

Pete Edler

The Shape of Frogs to Come

Visualization is much in vogue these days – if you want something, act as if you already have it. And to act as if you have it, visualize it – the Universe is inexhaustible and provides for all. You may think this a little weird but a lot of folks swear by it, and it certainly can't do any harm.

So I've been visualizing a time frame after the collapse of the United States of America. It's like building a platform in the future, which first must be a mental structure, nevertheless as realistic as possible. To guide us we have the Gorbachev and Yeltsin periods – with Gorbachev reluctantly supervising the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yeltsin the first leader of the new Russia. In the wake of these epochal changes during the early 1990s, for a short while, Mother Russia seemed poised on the threshold of a Golden Age, looking out over a vast future of truly democratic promise.

Similarly, I'm envisioning a great window of opportunity soon after the collapse of the United States. Most likely from the former US a cluster of smaller confederacies will emerge. Perhaps a core aggregate of US states will remain, renamed, as with the former Soviet Union. And naturally I envision those small groups of now independent former US states constituted as parliamentary democracies with a comprehensive spectrum of parties from left to right expressing the aspirations of the citizenry. So far so good - *but hold it there, pardner!*

What we will have during this period of a couple or three years is boundless American optimism, boundless American energy, boundless American imagination. Every single individual wants to shape the future anew, generating an enormous tidal swell of entrepreneurial fervor. For the first time in many, many decades every man, woman and child will feel that whatever they do, whatever their work, everything is literally bursting with meaning and promise. The future is truly theirs, their optimism palpable, their aspirations manifest.

This is exhilarating and dangerous. One wrong step and all might turn out to have been for nothing. Since everything will seem possible, everything can be tried – the small, communal lifestyle, the townhall concept, the Swiss referendum approach. For a short while America will be in a state of creative chaos, heady times for all. Remember, however, that as humans we are born longing for security and order. It will be in trying to establish order and security in this creative chaos that the dangers lie.

Everything will have happened, and will be happening, very fast – the good, the bad, the simply ugly. Then this brief initial stage of heady experimentation – not more than one or two, at most three years – will segue into control by power groups led or fronted by individuals with their own ideas of how things should be done. Many no doubt will use a past that was comfortable and profitable for them to guide them in their efforts toward a new future not very different from the old. That's human nature.

And that's the bad news – *if we allow it to be*. So for

now, for the purpose of this scenario, let's stay on that platform of a fresh and free America - free from the bonds and shackles of Empire, free to do as it pleases, free to create a truly humanistic future. Let's not look any further than that. Let's do this now. Let's agree there will be such a period, such an opportunity. Let's roll up our mental sleeves and go to work on that imaginary patch of future. And let's promise ourselves that this time we won't fluff it, this time we will succeed - such at least must be our fervent hope.

We have plenty of reason to be pessimistic, of course. After all, the platform I'm projecting floats in a sea of capitalist predictability. What has developed over the past say two hundred years is a global system of exploitation - not necessarily by design or conspiracy, perhaps incidentally, so to say willy-nilly, but nevertheless very effective and by now well organized and all-pervasive. Our problem is that we've got used to this. We have got used to being exploited, and in the process we have changed character - we ourselves have become exploitive. Not always and not necessarily in everything we do socially or communally but, much worse, *in*

principle! We routinely accept and use exploitation as a working model - a very large, comprehensive model that we rely on every instant of our waking time, and often even in our dreams.

It is this basic mode of thought, this conditioned reflex of thinking capitalist, that inhibits our imagination and prevents us from freely contemplating and designing desirable models for the future. I am not aware of anyone having suggested a better model of socio-political organization than democracy, yet clearly, after some 2,500 years of experimentation in the democracy department, we appear to be at our wits' end.

Not too long ago someone with a sharp sense of humor announced the 'end of history'. Announcing the end of democracy may not resonate as amusingly, which is why I'm cautiously suggesting we may be in the final phase of the final stage of democratic evolution. On the other hand, looking at the evolution of say frogs, democracy may simply be the most effective form of housing the content it offers. Frogs haven't changed shape for millions of years. Likewise, democracy as an organizational

model on our planet may last a thousand years more.

So when I cast the net of my capitalistically challenged imagination into the sea of future it amounts to an act of desperation, true, but also one of hope. As I might say if I were a presidential hopeful who shall remain nameless, “Yes, my friends, changing the shape of frogs is no easy task but I know America can do it.” And as his hopeful running mate who’d *better* remain nameless I might add, “Yes, yes, and we’re *doing* it!”

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