

# **Ernst Fraenkel Vorträge**

zur amerikanischen  
Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft und Geschichte

Herausgegeben von Carl-Ludwig Holtfrerich

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Seymour Martin Lipset

## **Neoconservatism: Myth and Reality**

Peter Steinfels

## **The Short Happy Life of Neoconservatism**

John F. Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien  
der Freien Universität Berlin

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## Vorwort des Herausgebers

Diese neue Schriftenreihe des John F. Kennedy-Instituts der Freien Universität Berlin soll dazu beitragen, die Ergebnisse der Ernst Fraenkel Vorträge zur amerikanischen Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft und Geschichte über den Tag hinaus festzuhalten und einem breiten Interessentenkreis auch außerhalb von Berlin zugänglich zu machen. Die Vortragsreihe ist dem Deutsch-Amerikaner und weltweit bekannten Politik- und Amerikawissenschaftler Ernst Fraenkel gewidmet, der von 1951 bis 1967 an der Freien Universität Berlin lehrte und dessen Initiative 1963 zur Gründung des John F. Kennedy-Instituts für Nordamerikastudien führte. Wie Ernst Fraenkel selbst, so sollen auch diese Vorträge renommierter amerikanischer Wissenschaftler und Kenner der jeweiligen Themenbereiche zum wissenschaftlichen Brückenschlag über den Atlantik hinweg beitragen und Anregungen für die Forschung am Kennedy-Institut sowie an anderen europäischen Amerikainstituten vermitteln.

Dieses Heft enthält die beiden Vorträge zum Rahmenthema "Neokonservatismus". Am 24. Juni 1987 hielt Seymour Martin Lipset (Stanford University) den ersten Ernst Fraenkel Vortrag. Ihm folgte am 10. Februar 1988 Peter Steinfels (New York Times), der schon 1979 mit dem Buch THE NEOCONSERVATIVES: THE MEN WHO ARE CHANGING AMERICA'S POLITICS, der ersten großen Studie dieses Phänomens, hervorgetreten war.

Die Vorträge wurden aus Mitteln finanziert, die die Fritz Thyssen Stiftung auf Antrag von Frau Professor Helga Haftendorn (Institut für Internationale Politik und Regionalstudien der FU Berlin) und mir (John F. Kennedy-Institut) zur Verfügung stellte. Der Stiftung gilt dafür ein besonderer Dank.

Berlin, im Juni 1988

Carl-Ludwig Holtfreich

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## Neoconservatism: Myth and Reality

### Seymour Martin Lipset

I feel very fortunate to be back here lecturing at the Free University where I led a seminar in 1953 and, as a result, had the experience of being downtown on the 17th of June and seeing a real revolution. But that is another subject.

I am particularly pleased to inaugurate the Ernst Fraenkel lecture series. Ernst Fraenkel, as you know, was a distinguished man, a great teacher and scholar, who also played an important role in politics. It is particularly noteworthy at this time, when South Korea appears on the verge of restoring democracy, that one of the things Ernst Fraenkel did before he returned to Berlin was write the Korean constitution.

What most comes to mind about Ernst Fraenkel, however, is that he was a passionate man who could not repress himself. He would get so wrapped up in an argument that he would start to yell. I can still recall his sitting across from me in my apartment in Zehlendorf and shouting in a voice which could be heard blocks away.

He is remembered for many intellectual accomplishments, but I cite him most frequently for laying down a very important dictum for scholars in the social sciences. He said that institutions always vary across national lines, that parties sind nicht Parteien and trade unions sind nicht Gewerkschaften. That is, it is impossible to translate institutional terms without knowing the different cultures behind the languages. Social and cultural analysis requires knowing at least two countries well, one's own and another, although the more the better. And, as you will see, a large part of what I have to say is that Konservatismus ist nicht conservatism.

