

MARS AND THE REPUBLIC

Matt Pearson

INTRODUCTION

Much of the speculation regarding colonization of Mars has at its core the idea of a Martian Republic. This is not because Mars is particularly suited to a republican, or more loosely "democratic" system or that careful examination of the facts has led to the conclusion that such a system is the best option, but simply that those expounding their opinions on the matter are almost invariably citizens of republics. Discussions of the matter are entered into with a base assumption derived from the very recent experience of only a fraction of humanity under conditions radically different from those the Martian colonists will face. At present, the republican system is primarily the government of choice for North America and Western Europe. Several nations, particularly in Eastern Europe and South America, possess the trappings with varying degrees of sincerity; many more nations do not even bother to feign it. At present republics, while not altogether uncommon, are by no means universal. Historically they are rare indeed. Go back even as little as a century and their number drops dramatically.

A Martian Republic is certainly an ideal to strive for and can potentially convey on human civilization the same sort of benefits as the American republic during its frontier period. Mars can act as a proving ground for new ideas, a cradle for invention and a societal safety valve all at once, but a republic is not assured. It will require a great deal of preparation and careful cultivation if it is to succeed and to assume its inevitability is to willfully blind ourselves to the perils of the course we have set ourselves upon.

THE BIRTH OF REPUBLICS

Contrary to modern Western bias, republics are not a form of government that people naturally tend to organize into. Their formation requires certain conditions, to endure requires a minor miracle. As is often the case when discussing Mars colonization (and despite the false assumptions such analogies can lead to) there are lessons to be learned from the history of the Americas.

Britain's American colonies (which we will focus on exclusively, for clarity) were uniquely suited to the formation of a new and lasting republic when they declared their independence. That collective act of defiance was the culmination of centuries of cultural development in the colonies. The individual colonies were able to unite not so much because of the compelling arguments of the benefits of doing so but because of their common culture, common language and common historical experience. The specifics of that cultural and historical base were essential for the republic's development, without it the Constitution of the United States of America would likely be nothing more than a figment of political theory.

The American colonies, while subjects of the Crown, were essentially on their own from the very beginning. The colonies governed themselves for the most part, though not always in a representative manner. Even when they had orders from their mother country, those orders could often be ignored to a degree. The distance was so great and the means of travel so slow that even garrisoned soldiers charged with enforcing the English laws acted locally and independently of direct control from London. Their orders originated in America, not in England. America was a world unto itself, cut off from the mother country. Centuries of practical independence laid the cultural groundwork for formal independence. By the time of the revolution, the people had a long history of self-reliance and self-governing.

America had ample resources in an easily accessible form. Everything the colonists needed was there for the taking. Food, water, building materials; all were present in quantities far in excess of what was required. The American colonies were an ideal medium for the formation of a new republic. Isolation from the mother country provided the rational motivation for independence. The availability of resources provided the means to make independence practical, but only the centuries of cultural evolution in the presence of those qualities allowed for the formation and survival of a free republic.

Neither will be the case on Mars. Unlike the American frontier, Mars will not be a wide-open field of seemingly endless resources stretching for as far as the eye can see and communications delays will be measured in minutes, not months. The Martian environment makes even the harshest regions of Earth seem a paradise by comparison. The American frontier had to be tamed, the Martian frontier is colder and harder, and must be broken. The task need not take centuries, a generation or two of grappling with the Martian environment, cut off from significant material help from Earth, may be enough to create the necessary cultural framework, but it cannot be bypassed entirely if the Martian Republic is ever to exist.

It cannot be stressed enough that simply living under an established republic is not sufficient. Just because the First Martian colonists will likely be Americans or Europeans who have lived under and been firmly indoctrinated in the ideals of representative government does not mean that those colonists will be well suited to building a new one. While Westerners are firmly rooted in democratic ideals, we are certainly not self-reliant to anywhere near the degree of the American pioneers. All the nations that have the means to take part in the colonization of Mars are well developed with high standards of living and a rather extensive welfare apparatus. Average American or European citizens, even those with the technical skills to make colonization physically possible, are not up to the task. In essence, what is required is a tech-savvy mountain-man, a "Daniel Boone" in a spacesuit. If there is to be a Martian Republic its founders cannot come from Earth, they must have lived their lives on Mars. They must develop a Martian culture that allows for the growth of a Martian Republic, it cannot exist in a societal vacuum. Republics require more than elections. The people must believe in it, they must have faith in the integrity of the system, and they must have a spirit of liberty and self-reliance. A constitution cannot provide the essential elements needed for a republic to function.

