

LXXI – Democracy By Fiat

LRC lewrockwell.com/1970/01/butler-shaffer/lxxi-democracy-by-fiat

By Butler Shaffer

Hardly a day passes without George Bush, congressmen or cabinet members, or their media lickspittles, smuggling into their chatter references to "democracy in Iraq." The words flow as a well-rehearsed mantra, so subtly as to draw no attention to an undiscerning mind. Like any cliché, its repeated offering is intended to be the validation of its content, such that only a wastrel of time could be expected to challenge its veracity.

"Democracy," said H.L. Mencken, "is the belief that the common man knows what he wants and deserves to get it good and hard." The people of Iraq are about to get "democracy," American-style, but without any regard to whether they actually want it. A Bolshevik speaker promised his audience "come the revolution, we will all eat strawberries and cream." "But I don't like strawberries and cream," responded a listener. "Come the revolution we will all eat strawberries and cream!," the Bolshevik intoned. Such are the parameters of "freedom and democracy" now being put together by neocon planners in Washington.

An early tip-off to the nature of the "Iraqi democracy" sham was the creation of the "Iraqi Governing Council," an American-run front that has about as much to do with the democratic process as the Bonn Conference's appointment, in November, 2001, of Hamid Karzai to be president of Afghanistan. Allusions to the "Jewish councils" and "kapos" established by the German government in ghettos and concentration camps to help govern Jews — under German direction — come to mind. Should the Iraqi Governing Council get any ideas about becoming independent of American authority, they will quickly discover the restraints that every government places on democratic rule.

Taking the democracy hoax to its next level, the United States — with the help of its appointed local puppets — began putting together a "constitution" for the Iraqi people. Not wanting to incur the transaction costs implicit in securing the consent of even a majority of Iraqis — a step one would have expected with any constitution grounded in the "social contract" myth — the details began to be fleshed out. Jay Leno — perhaps the closest to a real journalist on network television — suggested that America send the Iraqis ours. "It served us well for over two hundred years, and we're not using it anymore," Leno quipped. Will National Review be designated The Federalist Papers for the "new Iraq?" Will Bush, Rumsfeld, Cheney, Bremer, Powell, Wolfowitz, et al., be decreed the "founding fathers" of a people whose cultural roots extend backwards for millennia?

Cranking out constitutions under which other nations will be forced to live is nothing new to the United States. Following the Spanish-American War, the U.S. pledged that "Cuba should be free and independent," but that the American Congress should have final approval of the

Cuban Constitution. Under the final draft, the US was given "the right to intervene," militarily, in Cuban affairs. Such is the nature of the "independence" Washington is prepared to acknowledge for subjugated nations.

The Iraqis are in the process of learning what early 20th century Cubans learned: the counterfeit meaning that the United States ascribes to "independence" when applying it to foreign nations. The Bush administration continues to speak of the Iraqis assuming control of "their" government on June 30th, but when the details are examined, such control is as vacuous of meaning as George Bush's continued use of the word "freedom." The Iraqis will have no control over the police or military, and no power to legislate laws or establish budgets.

Even the United States acknowledges that the true sovereign authority in Iraq will be the American ambassador. In words reflective of the Orwellian "double-speak" that has become the style in this administration, Secretary of State Colin Powell declared that while Iraq would have "sovereignty," some of "that sovereignty they are going to allow us to exercise on their behalf and with their permission." Mr. Powell should have learned from his own ancestral history in slavery that one is not "sovereign" if permission to act resides in another; if others retain lawful authority over your life.

So far-reaching has the American government gone in defining and enforcing the "new Iraq," that even the Iraqi flag has been created under Washington direction! I wonder in what public relations office or commercial arts studio in New York City this banner was designed? After months of having the American flag shoved down their throats, many Iraqis – incensed at what they saw as similarities with the Israeli flag – publicly burned the new model. Hollywood music writers may even be busy, as I write, composing a new national anthem for Iraqi school children to learn in their American-run schools!

Perhaps the silliest illustration of Washington efforts to foist "democracy" on the Iraqis arose upon Donald Rumsfeld's arrival in Iraq following revelations of the atrocities at the Abu Ghraib prison. According to a cable television news report, Mr. Rumsfeld would be holding a "town hall meeting" in Baghdad to discuss the problems. For those who, unlike myself, believe in political systems, the idea of a "town hall meeting" comes about as close to a genuine democracy as one finds. But it has relevance only within a town small enough to allow for a genuine exchange of ideas and proposals leading, ultimately, not just to a majority-supported result, but one in which a genuine consensus might be reached among all.

