

Freneau -- How did he know all this 200 years ago?

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Philip Freneau
Rules for Changing
a Republic [into a Democracy, then] into a Monarchy

Those who had opposed the constitution thought their fears justified by the conduct of the government that began to function in 1789. Under the aggressive leadership of Alexander Hamilton, the secretary of the treasury, economic measures were taken that favored the few, while a effective party machine was organized and the army strengthened in such a way as to suggest an intent to control rather than to represent the many. The whole tone of Washington's administration was aristocratic, favoring as it did the educated, the wealthy, the clergy, and the press, who were fearful of "mob rule" and preferred to see what Hamilton called "gentlemen of principle and property" in command. As Hamilton had at his service a newspaper - John Fenno's Gazette of the United States - to support his policies, his opponents, led by Jefferson and Madison, decided to establish a rival newspaper, the National Gazette. Philip Freneau, an experienced journalist of known democratic leanings, was chosen to edit the paper. The editorial, reprinted here, is typical of those in which Freneau criticized the Hamiltonian program from 1791 to 1793.

Source: American Museum, July 1792: "Rules for Changing a Limited Republican Government into an Unlimited Hereditary One."

Rules for changing a limited republican government into an unlimited hereditary one.

1. It being necessary in order to effect the change, to get rid of constitutional shackles and popular prejudices, all possible means and occasions are to be used for both these purposes.
2. Nothing being more likely to prepare the vulgar mind for aristocratical ranks and hereditary powers than titles, endeavor in the offset of the government to confer these on its most dignified officers. If the principal magistrate should happen to be particularly venerable in the eyes of the people, take advantage of that fortunate circumstance in setting the example.

3. Should the attempt fail through his republican aversion to it, or from the danger of alarming the people, do not abandon the enterprise altogether, but lay up the proposition in the record. Time may gain it respect, and it will be there always ready, cut and dried, for any favorable conjuncture that may offer.

4. In drawing all bills, resolutions, and reports, keep constantly in view that the limitations in the Constitution are ultimately to be explained away. Precedents and phrases may thus be shuffled in, without being adverted to by candid or weak people, of which good use may afterward be made.

5. As the novelty and bustle of inaugurating the government will for some time keep the public mind in a heedless and unsettled state, let the press during this period be busy in propagating the doctrines of monarchy and aristocracy. For this purpose it will be particular useful to confound a mobbish democracy with a representative republic, that by exhibiting all the turbulent examples and enormities of the former, an odium may be thrown on the character of the latter. Review all the civil contests, convulsions, factions, broils, squabbles, bickering, black eyes, and bloody noses of ancient, middle, and modern ages; caricature them into the most frightful forms and colors that can be imagined, and unfold one scene of horrible tragedy after another till the people be made, if possible, to tremble at their own shadows. Let the discourses on Davila then contrast with these pictures of terror the quiet hereditary succession, the reverence claimed by birth and nobility, and the fascinating influence of stars, and ribands, and garters, cautiously suppressing all the bloody tragedies and unceasing oppressions which form the history of this species of government. No pains should be spared in this part of the undertaking, for the greatest will be wanted, it being extremely difficult, especially when a people have been taught to reason and feel their rights, to convince them that a king, who is always an enemy to the people, and a nobility, who are perhaps still more so, will take better care of the people than the people will take of themselves.

6. But the grand nostrum will be a public debt, provided enough of it can be got and it be medicated with the proper ingredients. If by good fortune a debt be ready at hand, the most is to be made of it. Stretch it and swell it to the utmost the items will bear. Allow as many extra claims as decency will permit. Assume all the debts of your neighbors - in a word, get as much debt as can be raked and scraped together, and when you have got all you can, "advertise" for more, and have the debt made as big as possible. This object being accomplished, the next will be to make it as perpetual as possible; and the next to that, to get it into as few hands as possible. The more effectually to bring this about, modify the debt, complicate it, divide it, subdivide it, subtract it, postpone it, let there be one-third of two-thirds, and two-thirds of one-third, and two-thirds of two-thirds; let there be 3 percents, and 4 percents, and 6 percents, and present 6 percents, and future 6 percents. To be brief, let the whole be such a mystery that a few only can understand it; and let all possible opportunities and informations fall in the way of these few to cinch their advantages over the many.

