of is expressing self-interest. In that respect we are no different from the immigrants themselves and those interests in this country that support high levels of immigration.

Immigration, it is worth noting, is always in the self-interest of the immigrant. To my knowledge, no one has ever left his or her homeland to settle in a foreign country in order to be worse off! People immigrate to the United States (or anywhere else) because they believe it serves their economic, political, religious, social, or other interests.

Likewise, many business interests in the United

States have supported high levels of immigration for reasons of pure self-interest. I have yet to hear an employer lament that there are too many prospective employees in the labor pool, forcing him to pay lower wages than he would really like. Nor does one often hear ethnic interest organizations complain about an overabundance of people they view as their constituency, or members of the immigration bar complain there are too many immigrant clients.

Nobody ever questions the integrity of immigrants and the domestic supporters of open immigration when they speak and act out of self-interest. The same cannot be said for the established population of the United States when, for reasons of self-interest, they call for reductions in *mass* immigration.

Most Americans oppose *mass* immigration not because of any animosity toward immigrants, or because immigrants look different, speak different languages, or practice different religions. They oppose *mass* immigration because *mass* immigration is not in their interests. They are guilty of looking out for themselves and their own perceived interests – exactly as the immigrants and their supporters do.

Americans oppose *mass* immigration because they do not see *massive* population growth to be in their interests. They do not see the loss of their jobs or wages to immigrants to be in their interests. They do not see the crowding of their children's schools with large numbers of kids who have language and other difficulties to be in their interests. They do not see rapid cultural and linguistic transformations of their neighborhoods to be in their interests.

If it is noble and laudable for immigrants to come to American to “make a better life” for themselves and their families, then it must be equally noble and laudable for ordinary Americans to oppose *mass* immigration that erodes the prospects for a better life for themselves and their families. If it is ignoble of ordinary Americans to deny some prospective immigrants the opportunity to come here in pursuit of something better, then it must be equally ignoble of immigrants to harm the interests of any American by coming here (and even the most fervid advocates of open borders concede that some people are hurt as a result of immigration).

I happen to be one of those Americans who believes that my interests and the interests of my family

are ill-served by policies of *mass* immigration. As noted in “The Puppeteer,” my initial interest in curtailing immigration was motivated by a longstanding concern for the environment – a motivation that even the article concedes is sincere and “passionate.” Over the years, as I have explored the issue, I have come to question the wisdom of *mass* immigration for many additional reasons.

Having observed what I believe to be a problem, I acted. Having failed to convince some of the people in the environmental movement that immigration was an issue that ought to feature prominently on their agendas, I did exactly what everyone else who is involved in issue advocacy has done: I formed an organization of like-minded people. Throw a dart at the Washington, D.C. phone book, and you will likely hit some group that has been formed to advocate a particular self-interested policy position.

If immigrants can have advocacy groups to lobby and disseminate information on behalf of their interests, and the businesses that profit by hiring low-wage immigrants can have armies of high-priced lobbyists doing their bidding on Capitol Hill, and the immigration bar can argue for more immigrant clients, why is it illegitimate for there to be organizations that advocate the interests of ordinary Americans with regard to immigration policy?

Over the years I helped found numerous groups, often for the purpose of narrowly focusing on one aspect of the immigration issue, one geographic area, or to appeal to a specific segment of the population. Some succeeded, others did less well. I remain involved with a few of the organizations I helped start, but have passed most of them off for others to run as we built the immigration reform movement.

It would be gratuitous of me to point out that among the array of individuals and organizations promoting open borders and *mass* immigration, there are some unsavory characters whose views can easily be characterized as anti-American, anti-Western, anti-Semitic and outright racist. There have been times when such folks have found their way into meetings, forums and other assemblies of people who advocate increased levels of immigration.

While I am clearly not above a little gratuitousness, I like to think of myself as a fair person. The fact that there may be some truly despicable

people pushing for open immigration policies, does not mean that I question the integrity of the vast majority of people and organizations that advocate higher levels of immigration.

I strongly disagree with the objectives of groups like the National Immigration Forum, The National Lawyers Guild, The National Council of La Raza, The Cato Institute, The Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), and individuals like Rick Swartz, Frank Sharry, Raul Yzaguerre, Stephen Moore, but I do not doubt their positions are based on a sincere belief that *mass* immigration is beneficial to their personal interests. They represent one pole of immigration-policy debate, albeit one with which I strongly disagree.

Moreover, the fact that all these individuals or groups may have at one time or another, found themselves making common cause with people and groups whose motives I do question, or that they have sought and received money from sources that have funded groups and causes that are beyond the pale, does not automatically delegitimize them or their positions on immigration, though it certainly calls them into question.

Political advocacy is a rough business. It is impossible to engage the political system in any effective way and remain completely unsullied or avoid all personal attacks. There is no such thing as a disinterested dollar in Washington, and there is no one who hasn't had a brush with some of the peripheral characters that inhabit the fringes of American political discourse.

### **So what?**

The way to judge individuals or organizations is based on what they themselves have said, written and done over time. The organizations with which I have been involved have established credible records and have earned the respect of key government policy makers and the media. Organizations like the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) and Pro English, on whose boards I continue to serve, are regularly called upon to testify before Congress and/or to appear in the media. Several of our court cases have been accepted by the U.S. Supreme Court for review, and several of these have been decided in our favor. (You never win them all!!) Other organizations, such as the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS)

and NumbersUSA, both of which I helped to start, but on whose boards I do not serve, have also made stellar contributions to the immigration reform debate.

Surely if the groups that I helped found and with which I remain associated were really nothing more than respectable facades for a right-wing fringe, Congress and the mainstream media would have figured it out by now. It should also be abundantly clear that immigration policy is a potent political issue that is not going to just disappear. If groups like FAIR, CIS, NumbersUSA, and ProEnglish were in fact a secret cabal being manipulated by a nefarious backwoods doctor from northern Michigan, as the SPLC implies, surely other groups would have come along to supplant them. Trust me, I'm not that smart or clever.

### **The Pioneer Fund**

Since the single biggest rap against me is that FAIR accepted money from the Pioneer Fund, I'll tackle that one head on. Understanding this charge requires a brief detour into the age-old debate over the relative roles of Nature (Heredity) and Nurture (Environment) in human outcomes. With the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, the pendulum swung strongly toward the "nature" side of the equation. By the early 1900s, it had swung equally strongly in the opposite direction. The Pioneer Fund was started in 1937 by individuals who still believed that "nature" (genetics) played a major – perhaps even a dominant role. To the displeasure of their opponents, they pursued this proposition by funding university-based studies of identical twins reared apart, now a standard genetic research technique. These showed that nature and nurture each played about a fifty-percent role. The debate continues beyond the publication of *The Bell Curve*, with the federally funded Human Genome Project. It would take a bold person indeed to predict exactly where the question of the relative roles of Nature vs. Nurture will eventually settle out. Some of my opponents object to these studies, and have transferred their objections to me and immigration policy questions.

In the meantime, I'm comfortable being in the company of other Pioneer Fund grantees such as Johns Hopkins University, Cornell Medical School, Brandeis University, University of California-Berkeley, the University of London and the University of Tel Aviv, among others.

What is good for the goose is good for the gander: if the character of a donor is to become a criterion for accepting grants, we are entitled to ask after the chief source of funds for the open borders crowd, namely the Ford Foundation. Henry Ford is well-remembered for his anti-Jewish attitudes and actions. It took a court order to stop him from publishing *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, which some claim is one of the most anti-Jewish books of all time (and which has been revived and circulated among some radical Hispanic groups that advocate open immigration).

Mr. Ford was also no friend of the union movement – recall the Battle of the Overpass with the United Auto Workers (UAW) at one of his factories. One would think such a history might poison the Ford Foundation as a source of grants for the open borders lobby. (See the chart at the end of this article.) Not so: the five main open-borders groups accepted \$57 million in grants from the Ford Foundation between 1968-1999. This compares with \$1.5 million that FAIR received from Pioneer, between 1982-1993, all of it unrestricted as to use.

The most important thing that needs to be said about FAIR's association with the Pioneer Fund – and this is true for every funding source that has financed the organization since its inception in 1979 – is that the money was used for purposes and projects that were determined solely by FAIR's board of directors, not by the donor. The money that FAIR received from Pioneer and from literally dozens of other charitable foundations has been used to promote the organization's goals of ending *mass* immigration and controlling *massive* illegal immigration to the U.S.

### The Camp of the Saints

Another accusation against me and The Social Contract Press, of which I am the publisher, is that we reprinted Jean Raspail's novel, *The Camp of the Saints*. For this, the SPLC designated The Social Contract Press a "hate group." But we simply brought the novel back into print. Our reprint appeared at the same time *The Atlantic Monthly* ran its December 1994 cover story on *The Camp* entitled "Must It Be the Rest Against the West?" by Matthew Connelly and Paul Kennedy. The latter is a professor of history at Yale University. We felt this controversial novel should be available for interested parties to read.

If the Social Contract Press as reprinter of the

book is racist and a hate group, then certainly the original publisher, Editions Robert Laffont in Paris merits the same appellation. And so does the American publisher, who arranged for the translation into English: Charles Scribner & Sons. The SPLC has not mustered the courage to characterize either of these publishers as "racist" or "hate groups." Don't hold your breath until they do.

There is a final point in "The 'Puppeteer'" article I wish to answer. The anonymous author of the SPLC story states on page 47 that "Tanton declined to be interviewed for this story." Further, on page 50 that "Tanton declined to answer ... a series of other questions faxed him by the reporter at his request." This would be damaging if true, but it is not true. I did reply. Obviously my answers were not what the SPLC wanted to hear. You're welcome to judge the veracity of their general approach from this deliberate deception.

### What is the SPLC?

"The Puppeteer" appeared in the Summer 2002 issue of *Intelligence Report*, the house organ of an organization known as the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), founded and headed by one Morris Dees. The SPLC is an advocacy group whose stated mission is to expose the activities of "hate groups." Though they don't specifically say so, the SPLC focuses its attention solely on groups that operate on the political right. If one is looking for information about the activities of groups like the Nation of Islam, Movimiento Estudiantal Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA – a small hard-left Hispanic group), or any other organization that espouses hate from the left, they would be well advised to look elsewhere, because the SPLC does not address these groups.

The SPLC, which has raised hundreds of millions of dollars "outing" organizations they deem to be right-wing hate groups, was itself "outed" in the November 2000 issue of *Harper's Magazine* which, unlike the *Intelligence Report*, is a venerable and independent mainstream publication whose authors sign their articles. According to contributing editor Ken Silverstein in an article entitled, "The Church of Morris Dees," the SPLC is little more than a direct mail outfit that has raised heaps of money hyping hate crimes – real and imagined – while doing virtually nothing for the victims.

At the time his article appeared, Silverstein claimed that the SPLC had \$120 million in the bank. This included the surplus from \$27 million it had raised the previous year through its direct mail operation, though it had spent only \$13 million on its civil rights' activities. The group spends twice as much on fund-raising activities each year as it does on legal services for the people whose causes they purport to champion. SPLC's fund-raising-to-expenditure ratio has earned them one of the American Institute of Philanthropy's worst ratings for any of the organizations it monitors. Here are the numbers from SPLC's October 31, 2001 report to the IRS on Form 990: Income \$36 million; Expenses \$23 million; Profit \$13 million; losses from playing the stock market with donors' money: \$27 million; net assets down to only \$114 million.

Another revelation in the *Harper's* article – one that is far less shocking in the post-Enron and WorldCom era than it was two years ago – is that accounting procedures have allowed the SPLC to disguise fund-raising activities as “educational” activities. According to the tax records Silverstein reviewed, of the \$10.8 million SPLC claimed to spend on educational activities in 1999, \$6.4 million was actually spent soliciting contributions.

Rather than being legitimate crusaders against alleged right-wing “hate” groups, SPLC and Dees have been shameless exploiters of the misfortunes of people they do almost nothing to help, claims Silverstein. Alarmist, and often graphic, direct mail solicitations hyping supposed hate crimes that are usually the sick handiwork of lone individuals rather than organized groups, net the SPLC handsome returns while doing little or nothing to aid the victims. The hate “groups” the SPLC relentlessly raises money to fight are often the figment of SPLC's direct mail department's overheated imagination, and unrelated crimes are attributed to these groups because, like sex and fear, hate sells.

His former partner in the direct marketing business that Dees ran before starting SPLC confesses that the two of them were not above hucksterism in their quest to amass profits. “We were not particular about how we did it,” Dees' former business partner is quoted saying in *Harper's*. More interestingly, Dees, who has made a career (and a ton of money – his

recently listed yearly salary was \$259,000, plus \$21,000 in “benefits”) exposing right-wing hate groups, received payment from the Ku Klux Klan when he was a practicing attorney in Montgomery, Alabama, in the early 1960s.

Having been sliced and diced in the media on more than a few occasions myself, I am not prepared to convict the SPLC and Dees based on a single article – although I hold *Harper's* and its fact-checking in much higher regard than the *Intelligence Report*. I have no reason to believe Ken Silverstein has any political axe to grind, while it is clear that the SPLC and Dees have one to grind with me. For an organization that preaches tolerance, SPLC seems strangely intolerant of ideas other than their own.

### In Conclusion

The best response to the charges made against me by the *Intelligence Report* is the public record I have amassed in 30 years of dealing with the issue of immigration policy, and just plain common sense. Few would deny that immigration is an important public policy issue, and if I and the organizations with which I am associated were really a bunch of extremists, someone else would have surely come along and stolen the spotlight by now. It is simply illogical that there could be no mainstream voices calling for limiting immigration.

The records of the groups on whose boards I have served with in one capacity or another for many years speak for themselves. They've been examined, analyzed, scrutinized and pored over by people in the media and government, and they all have come to the same conclusion: these organizations accurately reflect the views of millions of Americans regarding a critical public-policy issue.

I suppose I should not be surprised about articles that attack me or others involved in advocacy against *mass* immigration. As our political campaigns show, negative campaigning is highly effective. No matter how much everyone laments attack ads, they have become the staple of our political life. Issues can be very complex and it's much easier just to tear down one's opponent. The *argumentum ad hominum* works – unfortunately.

But in the end, issues must be addressed. Even if I am all those things my critics say I am, U.S. immigration policy would remain a matter of

significant controversy. It must be addressed; it will not simply fade away.

Numbers matter. Throughout this paper, I have italicized the adjectives “*mass*” and “*massive*” to make the point that we are not opposed to all immigration, but rather “*massive*” immigration. What is “*massive*”? That is what the debate is all about, if we can get past the name-calling. Immigration policy can, in summary, be reduced to the Three Great Questions: 1) How many people should we admit? 2) Who gets the visas? 3) How can we enforce the rules? ■