

Strauss and the Neo-Cons As Seen From Europe

Tim B. Mueller, “Party of Zeus/The Gang: The Influence of the Straussians on U.S. Politics,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Germany, March 5.

Mueller writes that one of the “ironies of history,” is that the strongest opponents, in the United States now, of the German anti-war position toward Iraq, are followers of a German-Jewish emigré to the United States, Leo Strauss. “The *New York Times* called him the ‘Godfather’ of the Republican Party’s 1994 ‘Contract with America.’ For *Time*, he is ‘one of the most influential men in American politics.’ And the *New Republic* calls his followers in the political and academic world, ‘one of the Top Ten gangs of the millennium.’ ”

Strauss received his doctorate under Ernst Cassirer, then came under the influence of Martin Heidegger, and was then promoted by Carl Schmitt. He then went to the University of Chicago, where he taught political philosophy for around 20 years, and built a “community” around himself, which is now very influential in the George W. Bush Administration and in the political science departments of American universities. “Most neo-conservatives are pupils, or pupils of pupils, of Leo Strauss. Several have studied with prominent Straussians, such as Harvey Mansfield or Allan Bloom.”

Mueller reports the importance of the Podhoretz (father Norman and son John) and Kristol (Irving and William) families, in the neo-conservative movements, and in the American Enterprise Institute, “before which Bush gave his Iraq speech the other day.” William Kristol, whose *Weekly Standard* is the mouthpiece of the neo-cons, was a student of Harvey Mansfield. Straussians also dominate the *Wall Street Journal*, several neo-con think tanks, and the Olin Foundation.

Certainly, with George W. Bush personally, says Mueller, there are other influences. But “the most important Straussian political figure is Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defense, whom several commentators call the ‘super-brain’ of the government. He didn’t only study with nuclear warfare strategist Albert Wohlstetter, but also with Allan Bloom—as did Francis Fukuyama, the most well-known Straussian in the Administration.”

According to Mueller, “one cannot understand present American politics, without knowing about the Straussian background of its leading neo-conservative thinkers.” He explains that Straussianism is a mixture of “elitist” ideas, with a religion built around “patriotism,” together with a return to the “democratic interventionism of Teddy Roose-



Organizing in Washington, D.C. on March 12, against the war drive of Leo Strauss’ chicken-hawks.

velt.” On “elitism,” Strauss insisted, that truth is reserved only for the few, “the philosophers.”

“Those ‘Straussian’ Intellectuals Who Make Up the Ranks of the American Hawks,” *Libération*, France, March 10.

“In the United States it is not the military who want the war. It is the intellectuals. The main ‘hawk’ of the Bush Administration, Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defense, is the most famous among them. . . . He studied at the University of Chicago, under the dual influence of philosopher Allan Bloom . . . and of mathematician Albert Wohlstetter, father of the American nuclear doctrine.

“It is not rare to see that the most bellicose are also the finest literati. One is Victor David Hanson, professor at the University of California, specialist in ancient Greece, who has constructed a theory according to which the military superiority of the West is the reflection of its cultural superiority. And Donald Kagan, Yale professor and another eminent historian of antiquity, and father of one of the most prolific neo-conservative ideologues, Robert Kagan. Wolfowitz and his friends are often characterized as ‘Straussians.’

“Leo Strauss (1899-1973) a Jewish intellectual having fled the Hitlerian regime, was in rebellion against modernity, the cause, according to him, of the emergence of Stalinism and of Nazism.” The neo-conservatives today have “the conviction that democracy and freedom must be implanted everywhere in the world, because each country is capable of receiving it,” states one of them, essayist David Brooks. “Several of the neo-conservatives of today attended [Strauss’] classes: not only Wolfowitz, but also Francis Fukuyama (author of *The End of History*), or John Podhoretz (editorial page editor of the *New York Post* and son of neo-conservative Norman Podhoretz). Another hawk, Bill Kristol, director of the *Weekly Standard* (and son of one of the founders of neo-conservatism, Irving Kristol) had Mansfield as a teacher.”