

How History Changes

28

8

Save



Supporters of former U.S. President Donald Trump look on before the start of a campaign rally at the Reno-Sparks Convention Center in Reno, Nev., on Dec. 17, 2023. Justin Sullivan/Getty Images



By Jeffrey A. Tucker

11/19/2024

Updated: 11/19/2024

A A Print

Commentary

Major changes are coming to Washington, D.C., and all of its outposts that could reshape American life for another generation or two. The

federal budget will be affected but so will all industries, most especially food and pharmaceuticals.

In a few years, we could see the return of small farmers, accountability for drug manufacturers, a curbing of agency overreach, and more freedom for enterprise generally speaking. Americans are going to be asked to start taking more responsibility for their lives rather than depending on government, which is in so much debt that it can no longer bear its present burdens.

In addition, political alliances in this country have undergone a profound shift that affects all prevailing assumptions. The coming together of the 1990s-era “crunchy liberals,” with the “Occupy Wall Street” movement against corporate capture of government, with the American First movement, alongside free-speech advocates, homeschoolers, and agents of change toward genuine free enterprise is not a coalition anyone anticipated even a few years ago.

Some of this makes perfect sense in retrospect. Academia in its promotion of “woke” cultural ideals has always exaggerated the role of race and underestimated the role of class in its political analytics. The coalition that elected Trump is very obviously multiracial and in utter defiance of those who said the interests of men and women were forever at odds.

The uniting drive has been none other than a desire for normal life back, unencumbered by administrative decrees and endless sermons by the cultural elite.

As with most of such moments in history, everything seems inevitable in retrospect. But if that is true, why did so few anticipate it ahead of time? I often think back to my early years of college in which I was taught that the Soviet GDP would soon pass the United States and that the Cold War would likely last forever because the Soviets presided over an impenetrable edifice.

It seemed true, until it did not.



Those of us who were around for the fall of the Soviet Union and all its client states in Eastern Europe can never forget those days. In a matter of months, the population withdrew its consent from government, leaders in government lost the passion for more enforcement, members of the military turned on the regimes, and the rise of information technology swept aside existing systems in country after country. It was a marvel to behold, and it defied explanation at the time.

These months of upheaval were not welcomed by the establishment on either side but they happened anyway. It was a people-powered movement that shifted the trajectory of history. Once in motion, events unfolded as if by force of gravity.

Intellectuals at the time worked quickly to figure it all out, and came to a consensus that the problem was rooted in totalitarian ideology itself. It was sucking the energy out of societies and nothing was being produced as compared with the mighty jobs and wealth engines of the West. Demoralized and out of ideas, the elites in those countries threw up their hands and said it is over.

And yet, poor societies wrecked by despotism have a long history. For that matter, the Soviet experiment lasted much longer than anyone expected. Why did it all crumble when it did? Understanding that is the real challenge.

The long-time champions of socialism worked quickly to assure us that none of these events were really a black mark on socialism itself since real socialism is not about coercion and mighty states. It was Stalinism that fell, not socialism as such. This becomes important because for many decades, the Cold War was framed as a great debate between capitalism and socialism. The winner in this case was clearly capitalism and, by implication, the U.S. government.

The trouble was that capitalism has always had an uncertain definition. If you mean a free market with few regulations and no industrial privileges and bureaucratic overlords, the United States qualified ever less, due to its mighty government with huge spending

and regulatory state. After the end of the Cold War, the United States did not grant its citizens a “peace dividend” but just the opposite. Its military might only grew as did tax and regulatory burdens.

As we look back at the 1990s and 2000s, it is apparent that the ranks of the dissidents were growing year after year. They just did not find their home or find their voice. The Tea Party movement, the health freedom movement, the whole food movement, the homeschooling movement, the free-speech movement—all of them developed in isolation, blinded by fictions of right and left to realize that they had common interests and a common opponent in what is now called the corporatist administrative state.

It was the stunning coming together of all these disparate movements, over just a few months prior to the election of November 2024 that yielded the election results that hardly anyone in elite media circles could see coming. It was not just about Trump. It was about the whole mass movement that rallied behind him as a symbol of protest against the establishment.

Out of nowhere, those who believed they were on the right, and those who believed they were on the left, had linked up together to bring about the most dramatic political shift in modern times. All at once, they noticed their common interest in throwing off their overlords and getting back to building good lives.

These are just the sketches of what we are seeing for now. The picture will not be complete for another year or so. We are also waiting to see whether this is just another cosmetic change in the names on the door or if we are going to see genuine structural change. For now, all signs point to the latter but millions are waiting to know for sure before the cheers go out to embrace a new age that truly does save the American project from the many forces that threaten it.

For many decades, scholars have contemplated the precise way in which “social change” happens. What has to come together? What exactly constitutes the “winds of change” in history? The Hegelians have a different answer than the classical liberals like me.

I'm with Ludwig von Mises who wrote that history consists entirely of the ideas that people hold about themselves and their societies, and that no regime is strong enough to withstand an idea whose time has come.

“The final causes to which history refers are always the ends individuals and groups of individuals are aiming at,” he wrote. “History does not recognize in the course of events any other meaning and sense than those attributed to them by acting men, judging from the point of view of their own human concerns.”

The simple idea in our time comes down to one word: freedom. It was the same theme when the Soviet Union fell, and it is the animating spirit behind the election of 2024 which defied the whole of conventional wisdom. Getting from the current system to one more in line with what the Founders envisioned is not going to be easy and it will not happen overnight. But change is in the air, and it is a delight to see which way the winds are blowing.

In short, history changes because of the coming together of people who want it to change. The status quo is never a fixed feature of the world. What can be made can be unmade and remade. Sometimes even the beastliest of hegemonies can be revealed as a fragile edifice, sustained only by illusions that are easily shattered with just a few pieces of evidence.

Permit me a footnote: it's been my great privilege to experience over three years a broad range of access to people with different views from my own. It came about because lockdowns shattered our old communities and put us all in touch with new ones.

I suspect that this happened all over the country and world. It was this new mixing of ideas—born out previous isolation—that have built this new populism we see with such an implausible coming together of what people used to see as differences. I'm grateful for that, and it offers a lesson for me and all over this: there is only good that can come from new paths of learning and exposure to new ideas. This is the way of progress.

Views expressed in this article are opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.

Sign up for the Epoch Opinion newsletter. Our team of Canadian and international thought leaders take you beyond the headlines and trends that shape our world.

[Sign up with 1-click >>](#)



Jeffrey A. Tucker

Author

Jeffrey A. Tucker is the founder and president of the Brownstone Institute and the author of many thousands of articles in the scholarly and popular press, as well as 10 books in five languages, most recently “Liberty or Lockdown.” He is also the editor of “The Best of Ludwig von Mises.” He writes a daily column on economics for The Epoch Times and speaks widely on the topics of economics, technology, social philosophy, and culture.



[WEBSITE](#)

Author's Selected Articles

The Vibe Shift and the Wealth Effect

Nov 18, 2024



Andrew Jackson in the 21st Century

Nov 15, 2024



A Plan to Tame Inflation

Nov 14, 2024



It's a Reboot of 'The Jetsons'

Nov 13, 2024



Copyright © 2000 - 2024 The Epoch Times Association Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Cookies Settings](#)