

# The Imperial Trajectory

by Jerry Woodruff

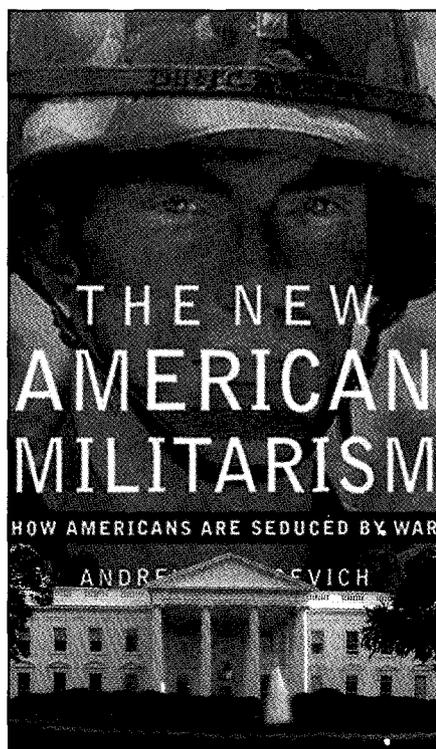
*"We oppose militarism. It means conquest abroad and intimidation and oppression at home. It means the strong arm which has ever been fatal to free institutions. It is what millions of our citizens have fled from Europe."*

—Democratic National Platform, 1900

**The New American Militarism:  
How Americans Are Seduced by War**  
by Andrew J. Bacevich  
New York: Oxford University Press;  
270 pp., \$28.00

Mention militarism, and names that come to mind probably include men on horseback such as Julius Caesar and Napoleon Bonaparte, not such desk-bound keyboard jockeys as Norman Podhoretz and Irving Kristol. Yet these and other neoconservative writers have helped foster an intellectual climate conducive to the emergence of what Andrew J. Bacevich calls "a peculiarly American variant of militarism" in the post-Cold War era. Bacevich's new book features no villains or conspiracies, however—only a fortuitous convergence of social, political, geographic, and economic forces that has produced "the new militarism." The neoconservative intellectual network is presented as merely a single contingent that, in combination with the military establishment's "never again" reaction to America's ignominious rout in Vietnam, created a post-Cold War faith in all things military, leading not just to the invasion of Iraq but to a sprawling projection of American power

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across the globe.

Bacevich, a West Point graduate, self-described conservative, and critic of the Iraq war, explicitly rejects the notion that responsibility for the phenomenon lies with any particular president or his advisors. That explanation, he argues, "lets too many others off the hook and allows society at large to abdicate responsibility for what has come to pass." Nonetheless, Bacevich insists that his intent is not "to deprive George W. Bush or his advisors of whatever credit or blame they may deserve" for America's increasing reliance on military prowess to achieve foreign-policy goals. Instead, he wants to show that "a military predisposition was already in place both in official circles and among Americans more generally," well

before the neocon-directed global "War on Terror."

Bacevich's argument is a formidable one, backed by an impressive array of supporting evidence that shows the author in masterful command of his subject. One of the virtues of *The New American Militarism* is that it is more analysis than polemic. Those conservatives, however, who take a longer view of America's empire-building and the role the military has played in the project may find the book's analysis incomplete. For, in Bacevich's view, the "new American militarism" did not sprout from the grand conquests of World War II and the resulting global projection of American military power (which seems never to have receded at war's end) but as a reaction to the defeat in Vietnam and the accompanying social upheavals of the 1960's.

That paradoxical outcome is partly the result of the efforts of a post-Vietnam officer corps whose members aligned themselves intellectually with what Bacevich describes as America's "forces of reaction" in an effort to refurbish the image of the American military establishment and to resist the radical social changes under way in what they feared amounted to the cultural Weimarization of the United States. Their primary motivations were to reassert their professional autonomy, so thoroughly undermined by the Department of Defense's civilian handlers during the war, and to rehabilitate the

military's reputation. Although these efforts ultimately produced what Bacevich calls "a remarkable rebirth of American military power" during the post-Vietnam Cold War years, the officers' reforms had unintended consequences, including the rise of "militaristic tendencies . . . incompatible with traditional conceptions of military professionalism that had set apart war as a separate domain, subject primarily to the authority of military officers."

