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What's Happened to America?

by Sheldon Richman

Who says the government schools and the welfare state don't work? They work perfectly. They were designed to put the American people into a political coma, and that's what they've done.

The objective would never be framed that way. The politicians would say that the purpose was to create unity, patriotism, and gratitude toward those who "protect our freedom," that is, the government. But in fact, the purpose was to induce a political coma, and it's done so.

How else to explain that few people give a hoot that we were obviously lied into war by the president of the United States, the vice president, the secretary of state, the secretary of defense, and others, without a proper congressional declaration, and led to believe that Saddam Hussein was both willing and able to launch so-called weapons of mass destruction against us on 45 minutes' notice?

How else to explain that hardly anyone notices that with respect to criminal suspects the Constitution has been all but consigned to the paper shredder, with American citizens and others being held indefinitely without charge and without the right to go before a judge to challenge such treatment?

How else to explain that it's a matter of indifference to most people that the government has assumed the authority to secretly search homes and monitor telephone calls and email almost without restriction — and that this is still not enough power for Attorney General John Ashcroft?

How else to explain that questioning the good faith of the president is considered so beyond the pale that one is led to conclude that the Fuehrer Principle is being taught in the schools?

Finally, how else to explain that while the American people are making a bestseller out of a book by a conservative hit-woman who labels her political opponents traitors, they do not see that the real threat to freedom are those who think "national security" requires a blank check for the government.

Americans have been schooled into compliance and complacency. The president says Iraq could attack us at any time — and they believe it. The president hints that Iraq was connected to 9/11 — and they repeat it to pollsters. The president repeats the phrase “weapons of mass destruction” enough times — and they conclude that not only have such weapons been found, but Saddam Hussein even used them against U.S. forces. Who are you going to believe, the president or your eyes? Evidence? Who needs evidence? The president said so. Or kind of said it. Or implied it. Whatever. Can we celebrate the Fourth of July now?

How bizarre that for most people, sticking American flags on the car and front lawn is the highest sign of love for America, and questioning the president’s honor and veracity is the surest sign of treachery. After months of fruitless WMD searches, the politically comatose are satisfied with their leaders’ and the media parrots’ inane responses: “We’ll find them eventually.” “We know Saddam Hussein had them in 1988.” Or: “Hussein was the *real* weapon mass destruction. Besides, we liberated the Iraqi people, didn’t we?”

We have reached the dead end that many warned of for decades. Years of incessant propaganda have led to this sorry state. The people have let themselves be reduced from citizens to subjects. Independent thought, rigorous questioning, and rational skepticism — the marks of free people — now indicate a lack of patriotism, even “treason.” In their place we find obeisance, obedience, and fear. The Supreme Leader says “boo” (or “terrorism” or “WMD”), and people cower and cry, “Protect us. We’ll do anything you say. Take suspects away in the night. Hold them forever. Do anything. Just protect us.”

The question that takes the cake is, “Don’t you support the troops?” The noncomatose would know that to oppose sending Americans into unnecessary war *is* support. But that question is only supposed to change the subject. It’s the kind of thing the politically comatose say when threatened by the reality of their abdication of responsibility.

The truth isn’t pretty these days. But there it is. Look for yourself. If you can feel proud about it, I don’t understand you.

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