

The Cabal Strikes Back

Ever since the exposure in the mainstream media last year of the neoconservatives as a fifth column that engineered the present boondoggle in Iraq, dragged the United States into a foreign war for the transparent benefit of Israel, and concocted what are now known to have been lies about Iraq's "weapons of mass destruction" and Saddam Hussein's "links" to the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center, the neoconservative cabal in both the Bush administration and the press has been on the defensive. The cabal (or, at least, its major leaders in government) ought to be standing in the same dock that Alger Hiss and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg once occupied, but that outcome cannot—yet—be realized. What has been realized is the complete discrediting of "neoconservatism" as a more "humane," more "responsible," or more "credible" variety of the conservative persuasion. Whatever you might say about the flaws of the Old Right, it never placed the interests of foreign states above those of its own country, nor did it ever entice the United States into war to serve the imperial and perhaps even genocidal ambitions of such states. The discrediting of the neocons has been carried out by the "mainstream" or "establishment" and largely liberal press, even though most of what has been brought to public attention about neoconservatism was said long ago by paleoconservatives now consigned—by the victorious neocons themselves and their Old Right surrogates—to exile.

Precisely because of the exposure of the hidden neocon agenda in the establishment press, their hired guns had to return fire, and, in the September issue of *Commentary* (which remains their premier outlet), neocon gunslinger Joshua Muravchik pumped out some rather predictable rounds.

The burden of Mr. Muravchik's fire, of course, was that all the critics who denounced and exposed neoconservatives as responsible for the Iraq war are really antisemites. "Of course," because that is what neoconservatives always say about anyone, right or left, who criticizes them, Israel, or American foreign policy for being too pro-Israel—Pat Buchanan, Joe

Sobran, Gore Vidal, the *Nation*, *Chronicles*, etc., etc., etc. Mr. Muravchik, however, concentrated his own fire on the left—and rightly so, since the left, now and for long the dominant force within the establishment media, is in a stronger position to harm the neocons and thwart their agenda than any part of the right, old or older. Mr. Muravchik is thus able to discover antisemitism lurking in the reflections of such apostles of progress as Elizabeth Drew writing in the *New York Review of Books*, Michael Lind in the *New Statesman*, William Pfaff in the *International Herald Tribune*, and many others, and not merely individual writers but such institutions as the *New York Times* itself, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, the "British Broadcasting Company" (*sic*), the *London Times*, the *National Journal*, the *Boston Globe*, and (by no means least) Lyndon LaRouche, "the crackpot political agitator," as Mr. Muravchik not inaccurately identifies him and with whom he does not hesitate (not so accurately) to lump the others he names. One has to wonder, reviewing this encyclopedic compendium of supposed Jew-baiters, how any Jews could remain at liberty at all in the countries where the thoughts of such pundits are received seriously.

Commenting on the emphasis several of these critics placed on the supposed connections between the neoconservatives and such figures as Leon Trotsky and Leo Strauss, Mr. Muravchik finally spies "the real reason" that lurks beneath any and every criticism of the neocons:

There is, however, one thing that Strauss and Trotsky did have in common, and that one thing may get us closer to the real reason their names have been so readily invoked. Both were Jews. The neoconservatives, it turns out, are also in large proportion Jewish—and this, to their detractors, constitutes evidence of the ulterior motives that lurk behind the policies they espouse.

Leave aside the question of why it is permissible to search out the "ulterior motives" that supposedly drive the crit-



ics of the neocons but not at all permissible to suggest that neocons themselves may have motives of an ethnic and political character. Mr. Muravchik himself notes that "Many neoconservatives are in fact Jews" and offers a somewhat labored explanation of why this should be so in terms of "a powerful attraction to politics and particularly to the play of political ideas" on the part of Jews. Be that as it may, it is perfectly consistent with explanations of neoconservatism in terms of the supposed influence on it by Trotsky or Strauss, both of whom also exhibited the same "powerful attraction to politics" and political ideas. Of course, it is not at all self-evident that mere mention of the Jewishness of the neocons implies the presence of antisemitism, and the far more obvious reason their Jewishness is so often brought up is that it helps explain why they are so zealous in their advocacy of war against Iraq and other Arab states hostile to Israel. This is no more anti-Jewish than pointing to William Buckley's Catholicism as an explanation for his opposition to abortion is anti-Catholic.

