

# Thornburgh longs to scrap Constitution

by Kathleen Klenetsky

Is it possible for an individual to function honestly and competently as the Attorney General of the United States, when he has worked closely with groups devoted to overthrowing the U.S. Constitution? What might ordinarily be a hypothetical question suitable to classroom civics discussions, has taken on real urgency now that Richard Thornburgh is serving as the nation's chief law officer.

Since his appointment by George Bush, Thornburgh has trampled on the Constitution by promulgating the Thornburgh Doctrine, which maintains that the U.S. has the right to invade another country and kidnap foreign nationals suspected of disobeying U.S. laws. He has campaigned vigorously to strip U.S. criminal defendants of their constitutional rights; and to expand "white collar crime" prosecutions of savings and loan officials, industries in violation of environmental regulations, defense industry executives, and others.

Thornburgh's contempt for constitutional principles is reflected in his past involvement in two groups that have been in the vanguard of the campaign to undo the work of the Founding Fathers, the Committee on the Constitutional (CCS) System, and the National Taxpayers Union (NTU).

## The Constitution must go

The CCS was established by former Carter White House counsel Lloyd Cutler in the early 1980s, to fulfill the aims he had laid out in the Fall 1980 issue of the Council on Foreign Relations journal *Foreign Affairs*. There he sharply criticized the U.S. Constitution for creating a political system that permitted the average citizen to have too much influence over elected officials. This, he complained, impedes the imposition of policies which the Establishment elite deems necessary, but which would be politically unpopular, such as deep cuts in Social Security and other austerity measures. Thus, Cutler argued, the constitutional system should be scrapped and replaced with something less susceptible to constituency pressure, such as the British parliamentary system.

According to CCS coordinator Peter Schaffler, Thornburgh was an "active member" of the group's board. Thornburgh is clearly in sympathy with Cutler's overall aim of changing the U.S. government to facilitate austerity measures. Spokesmen for the CCS and NTU report that Thornburgh became involved in their efforts because of his long-

standing commitment to an amendment to the Constitution to require a balanced federal budget.

Presented as a panacea for the nation's fiscal woes, a balanced budget amendment would create an even bigger mess than now exists. Under current Depression conditions, real production is rapidly collapsing, and the tax base along with it, so that balancing the budget would require increasingly savage attack on defense and social spending, leading to further shrinkage in revenues.

It was Thornburgh's commitment to the balanced budget insanity which also brought him to the NTU. This group has played a pivotal role in orchestrating the effort to get state legislatures to adopt resolutions calling on Congress to convene a second constitutional convention, to adopt a balanced budget amendment.

The constitutional convention issue is highly controversial, and rightly so. Leaving aside momentarily the merits of the balanced budget amendment, there is no guarantee that a convention could be limited to this one subject; there are well-grounded fears that it could become a "runaway" convention, with all sorts of amendments adopted. Yet, the NTU runs around from state legislature to state legislature preaching the virtues of the so-called "con con."

Thornburgh's public involvement with the NTU dates to 1987, when he joined an NTU spinoff called "Citizens for a Balanced Budget Amendment." Thornburgh, then governor of Pennsylvania, served as co-chairman, along with Richard Lamm, the former Colorado governor who leaped into notoriety with his 1984 call for the elderly to "die and get out of the way." This, in fact, is the primary motive behind the balanced budget amendment drive: to force through such lethal cuts in spending that lots of people will have no choice but to "die and get out of the way."

Even before that, in 1986, Thornburgh had given favorable testimony before the New Jersey state legislature when it was considering a resolution to call for a constitutional convention.

Thornburgh's anti-Constitution activity has drawn fire from groups such as the Sons of the American Revolution—a development which has not gone down well with Thornburgh's co-conspirators. An NTU staffer bitterly complained that "right-wing crazies in red polyester slacks" are "out to get" Thornburgh, by "trying to show that he is an evil person" because of his involvement with the CCS and NTU.

Indeed, the same "right-wing crazies," along with a coalition of liberal groups, have succeeded in getting two out of the 32 states which had endorsed "con con" resolutions, to rescind them. (A total of 34 states must adopt such resolutions before a constitutional convention is held). Despite these setbacks, an NTU official recently gloated that there is a good chance several other states may soon adopt such resolutions. With the Attorney General in their corner, the enemies of the U.S. Constitution may soon rack up some important new victories.