

NEWT'S SWEET DREAMS

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Recent events have corroborated my contention that the futurist's curse is "may your dreams come true."

During the 1980s, while I was an executive officer of the World Futures Studies Federation, I had the opportunity to visit many WFSF members in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Many of these people dreamed of, and worked for, the time when the scourge of "communism" would be lifted, and they then could join the rest of the world as citizens of "normal" nations.

Their dreams came true far sooner than they imagined, or hoped. Many of them found themselves thrust into the highest positions of decision making and power in their countries well before they had developed any clear idea of what they wanted the future to be like, much less before they had any clear ideas of the policies necessary actually to create a better future.

While I would generally say the present of the former communist nations is modestly, but importantly, better than it was, I would say present conditions and future prospects are very far from what my futurists friends dreamed of before they were given the reins of power. Nonetheless, I have been moderately proud of some of my friends in the former communist areas, although deeply ashamed--and quite confused by the barbaric behavior--of others.

Recent events have thrust two other people who I have long regarded as futurists into the American political spotlight. One is Albert Gore, who for many years was one of the handful of people in Congress who took the future--and futures studies--seriously. He was a leader in the Congressional Clearinghouse on the Future, and a frequent speaker at meetings of the World Future Society, a Washington-based futures organization also with a worldwide membership. He published frequently in various future-oriented journals and magazines as well.

Even though, during the 1990 campaign, Gore became known as (or tarred as being) an "environmentalist" because of his 1992 book, Earth in the Balance. I had known him for years more as a "high tech" futurist. I thus was not the least bit surprised when his name became so closely linked to the idea, and now the growing reality, of the "Information SuperHighway."

But much more recently--within the last few weeks, in fact--a person hitherto unknown to most Americans, has suddenly appeared--everywhere: on the covers of both Time and Newsweek; on the front page of all newspapers; in fawning as well as ridiculing political cartoons; and constantly on television--on talk shows, variety shows, game shows, Saturday Night Live and now Murphy Brown.

The man with The Best Name for Political Ridicule since Estes Kefauver (ask your grandparents), he is the Gingrich who stole Congress; the Aye of Newt, Uncle Scrooge--my fellow futurist, Newt Gingrich.

Yes, he too is, and frequently has been acknowledged by the media as being, "a futurist."

Now, any one who reads mainland newspapers and magazines knows that it is not necessarily a compliment to call someone "a futurist." To be "a futurist" is, in American media parlance, to be a fruitcake; an idle dreamer; a soothsayer; a "crystal ball gazer" whose ideas are only fit to be ridiculed and dismissed.

Now, for historical reasons that we won't go into here, Hawaii media tend to be tiny smidgen less disdainful--but every bit as skeptical--of "futurists." But the American media have dealt with Newt so far as though he suddenly did, in fact, appear from under a rock when some frog kissed him, transforming him from a being Newt, the weird Republican congressman from Georgia, into Newt, The Speaker of the House.

The press knows it should treat Speaker Gingrich seriously, or at least politely, but--having spent so many years either ignoring or ridiculing his ideas--it is wholly incapable of hearing, understanding and analyzing what it is he has been and still is saying and doing, much less how he could have parlayed those words and deeds into the 1994 election and into what I believe will in fact be a revolution in American politics at least as great as the 1932 election of Roosevelt, which created the political landscape within which virtually every American alive has been required to function.

Now, that point has been very frequently acknowledged in the mainland press. Newt himself tirelessly likens himself, and his work, to Roosevelt and the New Deal (in somewhat the same way Marx likened himself to Hegel: by turning Hegel upside down).

In my opinion, the 1994-1932 analogy is inadequate for understanding the profundity of the 1994 elections.

But for now, I would just like to say that I have known and communicated with Gingrich since I met him as a founding member of the Committee for Anticipatory Democracy, in 1975.

