

The Reagan airport

Martin McLaughlin
6 February 1998

Congress passed a resolution Wednesday to rename Washington National Airport after former President Ronald Reagan. The House passed the measure by a margin of 240-186, with most Democrats opposing the measure. The Senate margin was a top-heavy 76-22, with half the Democrats supporting the bill, including such liberals as Edward Kennedy. Clinton announced he would sign the bill, with White House spokesman Mike McCurry saying, "I think for him it came down to a question of honoring Ronald Reagan."

The absurdity of naming an *airport* after Reagan is so evident that even the corporate-controlled media has been compelled to report protests by representatives of the air traffic controllers union. Reagan fired 13,000 air traffic controllers during the 1981 PATCO strike. Four workers were sent to federal prison during the strike, and dozens died of heart attacks or suicides after they were deprived of their livelihood and blacklisted. The effects of this vindictive policy are still felt today in the air traffic safety system.

There are, of course, broader reasons why the renaming of anything for Ronald Reagan is politically repellent. His administration coincided with a dramatic shift to the right in bourgeois politics, in both the Democratic and Republican parties. He carried through the largest tax cut for the rich in history, effecting a vast transfer of wealth from working and poor people to the wealthy. He inaugurated the systematic attacks on the victims of capitalism—the poor, the sick, the homeless, the unemployed, welfare recipients—which have culminated under Clinton with the abolition of federal welfare programs.

In its foreign policy, the Reagan administration was identified with militarism and anticommunism, propping up right-wing dictators and waging covert war against the people of Nicaragua, El Salvador, Angola and other countries. These efforts culminated in the Iran-Contra affair, in which a massive conspiracy

against the democratic rights of the American people was revealed and then quickly covered up by Congress, the White House and the courts.

Whatever one thinks about the practice of naming natural or manmade landmarks after the deceased, few would quarrel with the historical stature of figures such as Washington, Franklin, Jefferson or Lincoln. But Ronald Reagan? Even among his own supporters his intellectual mediocrity was acknowledged. One chronicler of his administration aptly titled his book *Sleepwalking through History*.

But Reagan is a hero to not a few people who profited handsomely from his anti-working-class policies. Despite the accumulation of economic and social contradictions and enormous class divisions, those at the top of American society remain largely heedless of the profound and wrenching settling of accounts that is inexorably approaching. It is therefore quite natural that they should honor a man whose ignorance rendered him oblivious to the long-term implications of his own policies.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact