

## Enthusiastic Democracy

Less than a month after President Bush unbosomed his latest reflections on political philosophy before the National Endowment for Democracy in Washington, one of the latest victims of his administration's crusade to foster the "global democratic revolution" in Iraq was grousing that what the administration planned for his country simply wasn't democratic enough. The Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, leader of the 15 million Shiite Muslims of Iraq, some 60 percent of the population, announced his opposition to the neat little blueprint for "democracy" that the president's neocon policy wonks had decided would be suitable for the Iraqi rabble. The grand ayatollah's dyspeptic reaction is entirely understandable. In a country where the people he represents constitute the majority, democracy or something more or less resembling it would be welcome to him—at least until he and his colleagues win the elections.

That, however, is clearly not the case with others in the Land of the Great Cake-walk. "This is a society comprised of [sic] Sunni, Shiites, Kurds, Assyrians, Christians and others," one member of the "Governing Council," as the media calls the puppet government set up by Mr. Bush's viceroys, told the *Washington Post*. "The ayatollah is a very important man of the Shiite society . . . but others have an opinion too. There must be a consensus among all communities." Of course, there is no consensus among all communities, which is why there has never been a "democracy" in Iraq in the first place and why gentlemen like Saddam Hussein were able to rule it at all.

Whatever happens in Iraq, the President's speech to the NED pointed to similar debacles for the apostles of "global democratic revolution" far into the future. Mr. Bush sang,

The advance of freedom is the calling of our time; it is the calling of our country. From the Fourteen Points to the Four Freedoms, to the Speech at Westminster, America has put our power at the service of principle. We believe that liberty is the design of nature; we believe that liberty is the direction of

history. We believe that human fulfillment and excellence come in the responsible exercise of liberty. And we believe that freedom—the freedom we prize—is not for us alone, it is the right and the capacity of all mankind.

At no time, of course, did the President bother to define "democracy" or its relationship to the other sacred cow of his speech, "liberty." He spoke of both as more or less indistinguishable, even though both classical political theory as well as the conservative thought of which the President purports to be a more compassionate representative have always distinguished them sharply. If we are indeed going to embark on the sort of "revolution" Mr. Bush demands, pushing democracy onto non-Western societies at the point of our bayonets, then it would be best if we at least knew what it is we are pushing and what it would look like once we have pushed it.

The high priests of "global democracy," of course, are the neoconservatives, who have been plotting the war against Iraq for years and who were peddling "global democracy" to President Reagan well before that. During the Cold War, when not a few of our closest and most dependable allies were distinctly nondemocratic, ranging from such principled statesmen as General Pinochet and Francisco Franco to outright gangsters such as Raphael Trujillo who were only marginal improvements over Lyndon Johnson and Bill Clinton, we simply could not afford to chatter too much about "spreading democracy." Serious efforts to promote it by demanding the introduction of such quaint Anglo-American customs as regular elections and letting the opposition out of prison only played into the hands of the communists, who understood how to exploit such superstitions for their own purposes. Once the Cold War was over, however, the United States enjoyed the leisure to launch its own campaign of political subversion by "democracy" throughout the world, and, today, there is hardly one of our old anti-communist sidekicks, be he statesman or thug, who remains in his saddle.



Whatever democracy as we are engineering it abroad might be, we must look to the neoconservatives to explain it to us. Thus, in the September issue of *Commentary*, Joshua Muravchik (in the article I discussed in this column last month) expatiated on the importance of "democracy" to his neoconservative comrades. Digressing from his explanation of why anyone who criticizes the neocons must be an antisemite, Mr. Muravchik discussed the question of the relationship between neoconservatism and liberalism:

A final distinction may reflect neoconservatism's vestigial links with liberalism. This is the enthusiasm for democracy. Traditional conservatives are more likely to display an ambivalence toward this form of government, an ambivalence expressed centuries ago by the American founders. Neoconservatives tend to harbor no such doubts.

Unfortunately, however, Mr. Muravchik defined democracy no more precisely than Mr. Bush did a month or so later, though his comment remains helpful. It tells us that neocons disagree with the Framers of the Constitution as well as with today's traditional conservatives, which is what their paleoconservative critics have been saying for decades and what neoconservatives almost always try to deny, as when they are denouncing paleos as "unpatriotic conservatives" or calling Pat Buchanan a "leftist." Nevertheless, given the inadequacies of Mr. Muravchik's explanations of democracy, we shall have to address the question ourselves.

