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Bipartisanship? Bah! **by Sheldon Richman**

One of our smartest political philosophers, Will Rogers, had it right: “Be thankful we’re not getting all the government we’re paying for.”

I think of that whenever I hear politicians and commentators praise bipartisanship. I also think of this saying: “Be careful what you wish for. You might get it.”

Where did all the wise heads get the idea that Americans voted for bipartisan cooperation last November? After six years of full Republican control, it looked to me as though the voters wanted divided government — blessed gridlock — do-no-harm government. Hear, hear!

But our one-party-with-two-denominations system can’t admit that. Both groupings have to come up with a tortured interpretation of the results to justify their continued exercise of exploitative power, taking from those who produce wealth — entrepreneurs and workers — and forking it over to those who haven’t produced it — largely parasitical, rent-seeking business interests (defense contractors, ethanol producers, agribusiness giants, et cetera), and a few others thrown in.

In 1866 New York Judge Gideon J. Tucker famously said, “No man’s life, liberty, or property are safe while the Legislature is in session.” There’s another piece of political wisdom, and it applies to the Congress. We are most in peril during spasms of bipartisanship, because it means the public looters have put aside their jockeying for supremacy and have become open conspirators against the public interest.

Better that they be fighting, although very often one suspects that the open squabbling is staged to misdirect us from the real damage being done by “our” elected officials.

George Washington is reputed to have pointed out the obvious, namely, that government is not reason but *force* — like fire, always dangerous, even when under control. But of course regular people are never really in control. On the contrary, they are *controlled*. The politicians tax *us*; we don’t tax them. They regulate *us*; we don’t regulate them. They spend our money; we don’t spend theirs. So much for all persons’ being created equal. Jefferson’s moral truth has not often been honored in the observance.

Yes, yes, every two, four, and six years we each may cast one vote to determine who taxes and controls us and spends our money. Is that really such a comforting thought — especially considering that in the end the candidate-selection process is the province of insiders and their news-media allies?

If you reject the idea that we toil under one party with Republican and Democratic denominations, ask yourself why both denominations vehemently oppose opening the system up to third parties. Why do they hamper the formation of alternatives at every turn? Is two such a magic number. Or is the magic number really *one*?

If you still have doubts, observe what is happening with the Iraq war. Nearly everyone agreed that the election was a referendum on the war. The polls support this view and show that most people think the war was a mistake and want to see the troops withdrawn. President Bush has staked too much on his blunder to do anything but increase the number of troops. “Surge” sounds temporary. The administration estimates an 18-month operation, but we know that will be an underestimation.

So what do the triumphant Democrats promise? Hearings, and that’s it. They promise not to cut the war money or attach conditions. Yet the leaders say they oppose the surge.

So where does that leave them? No surge and no withdrawal. In other words, stay the course! That’s the Democrats’ alternative. Is that what the majority of Americans voted for? I’m so glad we got to go the polls.

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