

Maybe never, certainly not in modern times, has the Annapolis State House seen anything quite like William Donald Schaefer.

With his official inauguration still two weeks off, Baltimore's mayor has become Maryland's *de facto* governor.

Latin comes naturally to any consideration of Schaefer's impending regime; his self-crowning brings to mind Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne. Closer to modern times, the mayor's techniques are more than vaguely reminiscent of the last self-designated caesar, Benito Mussolini.

The latter comparison first arose during the recent campaign when Schaefer's advocates' arguments seemed to echo the Italian Duce's admirers' claims that Mussolini made the trains run on time.

The two do not share identical styles. Mussolini was a magnificent orator. Schaefer's public speeches rank as fumbling embarrassments to all but his most willing sycophants. There are other differences.

On the other hand, lacking the Italian's commanding stage presence, Baltimore's mayor still comes off as one helluva showman. He understands the public's need for bread-and-circus: witness his unrelenting drive for a new sports coliseum, or two, and damn the cost.

Schaefer's floating encounter with the aquarium dolphin displayed the genius of a master of publicity. His greening of major state buildings with \$400 Christmas trees amounted to a grandiose advertisement for himself.

Then there was the matter of the State House pressroom.

The ink was scarcely dry on the certification of his electoral victory before His Excellency-elect entered the reporters' basement quarters and startled those present by falling to his knees; whereupon, William Donald Schaefer arose and decreed the carpeting should be replaced. Other refurbishments were commanded.

The mayor's bullying of editors and reporters stands on the public record. He managed to convince an influential publisher to travel the state, to enlist non-metropolitan newspapers as supporters of his gubernatorial candidacy.

In his handling of the press, Schaefer apes, almost exactly, the late Italian dictator, who also gave or withheld news based on his perception of journalists' loyalty.

Moreover, the Duce ordered a completely new building for the foreign press, creating an ambiance of comfort and efficiency. The *Stampa Estera* still offers a model of order among the casual chaos of the Eternal City.

More than a gesture, the facility enabled Mussolini to stroke foreign correspondents while he centralized their activities, for easier control.

Similarly, surrounded by all that shining newness, the Annapolis press corps does not have to look outside to

know William Donald Schaefer's arrival dawns a new age for his state's government. Perhaps, in addition, the mayor means to emulate the Italian leader by keeping reporters content within their own space.

For, with no suggestion of collusion, I find myself aghast that Maryland's editors and reporters are conceding the governor-elect all his wishes, no matter how extraordinary; the man has already reached beyond a request for particular accommodation for his style.

Demanding super pay grades (\$95,000) for three select cabinet posts and in advance of the legislative session sets off a round of hefty salary increases, or the problem of deep disgruntlement in other high offices. Still, this flap serves chiefly to disguise Schaefer's principal grab for unprecedented power.

The governor-elect expects the Senate and House of Delegates to yield their right to name the state treasurer. Pay attention to the stories and you will discover the media have created a climate favorable for Schaefer naming his choice to replace William James, a former Senate president.

Though little known to the general public, the treasurer plays a vital role on the Board of Public Works, which approves contracts and parcels out millions of dollars. As the legislature's representative on the board, by acting in concert with the state comptroller, the treasurer can constrain any grab for power by the governor.

These three — governor, comptroller and treasurer — make up the board.

If he can install his nominee, Schaefer will be able to use the state's millions to make senators and delegates dance to any tune he whistles. In one quick stroke, Maryland's almost-governor will be able to manipulate the legislature under the threat of depriving funding to opponents' districts.

Would William Donald Schaefer go that far? Can anyone who knows his City Hall record have any doubt?

The governor-elect is not evil; don't get me wrong. But in his dealings with Baltimore's elected officials, especially the City Council, the mayor consistently displayed scant regard for democratic process. By all evidence, he has practiced a benevolent dictatorship. Baltimoreans sing his praises.

Millions of Italians were happy under Benito Mussolini; he retained their adulation until he sacrificed their sons in unwanted wars. Even today, many Romans are willing to argue that the Duce was not an evil man, and he made the trains, together with the bureaucracy, function better than ever. Perhaps it is these qualities Marylanders want from their next governor.

Would a thinly disguised dictatorship be so bad for this state and its citizens?

As matters are progressing — while both the Annapolis press corps and our legislative leaders sleep — Marylanders could very well find out.

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Another

Mussolini

