

Now You Too Can Wreck the Nation: Playing Politics Bush Style

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CP - Dave Lindorff - Looking for a last minute gift idea for someone who is hard to shop for? How about a chance to wreck the nation? That's the idea behind a wacky political board game dreamed up by two California women who watched as Bush and the Republican Congress ran the country into a fiscal hole and started several interminable wars financed on credit and decided to do something about it.

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By DAVE LINDORFF

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Thinking that what they were watching happen was akin to Monopoly in reverse, they developed their game, where the winner is the one who can destroy the county by a combination of wars, tax cuts for the rich and outrageous budgets for military production, pork-barrel projects and corruption.

Players pick a token representing a politician beholden to one of four special interests, like defense contractor or the oil industry, and move around the board to a pair of thrown dice, plundering the public treasury along the way and trying to spend their \$1-trillion share of the national budget.

"The way it works is you pick up fact-based cards along the way-all based upon things that Bush and Congress have really done," says Jennifer McGlynn, one of the co-creators of Wreck the Nation (they also had consulting help from McGlynn's 12-year-old son). "Although an article in the Chicago Tribune called Wreck the Nation one of the 20 coolest board games, we haven't made it into Toys `R' Us," says McGlynn, "and I suspect we never will. The game is just too anti-Bush."

It's also probably too educational. As an added bonus, when players pick up one of the game's revenue cards, homeland security cards or expenditure cards, they can go to a website and

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punch in the numbers on that card to find out the true facts behind what the card tells them to do.

A typical card is this one from the Homeland Security deck, which reads, "Supreme Court rules you cannot designate terror suspects 'enemy combatants,' declare them outside the US legal system, and imprison them forever at Guantanamo Bay." Go to the website (www.wreckthenation.com) and enter the code. This takes the player to a web page that says:

After the tragic events of 9/11, 660 men from 42 different countries were rounded up as suspected members of Al Qaeda & other terrorist networks and sent to a makeshift prison camp at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, Cuba.

As "enemy combatants," these prisoners are considered outside of the U.S. legal system and can be held indefinitely WITHOUT TRIAL until hostilities in the "war on terror" are concluded. Or at least, this was what the Bush administration originally intended when the majority of these men were captured back in 2001 & 2002. There have been numerous court cases brought on behalf of Guantanamo prisoners arguing that they can not be held indefinitely without the opportunity to refute accusations and suspicions against them. The result of a June 2004 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court confirmed Guantanamo prisoners' right to challenge their detention in the U.S. legal system. To circumvent this ruling, the Bush administration established Combatant Status Review Tribunals in July 2004 to decide whether a prisoner is rightfully detained and imprisoned as an "enemy combatant." In February of 2005, a federal court ruled the Tribunals are illegal because the Tribunals insufficiently address the rights of a detainee to a fair trial.

As of February 2005, 5 men have been released without charges from Guantanamo Bay and over 100 of the original 660 prisoners have been handed over to other countries for further incarceration and interrogation.

As of February 2005, there are still 550 men imprisoned on the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay. They have been waiting for meaningful legal recourse in regards to their imprisonment for over 3 years.

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Not bad for a game rated "12 and older."

The same card entitles the holder to "Declare war against civil rights and civil liberties." This requires the player to flip another spinner three times. Each time the spinner lands on the category "Civil Liberties" (other choices are Democrats, American Workers, Choice, Pick a Country, etc.), the player pays out \$25 billion.

McGlynn, a Democrat, and her partner and co-creator Julia Carson, a Republican, are both Bush haters, says McGlynn. Carson's husband, a veteran, just returned from a tour in Iraq, so the war's not popular with either of them.

I asked McGlynn why she and Carson had opted for such a retro idea as a board game, instead of going with the times and producing an electronic version.

"The problem with video games is that it's just one or two people sitting in front of a screen playing silently," she said. "The idea with Wreck the Nation is to have a bunch of people sitting around a table talking politics."

What a novel idea!

My favorite part of the game is media monopoly. If a player lands on a media square-a TV or radio station or a newspaper-she or he can buy it. Buy three markets that are adjacent and you have a media monopoly. Or buy all three of any one media on the board and have a monopoly. Either way, if you have a monopoly, which allows you to take advantage of certain cards. For example, one Expenditure card, useable only if the player has a media monopoly, says, "Discredit an opponent's revelation that before 9/11, your Counter-Terrorism Chief repeatedly warned you al Qaeda, not Iraq, was the real threat. Use this card at the time of your choosing to send your opponent to any space on the board." Another Revenue card that can only be used by someone holding a media monopoly says, "To discredit your opponent, launch the new group Slow Boat Veterans for Monkey Business. Use this card at the time of your choosing to send your opponent to any space on the board."

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Wreck the Nation also has a poll spinner. If the needle lands on "Small gain in the polls" the player spends \$15 billion (remember, the object of the game is to spend all the nation's money in your possession faster than any of the other players).

One way to lose money fast is to land on one of the black "Gouge the Government" squares. Then you get to shake the special dice in a little black "Gouge the Government" cup. Add up the total of three throws of the dice and you get to spend that many billions of dollars.

My recommendation: A great gift for you child's classroom, or maybe for that annoying uncle who still has a Bush/Cheney '04 bumper sticker on his SUV.

This game is available at www.wreckthenation.com

Dave Lindorff is the author of Killing Time: an Investigation into the Death Row Case of Mumia Abu-Jamal. His new book of CounterPunch columns titled "This Can't be Happening!" is published by Common Courage Press. Information about both books and other work by Lindorff can be found at www.thiscantbehappening.net .

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