Nevertheless, whatever fantasies of antisemitism haunt Mr. Muravchik's mind, he is on stronger ground in challenging a good many of the erroneous statements about neoconservatives that their liberal mainstream critics have uttered, including those concerning their supposed connections with Trotsky and Strauss. As I have noted in my own columns in *Chronicles* and elsewhere, Strauss is "hardly 'the main intellectual influence' on the neocons," as William Pfaff had claimed, and few neocons apart from Irving Kristol have been Trotskyites at all. Mr. Muravchik is thus able to score a point in his apologia by correctly insisting that not a few of the liberal critics of the neocons do not really know what they are talking about with regard to where the neocons come

from intellectually and politically. That should hardly surprise us. Liberal critics of the right in general have not known what they were talking about for decades.

Yet despite being incidentally correct about some matters of fact, Mr. Muravchik's apologia for neoconservatism is less concerned with presenting a serious discussion of neoconservative ideas and recent objections to them than with lobbing vilifications at those who express such objections and reaching for any stick to beat them. Not only are the critics crypto-antisemites; they do not even know their Strauss and Trotsky. By the time the attentive reader has reached Mr. Muravchik's own blundering misunderstanding of Trotsky's doctrine of "permanent revolution," he has figured out where the rest of the article is going.

The neocons, you see, had nothing to do with starting the war in Iraq. The presence of such Jewish neoconservatives in key policymaking positions within the Bush administration as Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, Elliott Abrams, and others is irrelevant, as is the presence of non-Jewish neocons in the State Department and Vice President Cheney's staff. Most of these people have nothing to do with the Middle East and most, contrary to what various critics have alleged, had nothing to do with producing a now notorious paper advocating war against Iraq for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu—in 1996, five years before the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States!

Mr. Muravchik's response to the last allegation is worth pondering for a moment. Most of the "Americans whose names appeared on the paper had long sought Saddam's ouster," he assures us, and, anyway, they did not write the paper.

It was the work of a rapporteur summarizing the deliberations of a conference, and was clearly identified as such. The names affixed to it [Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, and David Wurmser (a former assistant to neocon John Bolton at the State Department and now an aide to Vice President Cheney), among others] were listed as attendees and not as endorsers, much less authors.

Of course, if the "Americans" were attendees and participants in the conference, and the report of the conference that endorsed getting rid of Saddam

Hussein summarized the "deliberations of the conference," and the "Americans" had "long sought Saddam's ouster" anyway, why is it inaccurate to infer that the conference report shows that the "Americans" advising the Israeli head of state that Saddam should be ousted believed long before September 11 that Saddam should be ousted? All Mr. Muravchik's tendentious efforts at clarification, rectification, and justification are irrelevant. The fact remains that a group of mainly Jewish Americans who are neoconservatives of one kind or another and are also well known as strong supporters of Israel and of the Netanyahu-Sharon Likud party in particular have been pressing for the destruction of Saddam Hussein as being in the interest of Israel since at least 1996. Moreover, all of them were in the Bush administration at the time its war on Iraq was being developed. Why were any "Americans" advising the prime minister of a foreign state at all, and why are any of them high-ranking and influential policymaking officials of the U.S. government?

Mr. Muravchik's *apologia* for the cabal is thus riddled with inaccurate representations and a line of argument that is neither convincing nor relevant. Nevertheless, he does conclude with a fair enough point: "If any single episode exposes the fatuousness of the charge that neoconservative policies amount to Jewish special pleading, it was the 1990s war in Bosnia." That is so because most neocons then supported U.S. intervention in Bosnia out of "a distinctive neoconservative sensibility" about American power and its uses in the world. Despite a certain opacity in his description of it, that sensibility

may consist in a greater readiness to engage American power and resources where nothing but humanitarian concerns are at issue. In larger part, however, it is concerned with national security, sharing with traditional conservatism the belief that military strength is irreplaceable and that pacifism is folly. Where it parts company with traditional conservatism is in the more contingent approach it takes to guarding that security.