In the aftermath of Vietnam, America's officer class cleaned house, purging the ranks of "the dopers and the bigots, the malcontents and the untrainable," and embarked on a campaign of innovation on a massive scale in strategy, tactics, weapons, training, and overall military doctrine.

The officers concentrated their efforts on remaking the military to fight neither the "total war" of nuclear annihilation represented by Hiroshima and Nagasaki nor the "people's war" of guerilla combat waged in Vietnam and Algeria. Instead, they created an armed force that could fight the kind of high-tech, high-velocity wars witnessed in 1967 and 1973 between Arabs and Israelis in the Middle East.

The new doctrine for warfare—similar in basic ways to the *blitzkrieg* developed by the German Wehrmacht in the 1930's—exploits the advantages of the digital revolution, while relying on concentrated force, weapons of exceptional lethality that can be launched from great distances beyond the enemy's reach, and overwhelming suddenness and violence to blind and bewilder any foe. In Desert Storm—the first Persian Gulf War—that doctrine produced a stunning victory that the Joint Chiefs and civilian defense analysts believed would be replicated in America's future conventional wars. But the quick and efficient victory that had "redeemed" the U.S. military's reputation and prestige from the disaster of Vietnam also sparked a new post-Cold War vision among dazzled civilian officials who began to think that, "In war, it seemed, lay America's true comparative advantage." In an era when the United States had become the world's lone superpower, "larger questions about just what it was the Defense Department ought to be defending simply never came up for serious discussion." Thus, reform of the military resulted in an unprecedented capacity for projecting power around the globe, making, as Bacevich says, "the use or threatened use of armed force central to the American conception of interna-

tional politics."

Neoconservative theoreticians who believe America's role in the world is to spread democracy and capitalism—by force, if necessary—played a major role in developing this new conception. Robert Kagan has succinctly summed up neoconservative thinking:

[I]f the United States is founded on universal principles, how can Americans practice amoral indifference when those principles are under siege around the world? And if they do profess indifference, how can they manage to avoid the implications that their principles are not, in fact, universal?

Deploying the military where needed to impose those principles has acquired respectability among America's political elites. In a conversation about whether the United States should involve herself in the ethnic conflict in Bosnia during the early years of the Clinton administration, Madeleine Albright, then-U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, famously demanded of the reticent chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell, "What's the point in having this superb military you are always talking about if we can't use it?" Military force was transformed from an option of "last resort" for the defense of vital interests into a tool of foreign policy—and morality.

The incorporation of military force as an adjunct to diplomacy in the 1990's did not occur in a social or political vacuum. Americans were already prepared to accept such a concept, Bacevich argues, through the celebration of, and fascination with, military culture that had been developing across society at large during the previous decade, at least. Bacevich places responsibility for popularizing the moral underpinning of America's new militarism squarely on the shoulders of President Ronald Reagan: "More than anyone else, he deserves the credit for conjuring up the myths that nurtured and sustain present-day American militarism." Following the comparatively dreary years of the Carter administration, the optimist Reagan "manipulated" the symbols of patriotism, frequently praised the armed services, spoke reverentially of soldiers as heroes, and used these themes to rally support for both his political campaigns and his administration's policies. He called on

Americans to admire and appreciate the great deeds performed by soldiers in a "sanitized" version of American history and, for the first time, offered citizens a way to "support the troops" without having to confront physical risk themselves—a key component of the new militarism.

The sea change was aided by Hollywood, which happily produced films enlisting what Bacevich describes as "various Reaganesque motifs" (*An Officer and a Gentleman*, *Rambo*, *Top Gun*, etc.). Popular literature played a part, too, as such mass-market novels as *The Hunt for Red October*, *Red Storm Rising*, and *Patriot Games* fueled a new respect and admiration for the military establishment.

According to Bacevich, however, the one factor absent which the new American militarism becomes "inconceivable" is the rise of the conservative evangelical Protestant movement. In reaction to the social upheaval of the 1960's and the attacks on the U.S. military by the radical left, conservative evangelicals rose to defend American social and cultural norms against the radical-inspired counterculture. Defending America's role in Vietnam, they abandoned their traditional skepticism regarding the morality of force. "[I]nspired in no small measure by their devotion to Israel," Bacevich writes, "they articulated a highly permissive interpretation of the just war tradition . . ."