7. It must not be forgotten that the members of the legislative body are to have a deep stake in the game. This is an essential point, and happily is attended with no difficulty. A sufficient number, properly disposed, can alternately legislate and speculate, and speculate and legislate, and buy and sell, and sell and buy, until a due portion of the property of their constituents has

passed into their hands to give them an interest against their constituents, and to ensure the part they are to act. All this, however, must be carried on under the cover of the closest secrecy; and it is particularly lucky that dealings in paper admit of more secrecy than any other. Should a discovery take place, the whole plan may be blown up.

8. The ways in which a great debt, so constituted and applied, will contribute to the ultimate end in view are both numerous and obvious. (1) The favorite few, thus possessed of it, whether within or without the government, will feel the staunchest fealty to it, and will go through thick and thin to support it in all its oppressions and usurpations. (2) Their money will give them consequence and influence, even among those who have been tricked out of it. (3) They will be the readiest materials that can be found for a hereditary aristocratic order, whenever matters are ripe for one. (4) A great debt will require great taxes; great taxes, many taxgatherers and other officers; and all officers are auxiliaries of power. (5) Heavy taxes may produce discontents; these may threaten resistance; and in proportion to this danger will be the pretense for a standing army to repel it. (6) A standing army, in its turn, will increase the moral force of the government by means of its appointments, and give it physical force by means of the sword, thus doubly forwarding the main object.

9. The management of a great funded debt and an extensive system of taxes will afford a plea, not to be neglected, for establishment of a great incorporated bank. The use of such a machine is well understood. If the Constitution, according to its fair meaning, should not authorize it, so much the better. Push it through by a forced meaning and you will get in the bargain an admirable precedent for future misconstructions.

In fashioning the bank, remember that it is to be made particularly instrumental in enriching and aggrandizing the elect few, who are to be called in due season to the honors and felicities of the kingdom preparing for them, and who are the pillars that must support it. It will be easy to throw the benefit entirely into their hands, and to make it a solid addition of 50, or 60, or 70 percent to their former capitals of 800 percent, or 900 percent, without costing them a shilling; while it will be difficult to explain to the people that this gain of the few is at the cost of the many, that the contrary may be boldly and safely pretended. The bank will be pregnant with other important advantages. It will admit the same men to be, at the same time, members of the bank and members of the government. The two institutions will thus be soldered together, and each made stronger. Money will be put under the direction of the government, and government under the direction of money. To crown the whole, the bank will have a proper interest in swelling and perpetuating the public debt and public taxes, with all the blessings of both, because its agency and its profits will be extended in exact proportion.

10. "Divide and govern" is a maxim consecrated by the experience of ages, and should be familiar in its use to every politician as the knife he carries in his pocket. In the work here to be executed, the best effects may be produced by this maxim, and with peculiar facility. An extensive republic made up of lesser republics necessarily contains various sorts of people, distinguished by local and other interests and prejudices. Let the whole group be well examined in all its parts and relations, geographical and political, metaphysical and metaphorical; let there be first a northern and a southern section, by a line running east and west, and then an eastern and western section, by a line running north and south. By a suitable nomenclature, the

landholders cultivating different articles can be discriminated from one another, all from the class of merchants, and both from that of manufacturers.

One of the subordinate republics may be represented as a commercial state, another as a navigation state, another as a manufacturing state, others as agricultural states; and although the great body of people in each be really agricultural, and the other characters be more or less common to all, still it will be politic to take advantage of such an arrangement. Should the members of the great republic be of different sizes, and subject to little jealousies on that account, another important division will be ready formed to your hand. Add again the division that may be carved out of personal interests, political opinions, and local parties. With so convenient an assortment of votes, especially with the help of the marked ones, a majority may be packed for any question with as much ease as the odd trick by an adroit gamester, and any measure whatever carried or defeated, as the great revolution to be brought about may require.

It is only necessary, therefore, to recommend that full use be made of the resource; and to remark that, besides the direct benefit to be drawn from these artificial divisions, they will tend to smother the true and natural one, existing in all societies, between the few who are always impatient of political equality and the many who can never rise above it; between those who are to mount to the prerogatives and those who are to be saddled with the burdens of the hereditary government to be introduced - in one word, between the general mass of the people, attached to their republican government and republican interests, and the chosen band devoted to monarchy and Mammon. It is of infinite importance that this distinction should be kept out of sight. The success of the project absolutely requires it.