It is Mr. Muravchik's conclusion, then, that it is this "sensibility," not any covert preoccupation with the interests of Israel, that explains why the neocon cabal was so intent on a U.S. war against Iraq, and, in

a general sense, Mr. Muravchik is probably correct.

Why this line of argument is supposed to refute "the charge that neoconservative policies amount to Jewish special pleading" is not entirely clear. The whole point of neoconservatism, with respect to the "Jewish special pleading" that it serves (and, as I argued in a previous column here, that is by no means the only interest it serves), is that it offers "non-Jewish" reasons (to Jewish as well as non-Jewish Americans) to serve those interests. Specifically, neoconservatism serves as an ideological vehicle for a rationalization for American globalism, which does not by itself necessarily advance or protect Israel and its aspirations in the Middle East but is nonetheless a necessary precondition for doing so. That is, a globalist American foreign policy might not serve Israel, but Israel's interests cannot be served without American globalism, and it is therefore in the interests of Israel (as well as of various other groups) for the United States in the post-Cold War world to remain at least as internationalist and interventionist as it has been since 1941. What is imperative is to make sure American foreign policy is not captured by "isolationists" or advocates of what Mr. Muravchik calls "American inaction"—namely, paleoconservatives and their allies, the partisans of an "America First" policy.

What neoconservatives have done is to design an ideology—what Mr. Muravchik so delicately calls a "sensibility"—that offers ostensible and plausible rationalizations for the perpetual war in which Israel and its agents of influence in the U.S. government and media seek to embroil the United States (and which all too many American conservatives, out of a foolishly misplaced patriotism, are eager to support) without explicitly invoking the needs and interests of Israel itself. Paleoconservatives have been observing, commenting on, criticizing, and trying to expose the philosophically and morally flawed process by which this ideology was formulated for nearly two decades and, from the time that Pat Buchanan first began to call attention to Israel's "Amen Corner" in 1990, have routinely been demonized and denounced as antisemites and other bad names for doing so. It should give us no pleasure to affirm that our warnings, vilified and rejected as they were, have today been vindicated by the Middle East maelstrom into which the neoconservatives' "sensibility" has finally sunk us.

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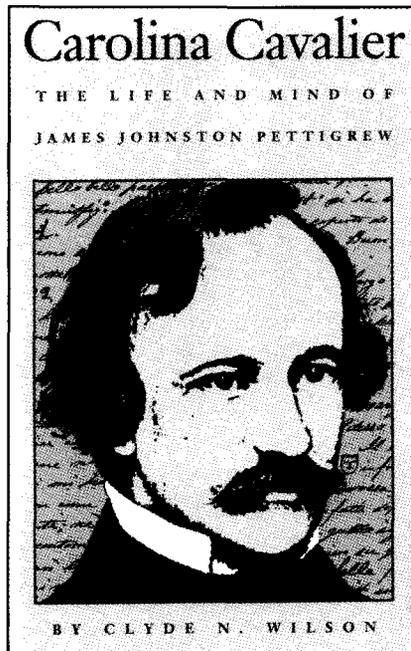
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The Road to Hell

It's been a rough three months for St. Mary's Oratory here in Rockford. First, over Labor Day weekend, some Republican members of the Winnebago County Board, in collusion with certain Republican county officials, hatched a plan to try to include St. Mary's in the land-acquisition area for a new, \$130-million county jail. When the plan was exposed, those board members and officials were reduced to claiming that they had no intention of taking the church and only wanted to put a tunnel across St. Mary's property to connect the new jail to the county's existing public-safety building. Seasoned observers of Winnebago County politics, however, suspected that the land grab was likely an attempt to take advantage of the jail construction to free up St. Mary's property now for use by the county somewhere down the road.

In any case, by the end of October, the county had settled on an alternative route for the tunnel, and life, it seemed, could return to normal for the Latin Mass Community at St. Mary's—at least, as normal as life could be at the church that some have taken to calling “St. Mary's in Chains” or “St. Mary's Between the Jails.” Nothing in Winnebago County, however, is ever that simple.

