

# Newt Gingrich leads Republican Party off into post-industrial cyberspace

by Jeffrey Steinberg

In the "World According to Newt Gingrich" (R-Ga.), the new American Dream is that every ghetto kid someday has his own laptop computer. Never mind that he or she will continue to dwell in a miserable ghetto, will have little chance of advancement, and won't even be able to read what's on the screen.

In fact, Gingrich's "Third Wavers" really have no intention of putting a laptop onto *every* knee. In "Newt's World," the *truly successful* people are called the "Brain Lords," whereas the vast majority of humanity is relegated to the status of either "Menial" or "Lost" people—the latter referring to those who just "can't cope" in a world where literacy means having a log-on to the Internet and the latest version of WordPerfect for Windows on your PC.

This bizarre vision of an America which has traded in its industrial prowess and steel and concrete infrastructure for the "virtual reality" of post-industrial cyberspace, is not drawn from the pages of cartoonist Gary Larson's "The Far Side." It is a plan for a future that can never be, which was spelled out at a recent conference sponsored by Speaker of the House Gingrich's own think-tank, the Progress and Freedom Foundation.

The event's corporate sponsors included Bell Atlantic, Eli Lilly and Company, Joseph E. Seagram and Sons, Philip Morris Companies, Southern California Edison, Emerson Electric, and Honda of America. Former President George Bush's chief White House counsel, C. Boyden Gray, not only poured in a pile of cash to host the event, which took place at the posh Mayflower Hotel in the heart of Washington, D.C. He personally attended the event, choosing to take up a discreet chair at the back of the room rather than sit at the podium. Edgar Bronfman, the head of Seagram, who is bidding to take over two of America's media giants—CBS and Time Warner—not only sponsored a corporate table at the luncheon, but "donated" his chief Washington lobbyist, William P. Roesing, to co-host the event with RJR Nabisco heir Gray and to assume a seat on the foundation's board of directors.

The Progress and Freedom Foundation (PFF), created in 1993, is loaded with GOP bigshots. Chairman of the board

is George A. Keyworth, President Ronald Reagan's science adviser and former head of the physics division at Los Alamos National Laboratory. Former Reagan Budget Director James C. Miller III sits on the board; former six-term Congressman Vin Weber (R-Minn.) is listed as a senior fellow. Arianna Huffington, the wife of the recently defeated GOP candidate for the U.S. Senate from California, is a director of the foundation. The January 1995 issue of the foundation's monthly newspaper *American Civilization* featured a lengthy interview with Eddie Mahe, one of the GOP's oldest and most venerated campaign strategists.

## 'Democracy in Virtual America'

One might assume that with this heavyweight lineup of conservative activists and moneybags, the PFF would have its feet fairly solidly on the ground. Not on your life.

On Jan. 10, several hundred predominantly young, white, male would-be computer entrepreneurs, self-described "futurologists," wannabe Republican Party policy wonks, and news media Gingrich-watchers sat mesmerized as Alvin and Heidi Toffler took them on a day-long excursion into their psychotic vision of the future. Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.), who harbors presidential fantasies, stopped by for lunch to deliver a keynote speech embracing the essentials of the Tofflers' vision, underscored by his bold campaign promise at the end of his speech, that the GOP would prove itself to be "the party of the Third Wave."

By the afternoon session, as the appointed moment drew near for Gingrich to deliver closing remarks, the crowd had already been subjected to a heady dose of pure Toffler, two hours of propaganda on "Culture and Politics in Virtual America," and two more hours of meanderings on "Virtual Economy, Virtual Government." They had heard, for example, Austrian School economist Michael Rothschild patiently explain that "the Third Wave means that the economy is not a machine—it's a tropical rainforest!"

The title of Gingrich's closing remarks could well have come from the Mad Hatter in *Alice in Wonderland*: "From Virtuality to Reality."

## Tofflerian 'wave' theory

Ever since the Nov. 8, GOP congressional victories swept Gingrich into the limelight, he has seized every opportunity to cite his 20-year intimate friendship and collaboration with the World Future Society's answer to Ozzie and Harriet, Alvin and Heidi Toffler. The Tofflers' 1970 book *Future Shock* was a pop-cult classic, which helped launch the shift in American culture away from a traditional commitment to scientific and technological progress, toward the notion that the world could somehow move into a "post-industrial" era without at the same time plunging into a New Dark Age.