### Introduction

The neoconservative trend in American politics should be termed a "tendency" rather than a "movement." It was never a cohesive set of beliefs, and has now almost disappeared from the political spectrum. The term itself is misunderstood abroad as well as in the United States. Much of the writing on the subject treats it as a variant of right-wing American conservatism, Friedmanite and Reaganite in its ideological orientation. In fact, the concept of neoconservatism arose out of quarrels within the American socialist movement, and the term was first applied as a way of discrediting political bona fides, much as social fascism was formulated by the Communists in the late twenties and early thirties to denigrate the Social Democrats. To understand neo-conservatism, it is necessary to examine the political failure of American socialism and the resultant sharp sectarian conflicts that emerged within the American left.

### Ideological Tendencies

Before tackling the subject itself, I think it important, particularly for a foreign audience, to give some background about ideological terms and tendencies in America. The words "conservative" and "liberal" mean something quite different in the United States than they do in Europe or, it should be noted, Canada as well. Many political writers such as H.G. Wells, Louis Hartz, George Grant, and Max Balogh have emphasized that there are no conservatives in America, that its citizens are all liberals. In The Future in America, published in 1906, in which Wells discussed the weakness of labor/socialist parties in the United States, he also noted that the country also lacked a conservative party of the kind present in Europe and Britain. He contended that the orientations of the two major American political parties, the Democrats and Republicans, corresponded to those of the left and right wings of the British Liberal Party. Wells asserted a thesis which was to be elaborated in 1955 by Louis Hartz in The Liberal Tradition in America, that the American political ethos is classically liberal in the 18th and 19th century sense of the term. Liberalism in its original meaning involves an anti-statist philosophy, opposition to mercantilism and the alliance of throne and altar, support for economic and political freedoms, laissez-faire and civil liberties, as well as egalitarianism in Tocquevillian terms, e.g., equality of opportunity and respect, regardless of status or income differences. Liberalism was the ideology of the American Revolution and remains the source of contemporary political values of the American right and left. Conservatism in the European and Canadian sense originated out of a defense of the alliance of monarchy and the church, religion and aristocracy. Tories have stood for a strong state, an established church, mercantilism, communitarianism, and noblesse oblige, i.e., the values of a hierarchical manorial society.

The American Revolution gave rise to an ideology which is anti-statist, anti-monarchical, anti-church establishment, pro meritocratic competition, and ultimately populist. Basically the American Creed has been suspicious of the state. The Founding Fathers first established a government which did not even have an executive, under the Articles of Confederation. It did not work. By 1789, they had accepted the need for an executive, but to control it set up an elaborate system of checks and balances deliberately intended to make domination by the central government difficult. The Bill of Rights was designed to inhibit state power. As Friedrich Engels pointed out, the pervasiveness of liberalism in America also may be linked to the fact that the United States is the purest example of a bourgeois state, formed in a society that lacks feudal or mercantilist origins. Bourgeois institutions and values occur in their most pristine form in America because it is the most important industrially developed country which is not post-feudal. What Americans seek to conserve is an anti-statist and equalitarian set of beliefs, an approach to

politics that in Europe is called "liberal." Hence, as has been suggested, Americans continue to support diverse forms of nineteenth century liberalism, not socialism or conservatism.

These American values have particularly affected the American left and labor movements. Not only has the United States lacked a socialist party of any significance, but membership in trade unions is smaller proportionately there than anywhere else in the industrialized world, only 15 percent of the non-agricultural employed labor force as of 1987. Even more significant is the continued opposition of American labor organizations to socialism, and the strong strain of anti-statism within them. The largest and most important trade union center, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) was syndicalist from its formation in 1886 to its merger with the smaller Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1955. The strongest radical or leftist trade union movement in American history, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), was anarcho-syndicalist.

Though much American labor history written by both Europeans and Americans describes the AFL as conservative compared to unions abroad, they are incorrect. Samuel Gompers, President of the AFL for most of its first four decades, was not a conservative. He argued that what the state can give, the state can take away. Workers should not depend on the state. They should rely only on themselves. Gompers believed that state owned industry would be a much tougher opponent for the union movement than private employers, since companies are weaker than the state. Workers, therefore are better off under capitalism than under public ownership. Unions can protect them more readily under the former.