MARTIAN SOCIETY IN A VACUUM

While it seems unfortunate at first that a republic cannot be established on Mars out of the can, it

is good to be discouraged from trying at this stage. The types of decisions that the government of a new Mars colony will face will fall into two basic categories. The first being organizational questions such as size of work details, use of the habitable space, what type of time keeping system to use and a host of other minor details and variations from the already established plan that will never be resolved to everyone's satisfaction by debate. The second category comprises decisions that need to be made very quickly, most likely in cases where something has gone horribly wrong. In neither of these cases is a system based primarily on popular opinion desirable; in the first case it is simply inefficient and in the latter it is a sure way to significantly reduce the colony's odds of survival. While some degree of popular representation is needed if only from a cultural standpoint, the government at this early stage must have the authority to act without consulting. This requires a small and centralized authority.

Building a new nation from the most basic raw materials is something that must be planned meticulously in advance and then strongly guided when all the well-laid plans begin to fall apart. Nothing as complex as establishing a colony on Mars will go entirely according to design, and when things begin to go wrong a mechanism must be in place for quickly deciding on a solution and implementing it. With such requirements the introduction of something as crude as a popular vote is a recipe for disaster. On the other hand, simply establishing an unquestionable hierarchy won't do either. What is required is a system which provides the needed command structure while still allowing for change instituted from below, a system of government well suited to an environment where it may become necessary to very quickly scrap the old way of doing something and replace it with a method more suited to the moment. The colonization of Mars will require a pragmatic and adaptable form of government (*ad-hocracy, if you will*) that allows for a great deal of individual initiative down to the lowest levels while having the authority to change drastically and quickly should the need arise. The future Martians will need to find a balance between seemingly contradictory requirements. In addition there are likely social trends that will have to be considered and if possible, utilized.

The establishment of a Mars colony will require workers in several widely varied fields all carrying out their tasks simultaneously. Such an endeavor would not need dedicated management personnel, and therefore even those who do have a management function would be rooted and active in one of the fields needed. The combination of the natural division of workers by trade and the lack of a rigid and ossified management bureaucracy would likely have profound effects on the project. Work on every aspect of the colony could proceed unhindered by interference from uninformed meddling, resulting in more efficient work and likely in superior results. Unlike on Earth, Martian colonists will be in a very real sense working for themselves, the more infrastructure they erect the more secure and comfortable their lives will become. Their successes will be rewarded with a steady and highly visible increase in the standard of living conditions for the entire colony and they will be acutely aware that failure will in all probability result in Mars' swift return to uninhabited status. The Martian colonial labor force will be well motivated.

During the building of a colony those colonists will live in an environment the likes of which humans have never fully experienced, modern needs coupled with fairly primitive societal forms. There will be no outside social pressures or regulators and labor will be specialized and therefore to a large degree segregated. As every colonist will know their job, be self-motivated to do it to

the best of their abilities, and generally be free from interference; those who work in a given field will likely tend to form fairly closed groups. While this may be good from a standpoint of building the colony's infrastructure, it results in a social structure without any direct Terran equivalent. While collectivism or corporatism are the most obvious parallels, such a society is really more like a hive. The "Hive" model offers distinct advantages during the building of a colony but the societal framework it creates does not readily lend itself to the establishment of a republic. If left to develop freely, the result of Mars colonization could well be a rigid caste society constantly reinforced by a hard and unforgiving environment.

The prospects for a Martian Republic developing on its own seem slim, especially taking into account the human factor. Fledgling republics are fragile things and humans are selfish creatures. Those with authority rarely relinquish it voluntarily if they can avoid it. If an approach combining the natural tendencies listed above with a legal framework intended to nurture republican ideals can be executed, the odds for success increase dramatically.

A transitional form of government is needed, something that can effectively carry out the task of building the colony's infrastructure while at the same time helping to create the conditions needed for the republic to be formed. Such a transitional government may take many forms, but it should be kept in mind that the more it approaches the status of a complete governmental system, the less likely it will be that the colonists will elect to entirely replace it. If something works, we tend not to want to change it. This tendency will be reinforced by the cold and hard reality of the Martian environment.