One reason *democracy* is difficult to define is that it has come to mean several different things. First, of course, it means

“rule of the people,” and every schoolboy knows that the “people” do not and cannot really and directly rule, so they have to have “representatives” to govern for them, which is what we do in this country and in other democracies such as Great Britain. But then, *democracy* is also often used in the sense of a “constitutional democracy,” which is more or less like what the Founding Fathers meant by the term *republic* and which, in turn, descends from the classical political ideal of the “mixed regime” of Aristotle, Cicero, Polybius, and others. In this sense, it means a government in which the three elements of political society—the One, the Few, and the Many—rule together, either checking one another’s excesses and tendencies to tyranny or contributing their own distinctive virtues to the government and society they establish. In this sense of the term, a sense with which most paleoconservatives are perfectly comfortable, *democracy* as the rule of the Many is but one part, balanced by the power of the other two. By calling the “republic” or “mixed government” by the name of “democracy,” however, those who claim to favor the unchecked rule of the Many are able to promote the erroneous belief that what is really a “republic” is in fact or should become a pure “democracy,” in which aristocratic and monarchic elements are eliminated or unimportant. That is more or less what has happened to the American Republic, which is why Mr. Muravchik is correct that both the Framers and modern paleoconservatives were and are “ambivalent” about it. They are “ambivalent” and not outright opposed simply because it usually takes a few minutes to figure out what those chattering about “democracy” actually mean. Once it becomes clear (if it ever does), there is no ambivalence. “Democracy” as the unchecked power of the Many is probably the most dangerous, tyrannical, and evil form of government ever imagined, and no paleoconservative advocates or supports it. Nor, for that matter, do neoconservatives. Let there be no illusion that such *soi-disant* enthusiasts of “democracy” as Mr. Muravchik and his peers at *Commentary* harbor any sympathy for the real Rule of the Many in American society, let alone in such societies as that of Iraq. Not long before the war with Iraq commenced, my old boss at the *Washington Times*, Arnaud de Borchgrave, a lifelong expert on Middle East politics, wrote that “There is little realization in Washington that democracy [in Iraq and the Middle East] would

make the region even more anti-American than it already is by giving free rein to Islamist fundamentalist extremists.” Official Washington may not realize this, but you can bet your box cutters the neocons do, whatever “enthusiasm” for democracy they spit up in public. Nor, of course, do they want anything like the Rule of the Many in the United States, with the specter of what neocon columnist Charles Krauthammer last year called the “white trash vote” actually deciding what happens in Washington.

So if the neoconservatives do not really want “democracy” in the sense of what the Framers and most paleoconservatives call a “republic,” and, if they do not really want “democracy” in the sense of the actual “Rule of the Many,” in what sense exactly do they want or wax enthusiastic for “democracy” at all, and what the hell do they mean when they dangle poor Mr. Bush in front of audiences of grown-ups and make him gabble on about pushing the “global democratic revolution”?

What they mean by “democracy” is nothing more than the system of dominance that came to prevail in the United States and the Western world in the last half of the last century. That system has nothing to do with elections, opposition parties, civil and political rights, or “liberty,” nor does it have anything to do with political theory, ancient or modern. “Democracy,” as the neocons and the President and most others who are enthusiastic about it use the word, means the centralized leviathan state under the firm and unqualified control of the managerial bureaucracy and those political forces able to influence it. It also means a particular kind of social and economic order, one largely stripped of traditional and even natural (sexual and racial) distinctions and identities and traditional moral practices and devoted largely to the mass production of consumer goods and the mass consumption of what is produced, and it requires not only a centralized and increasingly totalitarian bureaucratic state to manage it politically and economically but a sister leviathan to invent and manage a cultural order that explains, accelerates, and animates it. “Democracy,” in this sense, is largely what neoconservative Ben Wattenberg means by calling the United States today the “first universal nation”—universal, not just because of the mass immigration that has helped erase our cultural and ethnic distinctiveness but because the invented “culture” and economy of Produce and Consume

is universal and global and is intended to replace every other real government, economy, and culture on earth. That is what the “global democratic revolution” means.

Around the world, people tap their feet to American music, watch American movies and television, follow American fashions, are enthralled with American culture, speak American, emulate American economic and political ideas. We even export political consultants, briefcases chock-full of 30-second commercials. All this influence is increasing exponentially as the American-driven communications grid spreads everywhere. It should not be taken lightly; it already won the Cold War for us.

Of course, not one item of the mass-produced garbage of which Mr. Wattenberg is so proud is American at all. It just happens to have been produced and consumed (at first) in America, and the “Americanization” of the planet that he chirps about is, in fact, not real Americanization but merely the obliteration of the rest of the planet’s civilizations by an apparatus of force and mass manipulation that has long since disengaged itself from any particular nation, race, region, and culture.

It also ought to be clear that “spreading democracy” in this sense is not only entirely possible but entirely likely. “Democracy” as a balanced and ordered republican system of governance—the historic sense in which most Americans even today continue to use the term—cannot be exported or “spread” at all, because it is indeed culturally unique, the product of a particular race, culture, and historical experience peculiar to Western Europe and North America and not, as Mr. Bush’s speechwriters warbled, “the design of nature” or “the direction of history.” Attempts to export or even to emulate it very seriously usually end in catastrophes or merely fizzle out and are forgotten, but, since what the neoconservatives really mean by “democracy” is little more than a species of political and cultural imperialism, there is no doubt that it can be successfully exported and that it is being exported, good and hard, to all the places and peoples Mr. Bush and the global democrats have on their hit list. Like what we are experiencing today in Iraq, it will no doubt be a cakewalk.