The modern conservative evangelical movement was forged during the Cold War, in which atheist communism represented the main temporal enemy of Christian activists. During those years, the charismatic Rev. Billy Graham assured Christians that America's posture toward the Soviet Union and our military action against communists in Korea and Vietnam were just. On the home front, evangelicals sought to protect the social fabric. "In a decadent and morally confused time, they came to celebrate the military itself as [a] bastion of the values required to stem the nation's slide toward perdition."

Reciprocating their support, the military made common cause with conservative Christians in the Vietnam era. This *entente* was signaled in 1972 when the U.S. Military Academy at West Point presented the Reverend Graham with its Sylvanus Thayer Award, conferred on outstanding citizens who exemplify the ideals of honor, duty, and country. Bacevich finds great significance in the award's citation praising the preacher for his de-

fense of “traditional values”—a formulation “loaded with political connotations.” Accepting the award, Graham expressed the hope that the values of West Point would fuse with religious traditionalism, the two becoming “the beacon lights to guide our nation” through tumultuous times. Eventually, evangelical preachers Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Bakker, and others formed a Religious Coalition for a Moral Defense Policy, cementing religious belief with national defense. Thus was born a sociocultural alliance in which the Armed Forces, a prime target in the culture wars, embraced the evangelicals as allies in the fight against a common foe—at a time when conservatives in the Republican Party were seeking to mobilize the “religious right” on behalf of the GOP’s political agenda. Today, of course, conservative Christians are an important and potent (though not monolithic) political force, with some 100 million Americans reportedly identifying themselves as evangelicals.

Although Bacevich believes that the “knee-jerk bellicosity” of Christian conservatives in the 1970’s and 1980’s has abated somewhat, he maintains that

Conservative Christians have conferred a presumptive moral palatability on any occasion on which the United States resorts to force. . . . They have fostered among the legions of believing Americans a predisposition to see U.S. military power as inherently good. . . . In doing so, they have nurtured the pre-conditions that have enabled the American infatuation with military power to flourish.

According to many of the neoconservative thinkers and political advisors who provide the theoretical framework for force projection throughout the world, we are now engaged in World War IV: an open-ended global struggle against international terrorism. (In neoconservative thinking, the Cold War was World War III, lasting from 1947 to 1989, and was decisively won by the United States.) To Bacevich, however, the neoconservatives’ World War IV is a superficial concept. A more realistic assessment of the meaning of the ongoing conflict, he argues, can be

found in America’s involvement in the Persian Gulf. The military, cultural, and geopolitical forces leading to the latest protracted conflict were overtly engaged by President Jimmy Carter in his State of the Union Address of January 1980, in which he declared that

An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.

That doctrine, which resulted from the need to maintain American access to cheap oil and thereby preserve the American way of life, is, argues Bacevich, the visible policy expression of a belief held by American foreign-policy elites that, through the skillful application of military power, the United States will be able to “decide the fate not simply of the Persian Gulf proper but . . . of the entire Greater Middle East.” It is this gigantically ambitious project, Bacevich asserts, that amounts to the *real* World War IV. Proponents of the new militarism see America’s war on Iraq as an effort to establish an invincible force in the Middle East, resulting in a new political order in the center of the Persian Gulf. Policed by the United States, that new order will help pacify the region and guarantee uninterrupted oil supplies, while enforcing acceptance of a Jewish state in the Islamic Arab world. In Bacevich’s view, the events of September 11, 2001, merely enhanced the progressive militarization of U.S. policy.

**I**s *militarism* really the right word to describe the phenomenon Bacevich identifies? Significantly, the “peculiarly American variant” that today dominates U.S. foreign policy is not the result of unprecedentedly heavy influence exercised by American military officers. In fact, both foreign policy and the military itself remain firmly under civilian control and direction. Not uniformed generals but “various members of the civilian elite, whether in pursuit of an ideological, humanitarian, or strategic agenda,” are the ones who cultivate “an increasingly hearty appetite for intervention.” As Michael Mann, author of *Incoherent Empire*, has observed, “the notion of civilian control of the military [has become] meaningless, since civilians [are]

the leading militarists.”

Neoconservative George Weigel, for example, has argued for a “democratic internationalism” that requires active global engagement, backed by American military power. That the driving force behind global interventionism comes from civilian idealists eager to impose a set of politically inspired and (putatively) morally derived values raises an important question about the very center of gravity of Bacevich’s book. Is it not more accurate to describe this militarization process—the moralization of force—as simply the latest manifestation of America’s longstanding imperialism?

*The Oxford English Dictionary* defines *militarism* as characterized by the spirit and tendencies of soldiers, the prevalence of military sentiments or ideals among the people, the tendency to regard military efficiency as the paramount interest of the state, and the predominance of the military class in government. Bacevich insists that the new American militarism fulfills all those elements except the last, since the “military class” in Washington really consists of civilians who are “politicians, civil servants, journalists,” and others who simply have a “militarist” mindset. But the civilians who militarized U.S. foreign policy do not seek to impose the military virtues of obedience, discipline, honor, valor, and duty on anyone—nor are they themselves motivated by such virtues. They want, instead, to cultivate a global respect for “human rights” and to establish “democracy,” “free markets,” and, according to Gen. Wesley Clark, multiculturalism. (“There is no place in modern Europe for ethnically pure states. That’s a 19th century idea and we are trying to transition into the 21st century, and we are going to do it with multi-ethnic states,” he told CNN during America’s military intervention against Serbia in 1999.)

The patriarchy and autocracy ordinarily associated with the military mentality are precisely what some neoconservative supporters of the Iraq war hope to abolish in the Arab world. Victor Davis Hanson believes that “the plague of tribalism, gender apartheid, human rights abuses, religious fanaticism, and patriarchy” that characterize Arab culture must be ended by “democracy—and its twin of open market capitalism.” Hanson wants the Arab world transformed by the consumerism and individualism of the West through the “spread into traditional societies of Western-style popular

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culture, liberality and materialism . . .” That means replacing the Arab world’s autocracies not with uniformed military rulers from West Point but with lawyers, journalists, advertising executives, investment bankers, and corporate CEOs. Nor has “military efficiency” become overnight the paramount interest of the globally hegemonic American state. Instead, that state seeks to maintain—in the words of neoconservative columnist Charles Krauthammer, who presumes to speak for it—a “uniquely benign imperium,” which exists to protect, advance, and, where necessary, impose Robert Kagan’s “universal principles” on behalf of all mankind. Thus, the “militarization” described by Bacevich seems more like a continuation of the older imperial policies pursued by President Franklin D. Roosevelt during World War II. FDR’s wartime propaganda, which depicted that war as a contest between democracy (representing “universal principles”) and dictatorship, actually bears a striking similarity to the rationale for military force employed today.

In a brilliant and devastating review of Gen. Tommy Franks’ memoir, *American Soldier* (*New Left Review*, September-October 2004), Bacevich noted that, “in ways not always appreciated by or even agreeable to those who actually pull triggers and drop bombs, war is . . . always profoundly political.” So is military policy. Without a political content supplied by civilians, the militarization of American foreign policy could not have occurred. The origin of this policy is clearly not the Vietnam War but the global extension of American power following the Allied victory in World War II. The postwar efforts of American elites to maintain those far-flung troop garrisons, bases and airstrips, refueling depots and ports established the precedents without which the force projections of the 1990’s and since would have been impossible.

In this context, Vietnam may be seen not as a turning point or a beginning but as a temporary downturn along a more extended imperial trajectory.

Sen. Robert Taft, speaking in the fall of 1940 against potential American intervention in the European war, even to protect England, warned, “If the English Channel is our frontier, and this is our war, then we will have to defend it for years to come.” Sixty years after World War II ended, American troops are still in Europe (and Asia), and the expanded

frontier Taft foresaw has moved far beyond the channel.

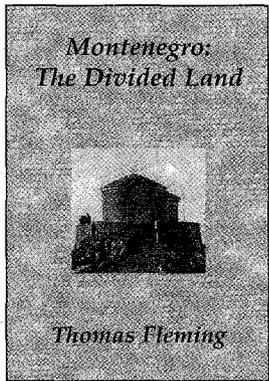
Today, that war is the prime source of the romanticized vision of soldiering and warfare that has become deeply embedded in the popular imagination. From *Saving Private Ryan* to the older *Sands of Iwo Jima*, no doubt more than a hundred films have been made, glorifying the exploits of U.S. troops as they make the world safe for democracy by killing thin-lipped, scar-faced Germans and vicious, buck-toothed Japanese. Even Ronald Reagan’s often dreamy evocation of the very real sacrifices made by American men in uniform was more often than not derived from the history of World War II. Despite the temporary damage American military prestige sustained from attacks by the left during the Vietnam War, World War II reemerged unscathed in the modern national psyche. In an apparent effort to transfer some of that war’s legitimacy to the Iraq invasion, for example, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice compared the terrorist attacks on American troops after the fall of Baghdad to the guerilla actions of Nazi “werewolves” who operated briefly in Allied-occupied Germany in the days before the seizure of Berlin.

The fact that the familiar political rhetoric and propaganda imagery persist 60 years later, accompanied by perennial celebrations of a never-ending list of battles, liberations, and beach landings, suggests the existence of enduring elites

that reap some power-enhancing benefits from their use. The social formations maintained by America’s imperial military projections can easily manipulate the symbols and rhetoric that animate various constituencies on behalf of one policy or another. Taken together, those policies all contribute to the social and political health of an elite that arranges for their implementation, even when the differing constituencies enlisted to support those policies are at odds with one another. Hence, on behalf of his invasion of Haiti to “restore democracy,” President Clinton had no need to seek the backing of conservative evangelical Protestants, despite their alleged delight in witnessing America flex her military muscles. Support for that project came from the Congressional Black Caucus and its constituency of radical minorities eager to see their far-left ally, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, installed in Port-au-Prince.

No matter which constituencies are marshaled for which particular policies advocated by whichever party happens to occupy the White House, the American drive since World War II for a global, multicultural-democratic-capitalist imperium never slackens.

Bacevich’s argument does not encompass that larger issue, which, if engaged, might have necessitated some adjustments to his presentation. Nonetheless, the impressive depth and force of his analysis are likely to bring *The New American Militarism* a significant measure of influence. ◊



**Montenegro:  
The Divided Land**

Thomas Fleming

### This Time, Be Prepared

The Serb land of Montenegro is once again at the crossroads of history. The blood-soaked mountains and dramatic coastline of this small land have been fought over by Illyrians, Macedonians, Romans, Byzantines, Turks, and Venetians, and, in the 20th century, by the armies of Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Germany. In World War II, Montenegro lost more men, per capita, than any nation of Europe, and now it is the latest target of the so-called international community, which has tried to create a phony separatist movement (complete with a bogus national church) to continue the disastrous policies that have involved the United States in wars over Bosnia and Kosovo.

Thomas Fleming has written the first well-researched history of Montenegro in the English language, taking the story from ancient times all the way up to the current crisis over separation from Serbia. This is no dry academic tome but a lively account of a brave people whose brave history rivals the tales of Leonidas and his Spartans at Thermopylae.

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# The Party Pooper

by Derek Turner

## The Party's Over: Blueprint for a Very English Revolution

by Keith Sutherland

Exeter: Imprint Academic;

196 pp., \$39.90



Keith Sutherland is a respected British publisher of such works as *History of Political Thought* and *Polis: The Journal of Greek Political Thought*, as well as the executive editor of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. He has also edited such important collections of essays as *The Rape of the Constitution?* (2000)—of which compendium Margaret Thatcher asked, “I only wonder if you need that question mark in the title.” Imprint Academic (of which he is proprietor) has published many other books on subjects as diverse as education, the nature of liberalism, the prime ministership, legal reforms, and cultural history. Most recently, he was assailed by the far-left *Independent* as the publisher of an “Islamophobic rant” for having the temerity to issue former immigration caseworker Steve Moxon’s *The Great Immigration Scandal*, which told the story of Moxon’s dismissal by the Home Office for telling the sorry truth about Labour’s *soi-disant* “firm but fair” immigration policy. To aggravate this diabolical sin against present pieties, Sutherland is also an occasional contributor to *Right Now!*; indeed, his book has its “remote origins” in an article that appeared in our pages in 2001.