The idea of a "town hall meeting" has been appropriated by the major political parties in America, and twisted into nothing that comes close to resembling any coherent community of individuals. A hall is hired and filled with pre-selected audience members, a number of whom have been given prepared questions to ask the candidate. That you or I could show up, uninvited, to take a seat and ask the sorts of questions of interest to us, is as unlikely in

modern American politics as in Baghdad. Does the American government really expect this "town hall" gathering to be open to the insurgents now fighting U.S. soldiers, or to the followers of Muqtada al-Sadr? This "town hall" charade in Iraq is such an absurdity that I suspect a few members of political science faculties across America would even see through it.

One of many as yet unanswered questions has to do with the election processes to be employed in Iraq. It is difficult to pull off the "democracy" scam without having elections, no matter how carefully rigged they might be. Which parties and candidates will be "permitted" — doubtless by the US ambassador's counseled generosity — to seek office? What platforms and other promises must be adhered to in order to qualify for certification? Will an "Iraqi League of Women Voters" conduct carefully staged debates among the candidates who have earned White House approval? What if Saddam Hussein should win the presidency as a write-in candidate? Who will count the votes, and will we, as per the 2000 American elections, see the United States Supreme Court declaring the victor?

One of the unintended consequences of the effort to establish democracy by fiat may be to reveal, to Americans, the chimerical nature of their own system. Perhaps more of our neighbors will, like Iraqi skeptics, begin to look behind the façade of the supposedly democratic processes under which they live, and discover the real sovereign powers who put their puppets in place to perform according to scripts written by those who pull their strings. Just as the Iraqis will realize that whether they are ruled by Paul Bremer or a future US ambassador carries no meaningful distinction, Americans may understand that George W. Bush and John Kerry are only fungible stand-ins for those who look on from the wings.

I was recently in Prague, and had the opportunity to visit the royal palace. Outside the main entrance to the grounds stood two giant statues: one of a man holding another man to the ground, about to slay him with a long knife; the other a statue of a man with a giant club, who was in the process of pounding his victim into submission. I commented to my wife that at least there was a time when political systems were more open about their purposes and methods. No pretenses about the "consent of the governed" in these forms; no latent sentiments about constitutions with their allegedly "limited powers." Here was the state portrayed in its very essence: the exercise of deadly, brute force upon all who will not submit to state authority.

Even though Hussein has been removed from power — the alleged purpose of this war — American troops continue to kill Iraqi men, women, and children in the name of bringing "freedom" to their country. American soldiers have taken over the torture of Iraqi civilians in the very prison in which such atrocities were carried out by Hussein's henchmen. As a result of such efforts, the Bush administration has succeeded in uniting disparate Iraqi groups in opposition to Washington's occupying forces. Had America been invaded by the Chinese army, those who sought to defend their homeland from the attackers would be revered as patriots, as were French and Polish resistance fighters who opposed Nazi subjugation. But

when Iraqis take up arms against an American invader, only the image of the al-Qaeda terrorist is offered by the United States and its media as an explanation.

The contrast between the fantasies and the realities of politics may have best been described by Hollywood. One of the most popular series of films ever produced was The Godfather trilogy. While I have no abiding interest in organized crime — apart from keeping an eye on political systems — I found this series enjoyable. I suspect that my interest arose from the fact that the characters exhibited a kind of integrity (i.e., a consistent adherence to a code of conduct or values). The "families" were up front about their purposes: they had business interests they sought to expand, geographic territories to defend, and a firm commitment to remove by any means — lying and deceit, if possible, or killing, if necessary — anyone who got in their way.

The family leaders engaged in no self-righteous posturing regarding their motivations. If the Corleone family wanted to move into a territory in which Tartaglia family interests were established, they simply did so, usually with staccato orchestration provided by machine guns. There was no pretense that the move was designed to "bring democracy" to the people of Jersey City, or to "liberate" Brooklyn from the tyrannical clutches of the Tartaglias. Like a street mugger who takes your money at gunpoint without feeling the need to mouth Keynesian doctrines about the "multiplier effect," these crime organizations operated from no higher principle than a superior force of arms.

Would that governments were as unabashed in their purposes as this; that their pursuits of despoliation and power over others were not embroidered with the kind of unctuous sentimentality that President Alfred E. Neumann regularly gushes. What if the Capitol building, the White House, and the Supreme Court building, each had at their entrances the kind of statuary I observed in Prague? Perhaps the American people would then learn the lesson now being forcibly thrust upon the people of Iraq: that "democracy" is to "liberty" as "war" is to "peace."

[The Best of Butler Shaffer](#)

