

Gloomy Conservatives

by Donald Devine

"A conservative is a man with two perfectly good legs who, however, has never learned to walk."

—Franklin D. Roosevelt

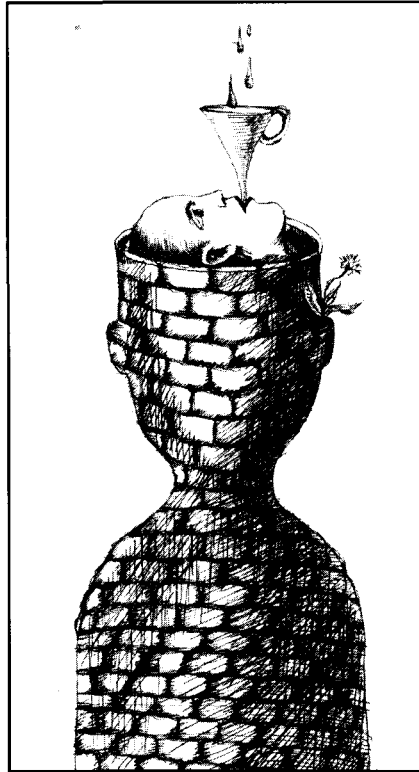
**The Conservative Movement,
Revised Edition**
by Paul Gottfried
New York: Twayne Publishers;
214 pp., \$26.95



This is a very disturbing book, concluding that "America will one day be 'one with Nineveh and Tyre,'" and that the general principles of conservatism will only reappear "when circumstances favorable to civilization return." The remnant, or paleoconservatives, are "without real hope" of political or cultural power, their only function being to express "iconoclastic exuberance" over unpopular causes in a spirit "far more Nietzschean than neo-Thomistic." This gloomy conservatism is the fruit of a movement whose magnificent development (described in five brilliant chapters) was arrested and finally destroyed by a force Paul Gottfried calls "neoconservatism," whose chief concerns are for the money and power that flow from a connection with the political establishment of Washington, D.C. Gottfried's neoconservatives are not just the Democratic, Cold War liberal intellectuals who shifted right in the late 1960's; they include most of the writers for *National Review*, the staff of the Heritage Foundation, and indeed most leaders and intellectuals commonly identified as "conservative."

This revised edition of *The Conservative Movement* is actually two books. The first five chapters, following the original edition (coauthored with Thomas Fleming), display even more thorough research and still keener scholarly insight this time around. The last two chapters by Professor Gottfried alone are new, and read much more like investigative

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journalism than academic analysis. They are also responsible for the difference between the mild optimism of the first edition and the deep pessimism of the second.

Early chapters describe the development of the conservative movement from its "neither organized nor coherent" origins during the New Deal through its consolidation by William F. Buckley, Jr., Frank Meyer, and *National Review* in the 50's, the Goldwater movement in the 60's, the academic conservatism of the 60's and 70's, the intellectual revolt of the neoconservatives, and the populist revolt of the New Right. Gottfried's narrative is indispensable to an understanding of conservatism, even if one can quibble with some of the details, and very useful for anyone wishing to understand the movement that culminated in the election of Ronald Reagan.

I grew up in the ferment that was "the movement" around *National Review* in the 1950's and attended St. John's University, which Professor Gottfried iden-

tifies as a center of conservative activity. After having rejected some of the strident early rhetoric of the magazine I was brought by Meyer to the fold, won by both his philosophy and his activism. Meyer's "synthesis of ideas that included absolute truths and personal liberty" seemed the right equation and did indeed become what Gottfried calls "the vital center of the conservative culture of the 1950's." While documenting the dominance of fusionism within the intellectual conservative movement, Gottfried properly chides its partisan, populist, defiant tone, its exclusionism (Meyer denounced George Wallace), its activism ("almost all of *National Review*'s staff participated in political campaigns"), and its optimistic conviction that "things could be set right."

Paul Gottfried argues convincingly that neoconservatives and others in their embrace cooperate with one another in funding projects, in getting jobs, in publishing each other's books, and in controlling institutions; he also shows some people to have made a lot of money. But the important question to ask about Washington conservatives is surely "Have they kept the principles of the movement and tried to advance them given their opportunities?" not "Have they received lucrative grants?" Detailing where they went wrong on policy is much more worthy of scholarly analysis than investigating their bank accounts.

