

Iraq's communal, anti-democratic election

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In the wake of the March 7 election in Iraq, the US administration and media hailed the ballot as evidence that the 2003 US invasion had, if belatedly, brought about democracy. A month later, bombs are tearing through the suburbs of Baghdad virtually on a daily basis and the new parliament is wracked by communal divisions. The claims of a new democratic beginning are another attempt to blind the American and international working class to the consequences of seven years of imperialist violence and intrigue against the Iraqi people.

A democratic election is not possible under a US occupation. The American military has suppressed every section of Iraqi society that resisted the country's transformation into a client state. Tens of thousands of the most determined and vocal opponents of the occupation have been slaughtered or are rotting in prisons. The US invasion is directly responsible for the deaths of over 1.2 million Iraqi men, women and children and turning more than 4 million more into refugees or displaced persons.

The population has been shattered, physically and psychologically. With endemic unemployment and over 32 percent living below the poverty line, most people are preoccupied with day-to-day survival amid the economic ruin produced by years of destruction. As a result, resistance has been largely quelled for the time being.

Under these conditions, the election contest was between the rival bourgeois factions that have collaborated with US imperialism. Neither put forward the views of the majority of Iraqis, who overwhelmingly want an immediate withdrawal of the hated army of occupation. Instead, the various parties and coalitions bribed, threatened and stoked sectarian

and ethnic fears in order to convince layers of the population to vote for them.

US General David Petraeus, who was in charge of the brutal repression during the so-called "surge" in 2007 and 2008, cynically coined the term "Iraqcracy" to describe the corrupt activities of those he helped elevate to power.

As a result of the election, the 325-seat parliament is even more sharply divided along communal lines than the one formed after the 2005 election. The Iraqiya coalition led by former Interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi obtained 91 seats, with the bulk of its votes coming from Sunni Arabs, secular Shiites and small ethnic minorities such as Turkomen and Christians. The Shiite-based State of Law coalition of outgoing Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki holds 89 seats, almost all from Baghdad and the Shiite-populated southern provinces. The Shiite fundamentalist Iraqi National Alliance won 70 seats in similar areas. Kurdish parties won 57 seats, all from the Kurdish-populated regions of the north.

The two frontrunners to head the next government, Allawi and Maliki, epitomise the venal and communal character of the Iraqi political establishment.

Allawi, a secular Shiite, was a former member of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party before going into exile in the 1970s. He worked for decades as an agent for American and British intelligence. Throughout the 1990s, he took part in the CIA plots to engineer "regime change" and replace Hussein with a more amenable dictator. In 2002 and 2003, he endorsed and helped disseminate the lies about "weapons of mass destruction" used to justify the invasion.

Allawi's stated position since 2003 has been

“security first, democracy second”. In June 2004, he was installed by the US as the unelected “interim prime minister”. His main role was to sanction the brutal suppression of a Shiite militia rebellion in Najaf and Sunni resistance in Fallujah. He was accused of personally executing six detainees alleged to be insurgents. His dictatorial tendencies earned him the nickname “Saddam without the moustache”. To win votes, Allawi appealed to Sunni and secular grievances against Shiite fundamentalist and Kurdish domination. Since last month’s ballot, he has threatened that his supporters will take up arms if he is sidelined from the next government.

Maliki, an exiled leader of the Shiite fundamentalist Da’wa Party, returned to Iraq in 2003 and quickly allied himself with the US occupation. He was elevated to prime minister in 2006 as a compromise amid bitter factional wrangling. He has built up a base of support in the country’s US-created military and urged on the crushing of anti-occupation Shiite militias that previously controlled much of Basra and Baghdad. His State of Law coalition has used US backing and money to establish itself as the dominant faction in the oil-rich Shiite south, at the expense of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and the Sadrist movement loyal to cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.

In an attempt to cling to power, Maliki’s supporters claimed that Allawi and Iraqiya were a stalking horse for the ousted Sunni-dominated Baathist regime. Attempts were made to disqualify Iraqiya candidates for their past Baathist associations. Allawi and his supporters denounced these moves in sectarian terms as being the machinations of Iran’s Shiite regime. Neither Allawi nor Maliki, however, can form a government without making deals with other ethnic and sectarian factions.

The communalism that dominates Iraqi politics has been consciously fomented by the US. Since 2003, American imperialism has played one faction off against another, confident that they are all utterly dependent on US patronage. Each is competing for privileged positions in the state apparatus and a share of the country’s only significant source of wealth—the oil industry. Oil production makes up 75 percent of gross

domestic product and close to 90 percent of government revenue.

Behind the scenes, the US embassy and military are undoubtedly pressing Allawi and Maliki to make the compromises necessary to quickly form a government suited to Washington’s requirements. Hinting at the pressure being brought to bear, the Iraqi newspaper *Azzaman* claimed on April 1 that there “have been reports that the US might eventually support a military coup if the politicians fail to mend fences and form a national unity government”.

The Obama administration is currently in the process of reducing US troop numbers in Iraq to 50,000 by August 31, to free up personnel and hardware for the escalating war in Afghanistan. Its interest in Iraq is not democracy but a puppet government that can hold the country together and prevent any disruption to the primary objectives of US imperialism—opening up the oil industry to greater foreign ownership and control, and maintaining access to the large military bases it has constructed.

The democratic will of the long-suffering Iraqi people will play no role in forming such a regime.

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