Alvin Toffler had only recently become famous from writing his book Future Shock. The last section of that book was on "Anticipatory Democracy." It was about creating a more future-oriented democratic form of government than that found in the US Constitution--or any other government. Toffler invited several academic futurists and future-oriented politicians who had thought about the matter to his home for a three day retreat. One of the outcomes of the retreat was the formation of CAD in Washington, DC, in June 1975; a three day-long series of futures workshop for Congress in September 1975, and the creation of the Institute for Alternative Futures, in Washington, DC. I have been on the Board of that Institute since its founding, and students in the Alternative Futures MA Option in the Department of Political Science of the University of Hawaii often do their internships in the Institute.

Though Newt Gingrich was not present at the first meeting in Toffler's house, he was involved in all of the subsequent CAD activities. Then for several years after he was first elected to Congress in 1978, I would visit with Newt whenever I was in Washington, and it was mutually convenient.

Without a doubt the most memorable visit I had with Gingrich was on June 10, 1981.

On June 11, Newt was going to give a presentation in the Oval Office to President Reagan, Jim Baker, and other members of the President's staff. On the 10th, he was giving a dry run of that briefing to some staff members of the Congressional Planning Committee of the Republican Party. Newt invited me to sit in, as the only "outsider" present.

With Newt's permission, I collected the handouts, and took notes of that meeting. On June 12, I presented them to a hastily-convened seminar of the UH Political Science Department.

What follows is based on those notes and handouts, and my continuing to follow Gingrich's career subsequently, though more recently, only from afar.

Now, as much as I may disagree with most of Newt's rhetoric and policies, he is no more (or less) a flake than is (or was) any other US political figure before he became famous (and/or powerful). Dator's Second Law of the Future is, "Any useful statement about the future should seem ridiculous." The corollary is that when futurists make useful statements about the future, they should expect to be ridiculed and laughed at.

Futurists have no problem with that. Unfortunately, the media, willfully ignorant of the utility of futures studies, only knows how to ridicule and laugh. Generally speaking, it does not know how to identify and evaluate presently-laughable but futuristically- important statements, and to place them in their proper context.

Before 1776 (or so), the ridiculous ideas about the separation of Church and State espoused by a farmer known as Thomas Jefferson could be dismissed out of hand. Didn't he know that ALL nations (and England's colonies) had Established Religions? How in the world was he going to separate the church from the state, for heaven's sake?

Before 1819 (or so), the idea that a business organization could be considered a "person" which should be accorded many of the rights that a live human being holds under the US Constitution must certainly have been laughable (I must say I still consider it pernicious, as well as ridiculous).

Before 1863 (or so), who would have dared believe the US would abolish slavery--an honored and "natural" institution since the dawn of time?

Before 1991 (or so), who would have dared believe the Mighty Evil Empire would crumble and fall with scarcely any bloodshed and without any foreign invasion?

And before 1994, who would have dared believe the mighty Liberal Welfare State, the brilliant and necessary creation of the Brain Trust of the 1930s

(vastly aided by the Second World War, and greatly imitated by every other nation in the world) could be brought to its knees--no: pushed flat on its face--by one Newt and a bunch of very carefully picked, prepped and cultivated Republican candidates, aided by, of all things radio! Talk radio--and this in the era of the digital SuperHighway, never mind television!

Well, folks, it is all right there in my 1981 notes; in Newt's mimeographed handouts, titled, "Key steps in developing a survivable United States," written by Newt Gingrich and one Marianne Ginther); along with a 23-point handout titled "Creating a Republican legislative agenda for a Conservative Opportunity State" and in later material, including a 21 page article titled, "Building the Conservative Opportunity Society: The Challenge in 1982 for America," this time written by Marianne and Newt Gingrich; various pieces of future-oriented legislation (one co-introduced by Gore and Gingrich in 1983 for "the continuous assessment of critical trends and alternative futures"), and ending (for me) with a handout from "the Baltimore Conference" of October 1983, titled "America at the Crossroads: Creating a Conservative Opportunity Society and a Republican Majority," and, in 1984, with a copy of the book, Window of Opportunity: A Blueprint for the Future, by The Honorable Newt Gingrich, with David Drake and Marianne Gingrich, with supporting blurbs by Alvin Toffler and Hans Mark (Deputy Administrator of NASA).

It is all there, folks.

