

The Politics of 9/11

Has anyone else out there begun to wonder just who these 9/11 “families” are that have been interviewed without end the past week about their “outrage” over President Bush’s TV ads with a quick clip of September 11? Are they all neutral innocents, as depicted, or are they part of an organized anti-Bush opposition?

*The activists who claim to speak for 9/11 families are not exactly politically neutral.*

It seems to us that the media that gives these folks so much free face time and column inches might push the story a bit further to help viewers and readers put this dispute in context. Alas, what a little pushing of our own unearths is that far from disinterested parties, the activists who claim to speak for all 9/11 families are in fact subsidiaries of established anti-Bush forces—political entities committed to defeating the President this fall. We guess transparency only applies to the business world.

Consider the benignly named September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows. The group has been loudly protesting Mr. Bush’s ads, organizing a rally for “victims’ families and firefighters” to condemn the President’s “offensive exploitation” of September 11. Peaceful Tomorrows says its goal is to “turn our grief into action for peace.” In the Washington Post’s coverage this group is “nonpartisan.” If so, nonpartisan has lost its meaning.

One of Peaceful Tomorrows’ founders is David Potorti. Mr. Potorti used to write for a left-leaning weekly in North Carolina, railing against faith-based initiatives, companies without unions and the “gaping inequities” in America. Within three months of losing a brother on September 11, he was protesting the war on terror in a peace march sponsored by Voices in the Wilderness, whose founder, Kathy Kelly, was recently sentenced to three months in prison for breaking onto an army installation. That’s where Mr. Potorti fell in with folks such as Kelly Campbell, a 9/11 family member and “environmental campaign coordinator.” Out of this emerged Peaceful Tomorrows.

The group was immediately welcomed into the Democratic network of money and support. Peaceful Tomorrows is a “project” of the leftist Tides Center. The Center provides back-office services to ideologically acceptable “charitable” organizations for a fee. The Center receives generous financial assistance from liberal foundations, including various Heinz family endowments. The chairman of at least one of those endowments is Teresa Heinz, wife of Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry.

Peaceful Tomorrows has also received grant money from the closely related Tides Foundation. The Foundation pushes the principle that money is fungible for left-wing activist groups. Big donors (including the Heinz endowments) give money to Tides, with private instructions as to which groups it should then be distributed; thus the origi-

nal donors don’t have to publicly admit to the activities they fund. According to a Tides Foundation spokesperson, the money Peaceful Tomorrows received did not come from Heinz. But when we asked Mr. Potorti where

the money *did* come from, he said its funding was “confidential.”

Peaceful Tomorrows isn’t so stalwart about other rules. The Tides Center is a 501(c)3, a tax-exempt non-profit, and therefore correctly explains on its Web site that its projects “may not engage in direct support or opposition of a candidate for political office.” We can only assume the Tides Center has been too busy counting its Heinz money to sever ties with Peaceful Tomorrows after its Bush opposition.

As for all the media attention, Peaceful Tomorrows has retained the well-known Fenton Communications, a public relations shop that for years has catered to left-wing advocacy groups. The most recent and famous is MoveOn.org, the outfit that had to disavow an ad on its site comparing President Bush to Hitler. A woman at Fenton who works on MoveOn.org’s project, Jessica Smith, also works on Peaceful Tomorrow’s campaign. Ms. Smith used to work for the Democratic National Committee and for Al Gore’s presidential campaign. We are a long way from the land of political innocents.

What we have, instead, are politically motivated activists standing willingly as a front organization for the Democratic Party. They’ve traded on the press’s reluctance to question their motives, hoping for a free run to impugn Mr. Bush every time he discusses terrorism from now until the election. Peaceful Tomorrows is hardly alone; scratch the surface and many of the other groups and individuals making a fuss have similar ties.

We sympathize just a little with the failure of the press corps to get to the bottom of this, given how difficult it has become to track groups like Peaceful Tomorrows. One of the entirely predictable consequences of the new campaign finance laws is that political money has diverted into myriad “non-profits” and other creatures of the tax-code, all claiming to be “nonpartisan” and therefore with little obligation to explain where they get their money.

None of this is to say the anti-Bush activists of Peaceful Tomorrows don’t have a right to try their hardest to get Mr. Kerry elected this fall. We’ve also said that we believe Mr. Bush has the right to talk about terrorism—the defining issue of his Presidency. Call us innocent, but we somehow think voters deserve to know more than they do now about all these 9/11 “family” groups. Some might even send them money, and some might switch them off.