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MaxSpeak on the March of Democracy

Kevin Carson

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The way liberty works in Bushworld is that any nation designated as friendly (read pliable) is struggling towards democracy, no matter how barren and repressive its internal political culture... Any such nation with an actual election, no matter how flaky, has achieved freedom. Any election that doesn't go our way (e.g., Washington state, Haiti, Venezuela) merits a do-over, or worse.

And, I might add, any country that introduced anything approaching genuine democracy (i.e., applying decentralism and direct democracy in either the political or economic realm) would likely be classed as a terror state and subjected to the same treatment as Venezuela and Haiti. The neoconservative version of "democracy," as commonly applied via People Power and assorted Velvet or Orange Revolutions, when The Walls Come Tumbling Down (TM), is essentially what Chomsky calls "spectator democracy."

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When it comes to “democracy” and “rule of law,” the neocons reveal their historical roots in the New Class/Crolyite politics of the “Progressive” era. “Democracy” means participating in a periodic legitimization ritual in which you select the professional elites that govern you, after which you sit down and shut up. The democracy, of course, should be as centralized, indirect, and all-around Hamiltonian as possible. Politics should be the domain of apolitical expertise, with conflict minimized and decisions based on the consensus of right-thinking people (i.e., the centrist establishment of men in suits who control big government and big business). Although the neocons love to emphasize decentralist values in their talk of “civil society,” their version of civil society and citizen involvement applies only to the realms of private consumption and recreation; it implies nothing remotely touching on the spheres of self-government or economic production, that might undermine the control of the duly constituted managerial and plutocratic classes over the corporate state.

Iraqi democracy, like the kind just established in Afghanistan, means choosing the guy who will take orders from the IMF/World Bank and start implementing the privatization/austerity/“intellectual property” regime designed by Milton Friedman or Jeffrey Sachs.

Joseph Stromberg recently described a recurring neoliberal pattern of “privatization” that might be more accurately described as the systematic looting of public assets by politically connected corporate elites. Stromberg described the typical “privatization” procedure as “funny auctions, that amounted to new expropriations by domestic and foreign investors”; the likely result, he says, is “a massive alienation of resources into the hands of select foreign interests.” More specifically, Naomi Klein recounted, in vomit-inducing detail, the kind of “democracy” the Iraqi Provisional Authority tried to foist on the Iraqi people.

(It’s odd, by the way, that the people so intent on introducing “free market” principles to the state-owned Iraqi economy under

Bremer were in remarkably little hurry about removing Saddam’s draconian penalties for organizing independent labor unions.)

Finally, a word of caution: The neocons prefer their version of “rule of law” (with its Weberian-flavored bureaucratic rationality) for the comparatively low maintenance costs and general mess entailed; but if democracy ever threatens to turn into the real thing they’re always willing to expend political capital on a fascist terror state until “civil society” gets its mind right and a country can be safely restored to the proper form of non-threatening, apolitical democracy. Just bring in Pinochet’s military, or give the Guatemalan death squads a few decades to liquidate labor organizers and peasant cooperative leaders by the tens of thousands, and the properly chastened people will be more than happy to relegate their “civil society” activities to organizing church socials and bowling leagues.

All in all, the ersatz neocon version of “democracy,” like their version of “free markets,” doesn’t bear much looking into.