

THE SERIES OF DILEMMAS THAT THE UNITED States has been faced with for the past four years in Iraq and throughout the so-called War on Terror—alternatives equally distasteful and undesirable, bulls that would toss us, whichever horn we laid hold of—have metastasized by 2007 into something far worse. As Tiberius said with regard to being in control of Rome, we are holding a wolf by the ears. At this point, it is equally dangerous to keep hold or to let go. Do we send in more troops? Do we withdraw? Do we go with the Sunnis? Do we support the Sh'ia? Do we stand with the Kurds? Forget about simple answers. Forget, too, complicated answers. There is no good answer. Everyone wrings their hands about the “catastrophic consequences of withdrawal.” Nobody speaks of “the catastrophic consequences of staying the course or escalating the war.” The wolf is not just at the door. We have it by the ears.

The response of President Bush to the repudiating elections of November 2006 was as predictable as it was cynical. He will not quit Mesopotamia. He's a decider, and he decides to slip the ears of the wolf into someone else's hands. The Democrats will do. Force them to declare failure in Iraq; make them responsible for initiating the inevitable, ignoble retreat from that broken land. Things are going to get worse, but not on President Bush's watch, if he can avoid it.

The citizens of the United States are groaning under the “leadership” of an administration that, having embarked on a quasi-colonial enterprise, covers its roguishness with a thin blanket of imperial rhetoric. There is a crisis in the Republic. If we look closely we will notice that our freedom contains the seeds of its own ruin. Tempting though it might be, it is not enough to say, “Don't

blame me—I voted for the other guy.” The “I-told-you-sos” on the tongue of everyone who opposed the war in Iraq are likewise worthless. Someone tried to convince one of us the other afternoon to come to a rally in Union Square, Manhattan, the sole aim of which was to gather and shout “No!” at anyone, anything, everything. Not the most constructive political act, though it might have been fun. Our political parties (all *two* of them), lacking sound or coherent policy, promise bread and stage circuses—anything to distract us from their endless, internecine wars and the overwhelming contingencies of the present age. But it is not enough to call a rogue a rogue.

As citizens of a republic, we must remind ourselves that *we* are the protagonists here; and the tragedies and failures of the Republic, whichever party might be in power, are *our* tragedies and failures. “[M]ost of us view health, education, and welfare as a set of social programs aimed largely at the poor,” writes Joseph Lough in the following pages. This is a mistake, he goes on to argue, for living well—*well-fare*—is actually a “precondition of citizenship.” Health, education, a sturdy house, and meaning in one's employment are not attained through New Deals. They are, rather, the very *backbone* of citizenship, without which a democracy will not be able to stand up to its demagogues and panderers. Amos and Eli Friedland ask, in their piece on silent juries and quiet citizens, “Why are we citizens silent about that which concerns us?” Why are we silent about the abuse of that which is ours? We cannot hope to claim the privileges of citizenship without committing to the work of citizenship. Our intent at *Radical Society* is to introduce you, dear reader, to the writing and art of a few citizens doing just that. ■