As for the wisdom of conservatives involving themselves with the Washington policymaking community, the problem is certainly a vexed one. Do you preach truth from an ivory tower and let the country go reeling to the left, or do you try to guide it rightwards at the expense of principle? There is a great danger in the latter course, and it is possible that Washington conservatives have indeed gone too far. The Heritage Foundation, in pressing its "empowerment" theme, is often close to the line but, in my view at least, generally avoids crossing it. Still it is helpful—if not always pleasant—to have someone like Professor Gottfried around to chide us, though

his strictures certainly do not justify our giving way to Nietzschean despair.

By the end of his book, Gottfried seems to mean by "neoconservatives" all optimists who call themselves conservative: if so, count me in. Earlier on, however, he suggests a better definition: neoconservatives are conservatives who "remain qualified defenders of the welfare state" and who support a "vision of a global democratic order." I suggest an operating definition of a true conservative as one who rejects the welfare state by supporting local and private institutions and judges foreign policy by whether it meets American interests—and of a neoconservative as a person who rejects only the excesses of the welfare state and argues for a make-the-world-safe-for-democracy internationalism. It seems to me that from this distinction three things follow.

The first is that the John Randolph Club "agreements," as reported in *The Conservative Movement*, will not do. "On immigration and trade policy, [libertarians and traditionalists] have united behind the principle that no policy should be adopted unless conducive to


political liberty in the United States." This is simple evasion: unless policies regarding trade and immigration are going to be made by local governments, what other than the welfare state can execute them in their increasing complexity? If fusionism's simple formula of "libertarian means applied by a conservative society for traditional ends" is to be replaced, much more theoretical work is required.

The second is that a former neoconservative who accepts conservatism, however defined, should be regarded by his new associates as a "real" conservative: "neoconservative" cannot become a permanent castigation. In Gottfried's early chapters, Irving Kristol is excused from the internationalist charge. He quotes Russell Kirk's opinion that Kristol is "not a neoconservative at all . . . but a conservative." He speaks favorably of Kristol, Midge Decter, and Gertrude Himmelfarb when discussing their views on social issues. Yet, by the closing polemical chapter, all are back in the neoconservative cage, along with almost everybody else.

Kristol supports one of my two postulated conservative tenets, yet is only a qualified supporter of the second (al-

though with less qualifications every time I read him). What to do? Excommunicate him for ideological incompleteness? Which brings me to point three: if people (including neoconservatives) tend in our direction, by all means let us welcome them and try to move them the rest of the way. I just cannot accept that neoconservatives move conservatives leftward.

Contrast the pessimism of the conclusion to the revised edition of *The Conservative Movement* with the qualified optimism with which the first edition ends: "Before giving in to anything like despair, conservatives in the 1980's [and 1990's] might take considerable comfort from contemplating their forty-year rise to power." While both the power and the comfort are today diminished, still conservatism in the '80's *did* roll back (however temporarily) the welfare state; that achievement, though insufficient, emphasizes the need for private and locally devised solutions to domestic problems and for a foreign policy based on considerations of a just national interest. Conservatives did not require foundation grants the first time around, and we will not need them the second. ©



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Roots of a New World Order

by William R. Hawkins

To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order

by Thomas J. Knock

New York: Oxford University Press;

381 pp., \$30.00



Though Thomas Knock draws no explicit comparisons between Woodrow Wilson's plans for a post-Great War world and the policies George Bush tried to fashion for a post-Cold War world, his use of the term "New World Order" in the title of his book is clearly meant to steer the reader to think in parallel terms: a frame of mind that could easily be carried into the new age of Bill Clinton.