11. As soon as sufficient progress in the intended change shall have been made, and the public mind duly prepared according to the rules already laid down, it will be proper to venture on another and a bolder step toward a removal of the constitutional landmarks. Here the aid of the former encroachments and all the other precedents and way-paving maneuvers will be called in of course. But, in order to render the success more certain, it will be of special moment to give the most plausible and popular name that can be found to the power that is to be usurped. It may be called, for example, a power for the common safety or the public good, or, "the general welfare." If the people should not be too much enlightened, the name will have a most imposing effect. It will escape attention that it means, in fact, the same thing with a power to do anything the government pleases "in all cases whatsoever." To oppose the power may consequently seem to the ignorant, and be called by artful, opposing the "general welfare", and may be cried down under that deception.

As the people, however, may not run so readily into the snare as might be wished, it will be prudent to bait it well with some specious popular interest, such as the encouragement of manufactures, or even of agriculture, taking due care not even to mention any unpopular object to which the power is equally applicable, such as religion, etc.. By this contrivance, particular classes of people may possibly be taken in who will be a valuable reinforcement.

With respect to the patronage of agriculture there is not indeed much to be expected from it. It will be too quickly seen through by the owners and tillers of the soil, that to tax them with one hand and pay back a part only with the other is a losing game on their side. From the power over

manufactures more is to be hoped. It will not be so easily perceived that the premium bestowed may not be equal to the circuitous tax on consumption which pays it. There are particular reasons, too, for pushing the experiment on this class of citizens.

(1) As they live in towns and can act together, it is of vast consequence to gain them over to the interest of monarchy. (2) If the power over them be once established, the government can grant favors or monopolies, as it pleases; can raise or depress this or that place, as it pleases; in a word, by creating a dependence in so numerous and important a class of citizens, it will increase its own independence of every class and be more free to pursue the grand object in contemplation. (3) The expense of this operation will not in the end cost the government a shilling, for the moment any branch of manufacture has been brought to a state of tolerable maturity the exciseman will be ready with his constable and his search warrant to demand a reimbursement, and as much more as can be squeezed out of the article. All this, it is to be remembered, supposes that the manufacturers will be weak enough to be cheated, in some respects, out of their own interests, and wicked enough, in others, to betray those of their fellow citizens; a supposition that, if known, would totally mar the experiment. Great care, therefore, must be taken to prevent it from leaking out.

12. The expediency of seizing every occasion of external danger for augmenting and perpetuating the standing military force is too obvious to escape. So important is this matter that for any loss or disaster whatever attending the national arms, there will be ample consolation and compensation in the opportunity for enlarging the establishment. A military defeat will become a political victory, and the loss of a little vulgar blood contribute to ennoble that which flows in the veins of our future dukes and marquesses.

13. The same prudence will improve the opportunity afforded by an increase of military expenditures for perpetuating the taxes required for them. If the inconsistency and absurdity of establishing a perpetual tax for a temporary service should produce any difficulty in the business, Rule 10 must be resorted to. Throw in as many extraneous motives as will make up a majority, and the thing is effected in an instant. What was before evil would become good as easily as black could be made white by the same magical operation.

14. Throughout this great undertaking it will be wise to have some particular model constantly in view. The work can then be carried on more systematically, and every measure be fortified, in the progress, by apt illustrations and authorities. Should there exist a particular monarchy against which there are fewer prejudices than against any other, should it contain a mixture of the representative principle so as to present on one side the semblance of a republican aspect, should it, moreover, have a great, funded, complicated, irredeemable debt, with all the apparatus and appurtenances of excises, banks, etc., upon that a steady eye is to be kept. In all cases it will assist, and in most its statute books will furnish a precise pattern by which there may be cut out any moneyed or monarchical project that may be wanted.

15. As it is not to be expected that the change of a republic into a monarchy, with the rapidity desired can be carried through without occasional suspicions and alarms, it will be necessary to be prepared for such events. The best general rule on the subject is to be taken from the example of crying "Stop thief" first - neither lungs nor pens must be spared in charging every man who

whispers, or even thinks, that the revolution on foot is meditated, with being himself an enemy to the established government and meaning to overturn it. Let the charge be reiterated and reverberated till at last such confusion and uncertainty be produced that the people, being not able to find out where the truth lies, withdraw their attention from the contest.

Many other rules of great wisdom and efficacy might be added; but it is conceived that the above will be abundantly enough for the purpose. This will certainly be the case if the people can be either kept asleep so as not to discover, or be thrown into artificial divisions so as not to resist, what is silently going forward. Should it be found impossible, however, to prevent the people from awaking and uniting; should all artificial distinctions give way to the natural divisions between the lordly minded few and the well-disposed many; should all who have common interest make a common cause and show a inflexible attachment to republicanism in opposition to a government of monarchy and or money, why then.....