Trying to derail the plans of her fellow board members, Mary Ann Aiello, along with local architect Gary Anderson, had filed a petition in September with the Rockford Historic Preservation Commission to have St. Mary's, its rectory, and its school declared a local landmark. The Diocese of Rockford, however—rightly mindful of its own prerogatives—opposed the application on the grounds that landmarking the church without diocesan consent constitutes a substantial burden on the free exercise of religion. Indeed, St. Mary's would be the first church in Rockford singled out for landmark status. (Two other churches have landmark status by virtue of their location in the Haight Village historic district, but they were not targeted for landmark status individually.)

To the diocese and the congregation at St. Mary's, the petition for landmark status is remarkably similar to the county's actions over Labor Day weekend. In

neither case was the diocese or the congregation consulted about its intentions or its desires. While Rockford's historic-preservation ordinance (which Gary Anderson helped to draft) is rather mild—in fact, landmarked buildings in Rockford have actually been torn down—the diocese could not simply consent to the landmarking, for both pragmatic and principled reasons. There are approximately 125 Catholic churches in the Diocese of Rockford, which stretches from the western border of Illinois to the suburbs of Chicago. Many of them are potential landmarks under local ordinances; some of them are eligible for state and national landmark status. Not all of those statutes are as accommodating as Rockford's, and the diocese has good reason to fear that submitting to this landmark petition would undercut its ability to fight the imposition of more restrictive landmark status on churches in other towns and cities.

The Institute of Christ the King, which administers St. Mary's Oratory and celebrates the traditional Latin Mass there, joined the diocese in opposing the petition. The congregation, which had applauded Aiello's efforts to protect the church from the county, largely regarded her decision to continue with the petition, now that the threat from the county has passed, as meddling. While Aiello is a Catholic, she is not a member of the congregation at St. Mary's, nor has she contributed to the church's maintenance and renovation over the past six years.

The core issue, of course, remains the free exercise of religion, an issue on which Bishop Thomas Doran has rightly said that he cannot compromise. He has reluctantly decided that, if landmark status is granted, he will close St. Mary's. Since he personally invited the Institute of Christ the King to administer St. Mary's six years ago in order to keep the church open, and since he reaffirmed his commitment to St. Mary's a year ago by elevating it to the status of an oratory, this has clearly not been an easy decision. The bishop has stated, however, that the Latin Mass will continue in Rockford if the city's actions force him to close St. Mary's: He will move the Institute and the Latin Mass



Community to a different facility. The diocese would prefer, though, to defeat the landmarking petition and to keep the Latin Mass at St. Mary's. Unfortunately, on December 9, the diocese lost the first stage of the battle, when the Historic Preservation Commission rejected the free-exercise argument and voted to grant landmark status. The petition now goes to the Codes and Regulations Committee of the Rockford City Council, which will likely approve it, before being sent to the council as a whole. How the council will vote is anyone's guess.

The world of “traditionalist” Catholicism is an unduly complicated one, and not a few partisans of the traditional Latin Mass like to engage in self-fulfilling prophecies about the “perfidy” of Catholic bishops. One such commentator, “Fr. Moderator” of the *Traditio.com* website, has taken upon himself the task of calumniating Bishop Doran by declaring, against all evidence, that the bishop's true intent is to end the Latin Mass in Rockford. Never mind that the bishop could do that at any time by simply withdrawing permission to say the Latin Mass; never mind that he has, instead, recently granted that permission to at least two diocesan priests, in addition to the priests of the Institute of Christ the King; never mind that he has used diocesan funds to underwrite the maintenance and renovation of St. Mary's when the Latin Mass Community could not afford to do so. “Fr. Moderator”—a man named M.E. Morrison of Hayward, California, who claims to be an “independent” Catholic priest (an oxymoron if ever there was one) and who, according to reports, may not even be validly ordained—knows better than those of us here in the congregation at St. Mary's Oratory. If this be the state of “traditionalist” Catholicism today, then *Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis*.