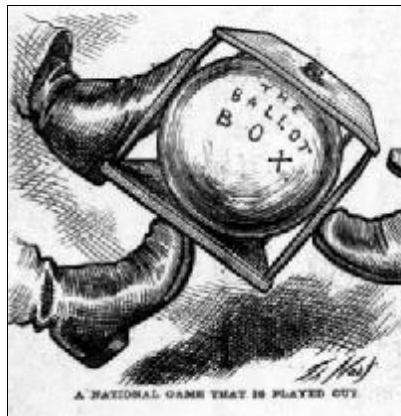


## LIBERTY VERSUS DEMOCRACY IN POST-WAR IRAQ: WINNING BRITISH HEARTS AND MINDS.

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### Liberty and Democracy

The government of the United States of America recently indicated that an Islamic Fundamentalist party would not be allowed to take power in the 'new' Iraq. This, rather predictably, resulted in much hand-wringing by metropolitan liberals and the repetition of platitudes along the lines of 'the wishes of the Iraqi people must be recognised.'

During the war the most frequently used term was that the Coalition was 'liberating Iraq.' However, in the aftermath of war this liberation seems to have manifested itself as simply giving the people of Iraq the vote. What about the other integral aspects of liberty?

Thus, in the short space of time since the end of the conflict we have seen the current attitude to Liberty and Democracy in Britain: they have become one and the same. Why?

### Democracy as a Legitimising Force.

Lord Acton said of liberty that it "is not a means to a higher political end. It is itself the highest political end."<sup>1</sup>

The problem with the current political class is that whilst they might issue grandiose statements supporting liberty, these sentiments are about as hollow as a statue of Saddam Hussein. Their problem with liberty is that they rather like telling people what they can and can't do: a system where individuals can do what suits their own ends and interests is simply not acceptable. It suits their purpose therefore to give something else an equivalence to liberty. Therefore in Britain today

any talk about individual freedom is invariably equated to democracy. Democracy has the advantage that it can be used in order to legitimise what are otherwise arbitrary decisions. It is undoubtedly important but it should not be disguised as a political end. Hayek noted that "Democracy is essentially a means, a utilitarian device for safeguarding internal peace and individual freedom. As such it is by no means infallible or certain."<sup>2</sup> And that is the point: majorities get it wrong. Besides, why should a majority of the population make everyone else do as they like simply because there are more of them?

Gordon Graham commented "Democracy, properly understood, is ... a kind of despotism that can ride roughshod over the individual"<sup>3</sup> whilst John Stuart Mill asked the question: "How much of human life should be assigned to individuality, and how much to society?"<sup>4</sup> My answer would be that 'society' (if we take such a notion to be a euphemism for the state) should limit its interference to that of creating a framework in which individuals may freely seek to pursue their own ends through mutually beneficial interactions.

Mill also warned of the tyranny of the majority: in short, ten people should not be able to tell nine people what to do. It is in this way that democracy can be used to coerce people to behave in certain ways: after all, the state has a monopoly on legal coercion (just look at how much choice there is in paying tax). Therefore, there is the danger that democracy can be used as a cover by collectivists to impose certain (seemingly desirable) social goals by forcing the efforts of everyone in a particular direction. This would be the death of freedom: man would become merely a means

to the ends of others.

As the Libertarian Alliance's Deputy Director Brian Micklethwait once wrote: "Very few people oppose either freedom or democracy on principle... and thus the two words regularly occur together in lists of good things which good people are sworn to defend. As a result the words are often used as if they both meant the same thing: freedom and democracy [sic]. Yet it must be insisted that insofar as the two words still have any meaning at all, they refer to two absolutely distinct principles, and that these two principles often conflict with each other."<sup>5</sup>

The sidelining of the discussion of any individual freedom other than the freedom to vote has been very handy for those opposed to liberty. It has allowed measures such as the suppression of free speech via political correctness, 'reforms' to the justice system and the criminalisation of self defence through ever more draconian gun controls. To the British public the vote has come to symbolise the pinnacle of personal freedom, the very embodiment of liberty. After all, you may not be able to criticise multiculturalism for fear of prosecution under race relations laws, but you still have a vote don't you? You may be imprisoned without trial, or retried after acquittal, but you still have a vote don't you? You can't defend your life or property from attack without worrying whether your attacker will sue, but you have a vote and that is what matters isn't it?