Newt Gingrich did not suddenly appear on the political scene. The "Contract with/on/against America" is absolutely nothing new. Absolutely nothing is secret or surprising here.

The election of Reagan in 1980 was, Newt believed, a fluke, not a trend. "Republicans," he said to me in 1981, "have been 'the minority,' 'the opposition' for so long that we cannot realize that now we must be 'the government.' But if we play our cards right, we can be 'the government' for the rest of our lives." "We have the opportunity to build a new coalition that will be as revolutionary in its way as that built by Roosevelt and the New Deal."

Newt then described a plan which begins with a vision of a preferred future for America, which he then termed (as you can tell from the material cited above) "The Conservative Opportunity Society." This positive vision, he said, should be clearly articulated in contrast to the "Liberal Democrat Worldview" which is all bad.

US government operates (said Gingrich, and many American Government textbooks agree), not according to the formal "separation of powers" between Congress, the President, and the Courts, but rather by "iron triangles" which are composed of interest groups focused on one particular economic or ideological issue; members of the congressional committees (often from the place where the interest groups are most powerful) which formulate policy relative to the issue; and the bureaucrats in the executive branch who are responsible for carrying out the policies of Congress for the benefit of the members of the interest group.

Every issue of importance has its own "iron triangle," and American government works, Newt believed, by and through these triangles, with each

triangle leaving the other triangles alone as long as no other triangle bothers them.

Nonetheless, Newt believed it was necessary to strengthen, or create, Conservative Opportunity triangles, while attacking and belittling Liberal ones. Newt proposed doing this by utilizing under-utilized media, since the major media were "captured" by the Liberals. As Newt said, according to my notes, "We have got to get Amway to use their Mutual Broadcasting System to get our message across. Freedom of the Press doesn't only mean that the Washington Post has the right to gut us. We have the right to get our message across too."

In addition to getting a positive, clear and compelling message formulated and across (and in sharp contrast to conventional Republican--or Democratic--party politics of the time), Newt said, according to my notes, "Richard Nixon helped us enormously by wiping out half of the senior Republicans, leaving a great vacuum which we, the survivors of the 70s, are alone to fill. We will not fill it with our friends and cronies, as has been done in the past, but with professionals, trained in campaign managing professionally, and thoroughly imbued with, and loyal to, our Worldview. If folks won't go along with us, we'll just say, thank you and good bye. Get on the team, or thank you, goodbye."

Virtually all of the newly-elected signers of the Contract are loyally "on the team," and fully willing and able to enact and try to carry out its provisions, I believe.

Throughout the 1981 briefing, Gingrich spoke admiringly of two models around which he planned to restructure the Republican Party, thereby turning it into "'the government' for the rest of our lives," namely, Amway, and the German Army, the Wehrmacht. He believed that the Wehrmacht was an excellent army, having an admirable chain of command within which information flowed freely up and down between the top and the bottom. The German Army lost the war, in his judgment, not because it was inferior to the American Army, but only because of the insanity of the goals it was asked to pursue. "We should," I quoted him in my notes as saying, "organize the Republican Party like the Wehrmacht" but pursuing, of course, the goals of the Conservative Opportunity Society.

Unlike most freshmen congress members, who wish to get on committees of substantive interest to their constituents, Newt chose to ride to power by restructuring the Republican Party.

Like a good futurist, he had a vision which he tirelessly espoused and refined; he had a plan of action, which he tirelessly enacted and improved; and he became a tireless leader who recruited enough loyal followers to fulfill his plan and achieve his vision.

Barring some event or other which removes Gingrich from the political arena, he and his supporters are fully able and capable of enacting the policies they propose. If they do, he is in my judgment understating the situation when he says it will be a revolution in American politics as great as the New Deal, resulting in policies and procedures as different from those

followed since the New Deal as the New Deal was from the policies and procedures which preceded it.

I believe it is high time we took Newt's vision and actions seriously, and began to understand what they might really mean for America, beyond what he may hope and dream.

Because when his dreams come true, we all will have to live with them.

I think I know what that means for us, our children and grandchildren.

Do you?