The AFL was much more militant than European labor movements before and after World War I. Such behavior corresponds to the strong emphasis on competitiveness or winning in other areas of American life. Federation affiliates struck more readily, using more aggressive tactics than did European unions. Both the AFL and the IWW were more prone to use violence against strike breakers and to damage employer property. Prior to the Great Depression, therefore, American labor was militant and syndicalist. During the early thirties, American unions initiated the tactic of factory sit-ins during strikes, one which subsequently spread to France.

The syndicalist and anarcho-syndicalist background of the American labor movement helps to explain the strong anti-Communist and anti-Soviet stance taken by the bulk of the unions since World War II and their alliance with intellectual supporters of a hard-line American foreign policy. This behavior has puzzled foreign observers, including Soviet ones, but it is entirely explicable given the historic distrust of the state which trade unionists have shared with other Americans.

In Britain and Germany, conservatives led by Disraeli and Bismarck inaugurated the welfare state. Rural and aristocratic Tories disliked capitalists as selfish materialists. They believed in the hierarchical values of the manor, in the responsibility of elites to protect those beneath them. They found offensive the values of capitalism, which assumed workers should be discharged without notice when they were no longer needed or no longer useful because of illness, age, or the state of the economy. Marx' Das Kapital and Engels' Condition of the Working Class in England both described in detail the oppression of workers under British capitalism, the most advanced economy of their day. These books are replete with quotations from official reports of the maltreatment of factory workers. Who wrote those descriptions? Tories, conservatives, who believed in the values of aristocracy, monarchy, communitarianism, noblesse oblige. They were as outraged as the Marxists by the way in which workers were treated, since they believed that employers should protect their employees.

Various writers dealing with the issue of why no socialism in the United States, such as H.G. Wells, Louis Hartz, and Gad Horowitz, have argued that strong socialist movements are to be found in countries with a strong state tradition, that Socialism is the other side of Toryism. Harold Macmillan once defined Toryism as paternalistic socialism. The last speech that he made in the House of Lords, at the age of 90, was a bitter attack on Margaret Thatcher for mistreating coal miners during their prolonged strike in 1984. He said these are our people, these are loyal Englishmen who provided coal when we needed it during the war. As a classic Tory, he found her politics immoral. Macmillan's values are the essence of Toryism. Margaret Thatcher is a bourgeois liberal. She is a Reaganite, a Friedmanite. She is not a conservative in the European sense.

Like Macmillan, George Grant, Canada's leading conservative philosopher and theologian, strongly opposes bourgeois liberalism, which he identifies with the United States. He emphasizes the link between socialism and British-Canadian type conservatism. Both seek to use "public power to achieve national purpose." He believes Canadian culture is preferable to American because it contains strong Tory and socialist strands. Another Canadian scholar, Gad Horowitz, who is a socialist, has also pointed to the "common orientation towards the collectivity" of the two tendencies. He notes that "socialism has more in common with Toryism than liberalism, for liberalism is possessive individualism, while socialism and toryism are variants of collectivism."

Socialism has not appealed to Americans because it proposes to enlarge the power of the state. In Europe socialism could have a mass following since statism is rooted in national traditions. Where statism is legitimate, the egalitarian tendencies are also statist, i.e. socialist. But in America, given the suspicion of the state, the left



has been anti-statist. The most recent large scale effort to build radicalism in America, the New Left of the 1960s, was much closer to anarchism than to socialism in its ideology and organizational practices. The European revolutionary figure who appealed most to the American New Left was Rosa Luxemburg and she, of course, is an anti-statist figure. Although a Marxist, she viewed state and party power as dangerous.

