



# Conservative the Neo-Cons Ain't

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*Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire* by Anne Norton (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004;) 235 pages. Reviewed for *TNA* by Richard Ward. (1000 words)

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When the “neo-conservatives” came along, we the surprised “*passé*-conservatives” were thinking to ourselves: “I don’t know exactly what this is, but any kind of ‘conservative’ is bound to beat anything ‘liberal,’ ‘new liberal,’ ‘progressive,’ ‘green,’ *et al.*”

And, sure enough, the suddenly-emerging-out-of-nowhere *neo*-cons (“new conservatives”) like Irving Kristol and son Bill Kristol, Paul Wolfowitz, Abram Shulsky, Carnes Lord, Gary Schmitt, Alan Keyes, and Leon Kass, behind “concert master” Newt Gingrich – they all were espousing those things dear to the hearts of us “old conservatives.” At that stage of their game, things like whacking the UN, foreign aid, gun controls, and abortion was a refreshing change from what had been a stale *status quo* for what then seemed “centuries.”

The October 7, 1996, launching of the *Fox News Channel* to 17 million cable subscribers was all that the fledgling *neo*-cons needed to ensure their meteoric rise to national and international leadership.



But it wasn’t too long before the separation between “con” and “neo-con” was noticed, albeit in a rather “off-hand” way. Where on *Fox News* were all the “old-cons?” How come Shawn Hannity was never seen interviewing the “hard-times stalwarts” who had literally “paved the way” for this “neo” breed? – the veteran John Birchers, the economists of the Austrian school, David Barton and others from the Christian right, *et al*?

And then, too, what about the ownership of *Fox News*? Being a native Australian, Rupert Murdoch was a great “mystery man” to nearly all Ameri

cans. The recipient of a “modest” inheritance from his late father in 1952, the Oxford-educated Murdoch, beginning with only that one, family-owned, small-town newspaper, went on to become what he is today, the billionaire owner and operator of *News Corporation, Inc.*

Politics-wise, one biographer presents the mystery man thusly:



“Murdoch is seen as either a political *neo*-conservative or simply an opportunist.” So, “old conservative” is ruled out for this “opportunist” (?) who, not until September 4, 1985, became a naturalized U.S. citizen, but then only to satisfy the legal requirement that only United States citizens could own American television stations. But the haunting question remains: Why would a mogul who was best known for his support of Australia’s Liberal Party be today’s owner of – of all things – the “kind-of conservative” *Fox News*, not to mention his support of the *neo*-con’s *The Weekly Standard*?

Anne Norton, in her *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire*, does not directly address that question. But there is another that she does cover quite convincingly, the question of exactly what is so “conservative” about *neo* conservatism?

Irving Kristol, widely regarded as “the godfather of neoconservatism,” says Norton, has “confirmed that neoconservatism is **a radical departure** from traditional American conservatism.” [*Emphasis ours.*] She continues:

.... Neoconservatives, Kristol tells us, “politely overlook” older conservative [? - *RW*] politicians – Coolidge, Hoover, Eisenhower, and Gold-water. They overlook older conservative theorists, the settled opinions, habits, and tastes of an older and more venerable world. They have lost – or perhaps rejected – a long history of conservatism in America and England, a tradition that gave America a memory of ancestry, that preserved a history. [*Neocons*] **are not preservers; they are (as they will tell you) revolutionaries.** –from Page 177, *Emphasis ours.*

Anne Norton is Professor of Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania. Earlier in her book, she had traced the roots of neoconservatism back to a small coterie of professors in the 1950s and 60s at her *alma mater*, the University of Chicago. Included were Joseph Cropsey, Ralph Lerner, Leon Kass, Allan Bloom, and, most notably, Leo Strauss. The above (and

many others) had been either students of Strauss' or else his colleagues. Where Strauss himself abhorred the whole concept of world government and international institutions that might lead to it, his academic descendants – like those named in our second paragraph – have drifted squarely into the heart of it.

... **Neoconservatives want a strong state, and a state that will put its strength to use**, a situation all too familiar to Europe. Neoconservatives would have that state **ally itself with – and empower – corporations**, with tax cuts targeted to stimulate the economy.... They, **although not always religious themselves, ally themselves with religion and religious crusades**. They encourage **family values** and the praise of older forms of family life, where women occupy themselves with children, cooking, and the church, and men take on the burdens of **manliness**. They see in **war and the preparation for war** the restoration of private virtue and public spirit. They delight in the **profusion of flags**: flags on cars, flags on houses, flags worn in lapels. Above all, Irving Kristol writes, neo-conservatism calls for a revival of patriotism, a strong military, and an **expansionist foreign policy**.

... They want “a strong state” with **a strong leader**. They speak favorably of **authoritarian leaders** and argue that America would profit from a more authoritarian democracy. They favor [*naturally, then*] **the expansion of executive power**. They want a strong state to have **an expansive and expansionist foreign policy – to, as they say, “make trouble” in the world. THEY HOPE – THEY PLAN – TO ESTABLISH A NEW WORLD ORDER TO RIVAL ROME. The new world order will, they recognize, be established not with the consent of the governed but through force. Military power is essential to a robust foreign policy, to forging the Pax Americana....** The neocon-servative economic program speaks to the concerns of small businesses, small property owners, and working people. The **appeals to ordinary people** are matched by **benefits given to the extraordinary**: the wealthiest individuals and corporations. They **combine populist rhetoric with a corporatist strategy**. They encourage **citizens to “police” their neighbors** and to inform the government of suspicious activities. They favor the establishment of **stronger police powers and more extensive intelligence at home**, with fewer constraints and **greater powers of surveillance**. – *from Pages 178-180, emphases added.*

Our not realizing “all of the above” is killing America in 2006. Call it “Democrat” or “Republican,” “liberal” or “conservative,” world government is world government, and Anne Norton's book is essential reading for all concerned. ■■■ *Richard Ward.*