

Donald Rumsfeld's 9/11 folly

EARLIER this month, when Internet news reports quoted Donald Rumsfeld announcing that the Defense Department would use public funds to organize a pro-war rally on the fourth anniversary of the September 11th attacks, many people assumed this to be an urban myth. It couldn't be true. Rumsfeld's supposed quest to defile the memory of 9/11 victims by pimping their tragic deaths to support an unrelated war represents a new low – even for the unabashed arrogance of the Bush administration. “Bad taste” is an understatement. This is like bringing home a hooker on your wedding anniversary. But lo and behold, this story is for real.

The upcoming September 11th “Freedom March” from the Pentagon to the National Mall represents the military's latest foray into the domestic propaganda business. In what The New York Times terms “an ill-considered attempt to link the Iraq War to the terrorist attacks of 2001,” the march will be both a “memorial” for the September 11th victims, and a support our troops pep rally, for the ill-named “War on Terror.”

The Freedom March, as described by its Pentagon organizers, promises to be pure unadulterated militaristic jingoism. If they're successful in drawing a crowd, it would be a classic example of the type of pageantry that has historically been the hallmark of fascist societies – the type of mass display chronicled, for example, in Leni Riefenstahl's classic

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1934 Nazi propaganda film, Triumph of the Will.

Toward this end, government agencies are encouraging their employees to march in the Pentagon event. On August 19th, for example, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in a move reminiscent of Soviet-era May Day marches, "urged" all employees of the Veterans Administration to attend the Freedom Walk. This is much the same mechanism that assured Saddam of huge crowds to line the routes of his gross military parades. Such official pageantry is a staple of Kim Jong Il's North Korea. We've seen this in Enver Hoxha's Albania, Slobodan Milosević's Serbia, Mussolini's Italy, Franco's Spain and Deng Xiaoping's China. It's nothing new. The Roman Empire pioneered using mass spectacle as a propaganda device to project the power of the state.

Lockheed and Disney

Rumsfeld and Bush, in attempting to organize their little mass spectacle, are just following a well-worn path. Only this time there's a new twist. Government by corporations needs a corporate sponsor. Hence, September 11th's Freedom Walk will be sponsored by Lockheed Martin – the defense contractor that makes all those nifty smart bombs that are vaporizing billions of our tax dollars, not to mention "liberated" Iraqi cities like Fallujah. And it's sponsored by Subway – they're the ones who make all those submarine sandwiches that we will no longer be eating. And it's sponsored by various Washington DC area radio and TV stations, including the local Disney/ABC affiliate – they're the people who will be bringing us "fair and balanced" news reports about the Freedom Walk. They're also the same people who unquestioningly echoed the Bush administration's false assertions of Iraq having weapons of mass destruction and being connected to the 9/11 attacks.

The venerable Washington Post was also lined up to sponsor the Freedom Walk until the leadership committee of it's union, the Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild Local 32035, unanimously condemned the decision, pointing out that "Post news employees are subject to disciplinary action for participating in political activities..." For the newspaper itself to co-sponsor an event that, according to Editor and Publisher, has drawn fire for its alleged "pro-war tilt" reeks of hypocrisy and undermines the credibility of the newspaper. The union argued that if the Post really wants to honor America's troops, they should give their employees a day off on Veterans Day. The Post heeded one of the union's two requests, and cancelled their sponsorship of Rumsfeld's march.

The Pentagon spinmeisters are still holding steady, arguing that the Freedom Walk is not a pro-war political demonstration, and it's not meant to link the Iraq War to the 9/11 attacks – it's just a dual purpose event, memorializing the victims of 9/11 while

celebrating America's fighting forces.

I Raq and Roll

The keynote performer headlining Freedom Walk's rally on the National Mall will be Country Music performer Clint Black, who recently hit the charts with radio giant Clear Channel Inc. blasting his hit single "I Raq and Roll" across the nation. Black's song opens with a body slam against the peace movement, with the first line bellowing, "You can take your signs in protest against America taking stands. The stands America's taken are the reason that you can." This tired logic has the Vietnamese peasants and not the Nixon administration as threatening our freedoms in the 1960s and 70s. The Vietnamese won, and today they make Nike sneakers while John Ashcroft and Alberto Gonzalez continue in the Nixonian tradition of undermining our civil liberties.

Deeper into I Raq and Roll, Black comes out of the closet wearing a brown shirt, crooning "I Raq, I rack'em up and I roll. I'm back and I'm a high tech G.I. Joe." This G.I. Joe goes on to warn the Iraqis – the people who, according to last month's official narrative, we liberated – "There's no price too high for freedom, so be careful where you tread." Hmmm? Black even acknowledges Freedom Walk sponsor Lockheed Martin's products in his song, singing "It might be a smart bomb – they find stupid people too..." And of course he also acknowledges that good old fashion killing staple as well, crooning on, "and I've got that good old fashioned lead... so be careful where you tread."

If you show up at Freedom Walk expecting a solemn memorial for the victims of the 9/11 attacks you'll be more than disappointed – you'll be absolutely sickened at this celebration of killing. And in all likelihood, if you show any signs of disgust, you'll be barred from the march the same way people with protest messages on their bumpers or lapels have been barred from all of George W. Bush's public speaking events. In order to participate in the Freedom March events, people will have to line up and register with the Department of Defense. How's that for an Orwellian twist on freedom? And if the registrant is between the ages of 14 and 35, no doubt they'll be getting an invitation from the military to participate in more marches – as cannon fodder.

Taking out the Garbage

What's the matter? Fascism isn't for you. Perhaps you have a weak stomach? Freedom Walk headliner Clint Black ends his hit song with a message just for you: "Now you can come along or you can stay behind or you can get out of the way, but our troops take out the garbage for the good old U.S.A. I rock, I rack'em up and I roll in the U.S.A. I rock, I rack'em up and I roll. I'm talking about the U.S.A."

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Let me say the word again. Fascism. F-A-S-C-I-S-M. It's more than an illegal war and a corrupt criminal administration that we're facing. It's more than corporate pillage and ecocide. The Bush administration represents an attack on the very freedoms that military veterans and civil rights activists alike have died to protect. The Pentagon's detestable pageantry will only serve to expose the Bush administration for what it is while deepening the wounds in a nation that, according to polls, is more and more uncertain about who was ultimately responsible for the events of 9/11.