The American emphasis on opposition to the state was modified drastically following the onslaught of the Great Depression in the 1930s. Richard Hofstadter noted that the Depression introduced "a social democratic tinge" into American politics and American trade unionism. The New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt fostered a welfare-planning-regulatory state, although he rejected proposals to nationalize industry and was explicitly anti-socialist, as was John L. Lewis, the founding leader of the CIO, who supported the Republicans in the twenties and forties. But classically liberal laissez faire individualistic doctrines remained strong on the right, among the Republicans and conservatives, and were gradually reestablished within the dominant American beliefs during the long post-war prosperity. Examples of the revival of these values are the six Republican victories out of the nine presidential elections since 1952 and the sharp decline in trade union membership, from one-third of the employed labor force in the mid-fifties to less than one-sixth in the mid-eighties.

### The Politics of Intellectuals

The relationship of this discussion of American values and political ideology to the topic, neoconservatism, rests in the fact that the tendency arose among intellectuals, the only stratum in American society in which leftist doctrines have made headway. American intellectuals (those involved in creative activities), as well as major sections of the intelligentsia (those who use intellectual products), have been alienated from the mainstream of bourgeois society, and some turned to socialist ideas as an alternative. In his book, Anti-intellectualism in the United States, Richard Hofstadter reported that, as of its publication in 1964, intellectuals in the United States had been on the left for at least the last three quarters of a century. Many in the smaller group of non-left intellectuals, such as Henry Adams, William James, and T.S. Eliot, were also alienated from American business and materialistic values. As Lionel Trilling has emphasized, these alienated intellectuals fostered an "adversary culture" antagonistic to capitalism. They have been progressives, liberals, socialists, and "greens." One of the constant patterns in American political life from the late 19th century on, the anti-materialistic conservation movement, has always drawn on the intelligentsia for support.

The Great Depression pressed many American intellectuals to the far left. In 1932, 400 writers, artists and academics, many of whom were very distinguished, issued a public statement endorsing Foster and Ford, the candidates for President and Vice President of the Communist Party. Post-war quantitative studies of the politics of academics have found that professors, particularly those in the social sciences and the humanities, have been much more disposed to support socialist or other leftist candidates than any other segment of the society for which opinion data exist. Faculty have disproportionately supported left-wing third parties. This does not mean that the majority have been radicals, but that the level of such commitments among them has been far higher than among the public at large. Only two percent of the general population voted for a left third party in 1948, but 15 percent of the social science professoriate did so. And more important than the opinions or vote of the stratum is the fact that the more successful, the more distinguished, the more creative they are, the more likely intellectuals are to be on the left. Friedrich Hayek attested to this phenomenon when reporting on his impressions of American university life in 1949, and these are supported by much subsequent survey data. Academics at the major universities, e.g., Harvard, Berkeley, Chicago, Yale, Stanford, are much more disposed to hold liberal-left views than at less prestigious schools. Those deeply involved in research and publication are more likely to be radical than those who primarily spend their time teaching. Recent studies of journalists find the same pattern; reporters working for major networks or newspapers are considerably to the left of the profession generally.

Thus it should be recognized that the free market-oriented United States has had important left wing tendencies within the intellectual community. However, given the persistent weakness of socialist and communist parties in America, these alienated intellectuals have operated in a political vacuum. Some have been members of the small radical parties, most have not. Hence, unlike the situation in Europe, there have been few pragmatic Realpolitik constraints on the ideological purity of the left intellectuals in America. In much of Europe, left intellectuals who wanted Praxis, who sought a meaningful relation between ideology and politics, could at different times in history support the socialists or Communists. Such a situation has never held true in the United States. America has had leftist intellectuals in abundance, but no mass party, no ideological pragmatism, no contact by radicals with policy relevant politics.

### Conflicts Within the Left

Relative to the size of the organized left in America, ideologically purist tendencies have been stronger in this country than elsewhere in the democratic world. Prior to 1945, Trotskyism was more influential in the United States than in































