Twenty-five years later, the Tofflers are still singing the same tune, with only slightly more polished lyrics. Today, post-industrial society goes by the name "Third Wave." In the Toffler lexicon, the "First Wave" was agricultural society, while the "Second Wave" was industrial society. And at the PFF conference, Toffler explained that the Nov. 8 Republican victory was "not a stand-alone event," but signaled the next great realignment in American politics: the transition from Second to Third Wave.

Borrowing from some of the rhetoric he probably first adopted as a student radical in Greenwich Village in the late 1940s, Toffler launched into a scathing attack against industrial society, because of its emphasis on "mass production, mass distribution, mass education, mass media, and mass destruction." Declaring all bureaucratic structures—whether in governments, corporations, or labor unions—"obsolete," Toffler described the Third Wave culture, built upon "PC power," as "demassified," "diverse," and "democratic."

For Toffler, the Great Change began in 1956, when, for the first time, more American workers were employed in white-collar and service-sector jobs than in factories. Today, the "muscle-based labor force" is vanishing, he gloated, adding that under 20% of the American labor force is now involved in industrial labor, while 80% are "knowledge workers."

Toffler reserved special venom for the nuclear family. "The idea that the nuclear family is universal and permanent has been shown to be a myth," he asserted, and blamed the destruction of the family on the hierarchical structure of the Second Wave society. The "traumatic demassification" of the nuclear family means that it will be replaced by a Third Wave family structure, which will be "varietal" and "polymorphic," he pontificated.

Heidi Toffler, writing in the Dec. 12, 1994 *Washington Post*, delivered her own New Age views on family life: "The fetus is a parasite in my body. Until it's viable, I have control over it. I would never have an abortion, but I would defend to the death the right of a woman to have that parasite removed."

In the Tofflers' post-industrial Third Wave America, the federal government will all but cease to exist; society will be held together by interactive computer linkups. One confer-

ence speaker, Arianna Huffington, suggested that members of Congress won't even have to be in Washington, except for great televised debates. They can vote by computer from their home districts.

## Gramm's endorsement

None of the ideas put forward by the Tofflers or any of the other speakers at the morning session were too far out for Senator Gramm. His lunch-hour speech amounted to a wholesale endorsement of the Toffler Third Wave psychobabble, with a GOP partisan spin. Gramm declared that the period from 1880 to 1970 had been an industrial era, in which the Democratic Party thrived because industrial progress required active involvement by the federal government. Beginning in 1970, however, "the Information Age supplanted the Industrial Age." Now that the transition from the Second Wave to the Third Wave is under way, the GOP can enjoy its moment in the sun. "The GOP is the party of the Third Wave," Gramm proclaimed. "History is on our side."

To prove that he was as comfortable with Toffler-speak as the next person, Gramm volunteered his own explanation for the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union: Blame it on "future shock." "The Information Age contained, and then tore down the Berlin Wall," the ex-Texas college professor explained. "A top-down system can't function in a post-industrial era."

By the time Gingrich arrived to deliver the final word of the day, the future had been at least figuratively beaten to death. Never at a loss for words, Gingrich launched into a paean to Adam Smith, one of the leading enemies of the American Founding Fathers, and in real life, a hatchet man for Lord Shelburne's imperial British East India Company:

"If you had asked me intellectually where we are—and this is directly out of Alvin and Heidi's work, so it won't surprise most of you—I would argue that the most accurate analogy for where we are right now is not 1933; it's the 1770s to 1800. . . . The greatest single works of that earlier period were intellectually both by the same man, and it's interesting that that one we seldom talk about, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* by Adam Smith, which proceeds and frames *The Wealth of Nations*, is an inherently philosophical and moral work. . . .

"But I think equally useful is to look at the role of Pitt the Younger in the 1780s and 1790s, because Pitt the Younger, surrounded by the disciples of Smith, rationalizes British tax policy to create the commercial environment in which so much wealth is made that people are able to fight the Napoleonic Wars and Britain is able to carry virtually the entire financial weight of the alliance against Napoleon in a way that would have been literally impossible without Adam Smith's intellectual ideas being transmitted into the tax policies of Pitt the Younger."

Somehow, Gingrich neglected to mention the fact that some of those funds also went into the sacking and burning of Washington during the War of 1812.