Such measures are central to the aim of undermining the individual and destroying liberty itself. By promoting multiculturalism, identity and personal worth are defined by ethnic/racial background rather than by individual choices and actions. This is just collectivism by stealth. By abolishing double jeopardy, you can be tried until a 'satisfactory' - i. e. guilty - verdict is reached. By eroding the ability of the individual to repulse attacks on his life or property from criminals, one de-

stroys the ability of the individual to resist the excesses of state power. By allowing a criminal to sue his victim simply allows him to abdicate his responsibility to respect the freedoms, property and life of others.

Thus, the cloak of democracy has provided a legitimate cover for the anti-individual legislation that has emanated from governments of both parties. No matter how few people vote, the fact that an election has taken place seems to provide all the reassurance that the public need that as Britons they are a free people: they may disagree with the government but that same government has an electoral mandate doesn't it? For many, that gives government a free hand to do as they will.

### **Democracy in Iraq**

So what does this all have to do with Iraqi liberty? The British perception of liberty being the same thing as democracy has prejudiced expectations for a post-war Iraq. There has been a failure amongst the people of this country to realise the limits of democracy, limits that must be in place in order to ensure that individual freedoms are respected.

Majorities can vote to suppress individual freedom. If 51% of Iraqis voted for Islamic fundamentalism, 100% would have to live with it. A hallmark of a liberal society is that limits are placed on democracy in order to suppress the 'tyranny of the majority.' One limit must be that the majority cannot vote to restrict the freedoms of the minority. But by allowing democracy to be used to destroy our freedoms in this country we have allowed ourselves to become content with the idea of allowing Islamic fundamentalists to destroy the freedoms of the Iraqi people: it's their choice after all isn't it? Well no it isn't. To talk about the Iraqi people making a choice is to address them as a collective whole and not as a nation of individuals with differing ambitions and interests. I find it highly unlikely

that the Iraqi people could choose anything unanimously, as a whole. When I refer to the opinion of the British public I do not mean to imply the opinion of everyone but a broad consensus amongst the majority. Certainly *some* Iraqi people might favour fundamentalism just as *some* British people enjoy eating peanuts. It is absurd to extrapolate from this that all British people should eat peanuts (allergy to which can be fatal) just as it is unfair to suggest that Iraq should become an Islamic state (opposition to which can be equally detrimental to your health).

## Conclusion

The people of Iraq are all working towards their own ends. Certainly some of these ends might coincide - for example, the restoration of order - as means to other individual ends, but an Islamic state would remove the right of the individual to work towards their own ends.

Therefore, it is perfectly acceptable for the US to say that it won't accept such a state in Iraq. Such a move might be democratic in the true sense of the word but it would do nothing to give Iraq lasting liberty. Of course Iraqi people deserve the freedom to vote but they also deserve the right to own and defend their property and to trade with others freely and fairly: in particular they deserve right to religious freedom. The majority Shi'a population have certainly every right to feel aggrieved at being denied religious freedoms by a Sunni-led regime but the answer isn't to impose Shi'a doctrine onto the Sunni's in revenge.

Whilst some Iraqi's may wish to live as Shi'a Muslims and others as Sunni's there also is a sizeable Christian population in Iraq (ex-Deputy PM Tariq Aziz was born into a Christian family): indeed the site of the Garden of Eden is said to lie between the Euphrates and the Tigris. Others may wish to renounce God altogether. This would only be possible

in a truly free Iraq.

If the British public settle with the notion that democracy is all the freedom that the Iraqi people need then they should be prepared to settle with seeing the same abuses of power in post-war Iraq as there were under the rule of Saddam. This would undoubtedly condemn Iraq to many more years of oppression.

Therefore, before the coalition can fully liberate Iraq there must be a battle for the hearts and minds of the British public. This should be in order to liberate Britain from the vestiges of creeping collectivism and regain the values that made Western civilisation the best in the world. Unless the people of Britain wake up soon and see how much freedom they have already lost, the vote may be all that they have left.

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- 5 Brian Micklethwait, *Liberty versus Democracy*, pp. 1-2 (Libertarian Alliance, 1981).