OUTLINE FOR A MARTIAN TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT

As every colonist will have a specific function and their numbers will initially be small, organizing the workers of various fields or "trades" is a reasonable basis for representation. As they will tend to group together on their own and the overall numbers will be small, organizing the colonists in this way will be fairly simple. Each grouping, or Guild as they will be referred to for this discussion, will be solely responsible for its role in the colony. This gives us the starting point for a government and is based on what the colonists will likely do anyway, it is a simple and stable start. But something more is required if the "Hive" is to be avoided and the groundwork for a republic is to be laid. Some central authority is required, both to direct the development of the colony toward a republic, and to take control in the event of a catastrophe. If its intervention is required, it must be quick, decisive, and free to take whatever action is needed. The primary purpose of the Executive is to have in place an authority to direct the colony if things do not go as planned.

The makeup of the Executive body could take many forms, though a single person or a body of three is likely the most effective. Two makes gridlock likely when swift action is required and anything more than three takes on the complexity and inefficiency of a committee. Either case destroys the Executive's ability to perform its function should the need arise. For a number of reasons, both practical and political, an Executive Triumvirate may well be the preferred option, from the perspective of efficiency versus excessive authoritarianism.

The Executive must be well informed about any action it may have to take, and to that end each

guild should elect one or more of its members to serve on an "Advisory Council". This not only ensures that the Executive has the necessary "big picture" perspective, but also forces the guilds to have regular contact with one another rather than focusing solely on their own work. This forced contact may prove to be the most important function of the transitional government. Should the need arise to implement new laws during the colony's early development, the advisory council can also act as a ready-made legislative body. Such an arrangement is ideally suited to the conditions because rather than having technical matters decided by people with little or no understanding of the issue in question, at least some of the guild representatives will have first-hand experience with any issue that arises.

This results in a Martian colony with a small, efficient government possessing the knowledge to perform its function. The only real policy should be the survival and development of the colony. Ideally the colonial government shouldn't have to do anything at all, but if it must then it will require the power to act. Though the Executive could in theory have the power to rule by decree, if the guilds took care of their own affairs the Executive would be irrelevant unless a situation arose in which its intervention were absolutely necessary for the colony's survival.

This system, while simple and effective for building a colony, does have the potential to become an authoritarian monstrosity, particularly given the Martian conditions that will tend to reinforce any strong authority already in place coupled with the lack of immediate alternatives. Living in a pressurized dome is likely to stifle the desire to question authority, given that the entire population will be dependent on the smooth and orderly functioning of society to a degree unheard of on Earth. Clearly, the transitional government requires some guidelines. First, the inclusion of some derivative of the Bill of Rights of the US Constitution would be a good start.

Aside from a brief list of the things the government cannot do, some method of expiration must also be put in place, otherwise it will not be the transitional system it is intended as. A regular referendum on whether the system is still required or to begin drafting the constitution of a Martian Republic is the simplest method. The absolute minimum timeframe for a referendum of this sort should be no less than twenty years. The republic cannot exist until the colony's infrastructure is well established and the colonists themselves will require at least that long to begin building the cultural foundation needed for the republic to endure. By the very fact of the ad-hocracy's simplicity and incompleteness it will need to be discarded as soon as the colony outgrows it, though to be truly ready a timeframe of 50-100 years is likely. While it may seem excessive, half a century is a fraction of the time it took for the United States to emerge.

RIGHTS, LAWS AND FREEDOM

While the transitional government will most likely not form the basis of the Martian government once the colony is firmly established, it will leave a lasting legacy. The principles and institutions of the transitional system will heavily influence those of the Martian Republic, therefore the transitional government must not only physically pave the way and secure the material well-being of the colony, it must lay a sound philosophical foundation for the future Martian state. It is an awesome responsibility, and reason must prevail over emotion. The Martians would do well to keep a few simple principles in mind.

Dr. Robert Zubrin has written a list of the "Rights of Mars" in his book "Entering Space: creating a spacefaring civilization." This list can be used to illustrate some important points. He wisely begins with derivatives of the Bill of Rights to the US Constitution. These principles are proven and are the basis for a free state. Additions to these must be carefully considered. While well intentioned, the careless dispensing of "rights" can result in a great deal of harm.