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## Fiddling While Rockford Burns

There's a big brown cloud in the city,  
And the countryside's a sin.  
The price of life is too high to give up,  
It's gotta come down again.  
When worldwide war is over and done,  
And the dream of peace comes true.  
We'll all be drinking that free Bubble Up,  
And eating that rainbow stew.

Normally, I wouldn't think of quoting the Poet of Walden Pond alongside the Bard of the Working Man, but Thoreau's words seem to share a certain kinship with the anti-utopian sentiments that underlie Merle Haggard's bouncy lyrics:

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation; a stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind.

Driving past the strip malls and big-box stores of East State Street, watching cars dart in and out of 40-acre parking lots as their occupants desperately take advantage of the after-Christmas sales, I have to wonder whether Thoreau could ever have conceived of a day when "the games and amusements of mankind" consisted primarily of buying, on credit, cheap Chinese-made products at Wal-Mart.

While Rockford "consumers" were being taken advantage of by chain stores based anywhere but here, the *New York Times* was visiting Rockford. In an article published on January 4, entitled "The Joyless Recovery," Edmund L. Andrews showed a greater understanding of the challenges facing Rockford than the entire staff of the *Rockford Register Star* (with the notable exception of political editor Chuck Sweeny, who, over the past year, has experienced something of an epiphany about the effects of free trade on his hometown). Worse yet, Andrews seems to have his finger more firmly on the pulse of Rockford than our own po-

litical and business leaders, who continue to ignore the obvious, even though the quiet desperation on the face of the average Rockfordian shows that he knows the truth: Rockford, as we have known it, is dying.

Back in the late 1960's and early 70's, *per capita* income in Rockford was among the highest in the nation. Ten years later, unemployment was over 20 percent. Today, one of Rockford's ZIP codes—61104—is the ninth-poorest white ZIP code in the United States.

One of my earliest columns on Rockford, "A Month in the Life of the Industrial Midwest" (April 2001), examined a month's worth of stories from the business section of the *Register Star*, a month during which the Rockford area lost two businesses, well over 4,000 manufacturing jobs, and over 100 retail positions. In the preceding 18 months, nearly 20 area companies had "downsized." After the column appeared, one of our East Coast readers sent us an article from the *Washington Post* that seemed to contradict my pessimistic outlook, arguing that Rockford was actually successfully converting from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-based one. Now that the area has lost an additional 20,000 manufacturing jobs and unemployment is approaching levels not seen since the recession of the early 1980's (which locally amounted to a depression), no one is making that claim.

No one, that is, except Robert Levin, the executive director of the Council of 100, a local business group founded in 1982, in the throes of that earlier recession. The council essentially functions as the local equivalent of an international NGO, lobbying government for policies favorable to business and attempting to attract new businesses to the Rockford area. And, like many NGO's, it has been funded (to the tune of \$100,000 per year since 1983) by government.

In theory, the Council of 100 is not a bad idea: Bring the heads of some of the largest businesses in Rockford together with government officials to increase cooperation in order to revitalize the local economy. And there's no doubt that the council, working hand-in-glove



with Democratic Mayor John McNamara throughout the 1980's, helped create the "development" on East State Street that put Rockford on the road to "recovery."

Throughout the 1990's, however, the council, along with other nongovernmental organizations such as the Rockford Area Chamber of Commerce and the Rockford Area Association of Realtors, played along with McNamara's successor, Democratic Mayor Charles Box, and endorsed a series of tax increases (both those imposed illegally by a federal judge and those presented to the voters through referenda) that financed Rockford's disastrous 12-year-long school-desegregation lawsuit. And long after Rockford regained an uneasy economic footing, the council continued to focus on retail and service-sector expansion, to the detriment of small manufacturing, long the backbone of Rockford's economy.

Today, the Council of 37 (as local radio talk-show host Chris Bowman refers to the dwindling and increasingly ineffective organization) is dominated by banks, healthcare providers, and media outlets, with the occasional developer, politician, and university president thrown in for good measure. The number of manufacturers represented on the council has declined, in part because of the loss of manufacturing in Rockford, in part because many of the largest manufacturers remaining in Rockford are now subsidiaries of companies based elsewhere, and in part because Rockford's small manufacturers have no reason to believe that the council represents their interests.

And so it was no surprise to read that Levin told the *New York Times*, quite matter-of-factly, that "We are in a global economy, and we are in the throes of a major transformation." Rockford can simply "reinvent" itself once more. If retail cannot sustain the local economy—since