*Chronicles* readers will by now have gathered that Sutherland is a person of considerable erudition, who has made—and is continuing to make—a major contribution to political and philosophical discourse in the United Kingdom; decidedly, he is not the “provincial scribbler” he dubs himself. So *The Party's Over* clearly merits attention from all who are concerned by the decay of democracy and social capital—not just in Britain but in all Western countries.

Echoing one of Socrates’ arguments with Gorgias, Keith Sutherland is worried that we now have “a system of government that a) is not based on knowledge and competence and b) puts power in the hands of rhetoricians.” He be-

lieves that this state of affairs has been largely caused, and is certainly exacerbated, by Britain’s political-party system, which is, he realizes, “incapable of reflecting the fragmented and pluralistic reality of modern life.” In the course of a dazzling constitutional Cook’s Tour, Sutherland proceeds to describe Britain’s political parties as “the bastard grandson of one of the darkest and most bloody periods of British history,” “an anachronism,” “a danger to democracy,” and “an affront to the constitutional dignity of this country.” The whole idea of “representative democracy” à la Burke is hopelessly outdated, he argues, in our age of large, transient, and diverse populations. Sutherland thinks also that advanced communications technology has rendered obsolescent the Victorian paraphernalia of geographical constituencies and ballot boxes.

He wishes to revitalize political life to limit politicians’ powers of patronage and self-serving, to discourage cheap sloganeering and the kind of childish factionalism that prevents opposition parties supporting even sensible governmental policies, and to let ordinary people have a greater and more informed stake in decisionmaking. He wants to make politics more local, more practical, and “less interesting” and is inspired by the example of Michael Oakeshott and other empiricists (although here his thinking seems somewhat at odds with his earlier approving citation of one of the contributors to *The Rape of the Constitution?*, who had declared that “the forces of radicalism on the right and the left must be deployed against the incremental totalitarianism of the extremists of the authoritarian centre”).

Although he is sketchy on detail, Sutherland proposes the replacement of the political party with a system whereby MPs are picked at random from the population, and also a stricter interpretation of the constitution that would allow the Crown once again to contribute to policymaking. The term “minister of the Crown” should, he believes, be more than just a polite fiction (although, paradoxically, under his proposals, the monarch would still have no real power). Meanwhile, government departments and the offices of members of Parliament should be drastically slimmed down and more power should be given back to local councils.

Sutherland argues that the major political parties have become so alike that

they are effectively redundant. New Labourism has been met by Diet Toryism. A liberal market consensus prevails, from which politicians deviate at peril of contumely and ostracism. Instead of ideologically discrete parties, electors are increasingly presented with Tweedledum and Tweedledee candidates and vote on the basis of which party offers the largest bribes or simultaneously pulls the most heartstrings. (Sutherland compares the present system unfavorably with that existing before the 1832 Reform Act when, at least, “politicians bought elections with their own money.” Better a few rotten boroughs, one might argue, than a rotten country.)

Today, whichever Buggins gets in, the results are the same, although each may differ in degree—the indulgence of evil, the erosion of both liberty and tradition, the penalization of the provident. It is small wonder that voter turnouts are dwindling, as people begin dimly to realize that their votes make little or no difference to their quality of life. And yet politicians like to claim “popular mandates” to pursue what often prove to be stupid or even disastrous policies. Sutherland dissects the myth of “popular mandates” witheringly, showing that almost never in recent history has any political party really possessed the trust of a majority of the population. Insofar as politicians are concerned about declining numbers of voters, they never consider the possibility that this phenomenon might be *their* fault. Instead of looking at the worm within and seeking to make their various parties more intelligent and responsive, some politicians decry populism and propose, instead, to make voting compulsory. Meanwhile, within the parties, the respective hierarchies are continually thinking of new ways to minimize the autonomy and influence of rank-and-file members. (In November, for example, Conservative Central Office announced plans to exclude grassroots Tories from having any say in the future over who is to be party leader.) The shortfall in private donations to political parties that affects all parties should be compensated for, an increasing number of politicians think, with taxpayers’ money—a proposal clearly likely to make the parties even more similar than they are already.

Sutherland does not believe that proportional representation, which leads inevitably to instability and lack of direction, is the answer to the big-party mal-