Of particular note are numbers 12 and 17, "The Right to Access to Means of Mass Communication" and "The Right to Free Education", respectively. The first nine rights are things that government cannot do *to* you. These two are things which government must do *for* you. They are not "rights", but entitlements. Rights make the people free, entitlements make them dependents. If the people of Mars want access to means of mass communication, they would be much better off building it for themselves than waiting for the Martian government to provide it to them. A colony of people who believe they are entitled to services simply by virtue of their own existence will never build a free republic. A people who know they are entitled to nothing but an opportunity to improve their conditions will strive to do just that, and Mars will belong to them.

Many other additional "rights" are simply superfluous if the first nine are taken at face value. Still others, such as "The Right to Self Government by Direct Voting" are aspects of a particular governmental system rather than an individual right. Even in the United States, the so-called "right to vote" is merely a collection of laws guaranteeing the opportunity to vote. If it were truly a right, citizens could just vote; there would be no need to register. It is an aspect of the American system of government, but it is not a right in the proper sense. Rights are simple things, generally things easily done by individuals. Some rights exist to limit what the State can do to its citizens, but when a state apparatus is required for the execution of the so-called "right," it isn't a right at all. For example, a right to due process simply prevents the state from arbitrarily imprisoning its citizens, a "right to trial by jury" refers to a specific form of due process and does not constitute a right in the proper sense of the word.

Whatever form a Martian Bill of Rights may take, laws are needed to give order to the new Martian society. It should be noted that, contrary to popular misconception, laws do not prevent crime. Laws define crime, and therefore, in a sense, laws create crime. To keep the transitional government small and allow the colony plenty of room to grow into its own path, the laws should be as few and as simple as possible. A good guideline would be something to the effect of:

If an action brings no quantifiable harm to the colony or its citizens, nor infringes upon the rights of others, it cannot be criminal.

Using this as a guide, any actions that are truly damaging (such as murder, rape, theft, vandalism, etc.) are clearly criminal. Many of today's laws do not meet such requirements of criminality and can therefore be discarded. Such a legal code retains all the authority to punish true offenses while cutting back significantly on the opportunities for abuse by the government, an important consideration in an environment such as Mars, where any established authority will tend to be reinforced by the inhospitable conditions and interdependence of the colony.

The establishment of property rights is of vital importance for the future of Martian colonization

as well, whatever form it may take. At first there will be no privately owned land as the colony's habitable space will be extremely limited resulting in all interior space being publicly owned to some degree, a sort of default communism. As mining operations and other activities on the planet's surface become practical there will be a need for establishing property rights over Martian land. Allowing the Martian government to simply grant title should be avoided, the implication being that the Martian government owns the entire planet. Ownership based on possession and use is the simplest method. An individual or corporate entity which begins mining operations gains ownership of the land. Simply declaring intent to mine is insufficient. This simple approach prevents corporations from claiming vast areas of Mars on speculation while still allowing individuals to homestead.

Once property rights are established they must be secure, the more freely the landholders can profit by improvements of their land the greater the incentive to develop further. Any activities that infringe on property rights, whether from other colonial interests or from government detract from the growth of the colony and must be avoided as much as possible. There will likely be intense competition over particularly lucrative lands as soon as anything of value is discovered, but this only serves to build the colony and Martian civilization more quickly and should be encouraged.

The transitional government outlined here is not what many want for Mars. It does not fulfill idealistic visions of a utopian future nor does it take a bold and dramatic jump toward a new, Martian philosophy. However, unlike some more idealistic proposals it can be implemented in the earliest stages of a colony, and most importantly, it is workable. While the building of the Martian Republic is a project for another generation, the colonization of Mars need not be. Yet while the task can be accomplished, attempting it will take us in new directions, likely some that we did not intend. We must be prepared, as the American pioneers before us were, to face the challenges and overcome them. At times those who remain on Earth may not approve of what emerges, but the endeavor is not about them.

If there is to be a Martian Republic we must first overcome the Martian environment. We may at times be forced to adopt very undemocratic methods to do so. There are many perils, but the path to freedom has always been beset with hardship, and it is never guaranteed or secure. Employing non-republican methods in order to build a republic is not without risks, but the risks are worth taking. If we blindly succumb to the modern prejudices of democracy we will almost surely fail. With eyes and minds open, on to Mars.