



The education of Bruce Bartlett

By Steve Benen – November 27th, 2012

In recent years, as Republicans have pursued ideological purity and the right has grown less tolerant of dissent, a variety of once-prominent conservatives have found themselves on the outside looking in.

Brink Lindsey and Will Wilkinson are noticeably absent from the Cato Institute team. David Frum is clearly on the outs with his former conservative allies. John Hulsman was a senior foreign policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation, appearing regularly on Fox News, right up until he expressed his disapproval of the neocons, at which point Heritage threw him overboard.

But I've always considered Bruce Bartlett the granddaddy of 'em all. It's hard to question Bartlett's conservative credentials: he helped write the Kemp-Roth tax bill in 1981, worked as a policy advisor in the Reagan White House, and worked in the Bush/Quayle Treasury Department. He worked at Cato and the National Center for Policy Analysis, and wrote regularly for the Wall Street Journal editorial page and National Review.

But Bruce had an "intellectual crisis," came to realize that the Bush/Cheney administration was pursuing an agenda that didn't make any sense, felt compelled to say so, and lost "every last friend I had on the right."

My book, [Impostor: How George W. Bush Bankrupted America and Betrayed the Reagan Legacy](#), was published in February 2006. I had been summarily fired by the think tank I worked for back in October 2005. Although the book was then only in manuscript, my boss falsely claimed that it was already costing the

organization contributions. He never detailed, nor has anyone, any factual or analytical error in the book.

Among the interesting reactions to my book is that I was banned from Fox News. My publicist was told that orders had come down from on high that it was to receive no publicity whatsoever, not even attacks. Whoever gave that order was smart; attacks from the right would have sold books. Being ignored was poison for sales.

I later learned that the order to ignore me extended throughout Rupert Murdoch's empire. For example, I stopped being quoted in the Wall Street Journal. Awhile back, a reporter who left the Journal confirmed to me that the paper had given her orders not to mention me. Other dissident conservatives, such as David Frum and Andrew Sullivan, have told me that they are banned from Fox as well. More epistemic closure.

After another unsuccessful election cycle, Bruce wants his former brethren to "undertake a clear-eyed assessment of who on their side was right and who was wrong," and come to terms with the fact that his criticism was motivated by a desire to help conservatives "avoid the permanent decline that now seems inevitable."

Bruce is offering sensible suggestions to the right; it's a shame they choose to pretend he doesn't exist.