Knock, an associate professor of history at Southern Methodist University, is an admirer of "the enduring relevancy of [Woodrow Wilson's] vision." This is unexpected, since Knock clearly writes from the far left of the political spectrum. But unlike other leftists—such as Arno Meyer, William Appleman Williams, Lloyd Gardner, and N. Gordon Lewis—Knock does not interpret Wilson's support of the League of Nations as a strategy to unite the Great Powers in a reactionary alliance against world revolution, or as a personal bid to steal the world stage from Lenin. Knock correctly points out that at the time, "Lenin was . . . a comparatively obscure politician at the head of a very shaky government." Had more people in the West been able to foresee what the Soviet Union would turn into, there would have been more support for Winston Churchill's desire to strangle communism in its crib. But Churchill is not even mentioned by Knock, who has a talent for writing history from the perspective of those who lived it. Knock's aim is not to discredit Wilson, but to recapture his spirit for radicals who still believe in progress and enlightenment. The value of his book is that he also reminds those on the right of the origins of many currently fashionable ideas—a re-

fresher course that is much needed.

Knock's diplomatic history of World War I and the Versailles peace settlement amounts to a relatively small portion of the book, whose primary focus is on the development of Wilson's ideas about the proper organization of the world. Knock stresses the President's influence on such American groups as the Women's Peace Party, the American Union Against Militarism, and the Socialist Party; on the Union of Democratic Control in England; and on individuals like Jane Addams, Upton Sinclair, Norman Angell, Bertrand Russell, Oswald Garrison Villard, and John Reed.

Wilson had always been an anti-imperialist: during the Mexican Revolution, he clipped Reed's columns and circulated them. In Mexico and Latin America, Wilson favored revolutionary idealism over concrete American interests, believing the region's problems stemmed from dependence on foreign investors, including Americans. He therefore supported rebels who planned to seize those assets. He intervened at Veracruz in 1916 to block a shipment of weapons going to the counterrevolutionary Mexican government; he apologized and paid compensation to Columbia for the taking of Panama to build the canal. He criticized the Monroe Doctrine because, while checking European aggression, it failed to restrain the United States. He told a group of Mexican newspaper editors that his proposed Pan-American Pact was "an arrangement by which you would be protected from us." When the AUAM's Amos Pinchot asserted that great economic power made America a great threat to the world, Wilson agreed, "unless some check was placed upon it by some international arrangement" like a league of nations.

For Wilson, "the reactionary opponents of domestic reform and the advocates of militarism, imperialism and balance-of-power politics were born of the same womb," says Knock. In contrast, Knock argues, "Feminists, liberals, pacifists, socialists and social reformers of varying kinds, in the main, filled the ranks of the progressive internationalists. Their leaders included many of the era's authentic heroes and heroines," all of whom, as Knock shows, enjoyed easy access to Wilson's White House.

A conformity of outlook was displayed in plans drawn up by leftist groups on both sides of the Atlantic at the onset of the Great War. The basic demands were always the same and were consolidated into Wilson's Fourteen Points: disarmament; free trade; equality of nations based on self-determination; democratic governments committed to social justice; and a league of nations that would mediate disputes and perhaps punish aggression. The first two were thought to be the most important, on the assumption that arms races and commercial rivalry were the main causes of war: if the military-industrial complex could be eliminated, opposition to the rest of the program would vanish. Behind this idea lay the notion that it is only reactionary elements, not "the people," who have dangerous interests. Under democracy, there would be only peace and "world community."

A commitment to that belief is what separated the "progressive" from the "conservative" internationalists. Men like Teddy Roosevelt, Henry Cabot Lodge, Leonard Wood, William Taft, and Elihu Root formed the League to Enforce Peace. But, says Knock, "almost all of them had been ardent imperialists and champions of Anglo-American *entente* since the 1890's," while "the LEP did not concern itself much with the economic causes of the war, with disarmament or self-determination, and certainly not with democratic control of foreign policy." What the LEP envisioned was something like traditional alliances formed to maintain a particular peace settlement, only more formal. They were mainly legalists, concerned with stability rather than social change. And "they remained committed nationalists and resisted any diminution of American sovereignty or military strength."

Senator Lodge turned against the league idea and led the fight against Wilson's impossible dream. Yet, "Lodge's arguments were not based on isolationist sentiments," Knock believes; instead, Lodge wanted "a unilateralist approach . . . which countenanced few of the restrictions on American freedom of action that Wilson's . . . league seemed to entail." In short, Lodge wanted the United States to be able to act in its own interest, and Wilson did not.