

Letters on “Ronald Reagan (1911-2004): An Obituary”

11 June 2004

Below we post a selection of letters on “Ronald Reagan (1911-2004): An Obituary” by David North.

To the Editor:

Regarding Ronald Reagan’s death: David North’s obituary said what was needed more comprehensively than any other of the dozens of essays I’ve read on this pathetic man’s passing into historical oblivion.

My years as a social worker turned me into what the philosophers call a “hard determinist”; I believe that individual people cannot truly be blamed as if we are initiators of what we do, even as we cannot be acclaimed on the basis of that same version of human action. To me, in other words, Reagan was more a symptom than a cause.

But there is no denying that people do what they do, no matter how much philosophers and social theorists may dicker about the causes, and Mr. North has enumerated beautifully the horrible changes that Ronald Reagan wrought, directly and intentionally, as president.

My social worker years also made me an eyewitness to thousands of New York City area working class people rendered homeless during this period. They were forced off the Social Security disability benefits they had rightfully earned by Reagan’s changes to federal real estate taxation that encouraged speculative “churning” in the region’s multifamily rental real estate markets, condominium conversions of rental housing, the ruthless ending of rent control implemented by real estate interests as they bought up local politicians. They were also forced into homelessness by the purges of the Social Security rolls and the massive Reaganite attacks on benefits for the poor.

Reaganism was around—in the books of Robert Ringer, such as *Winning Through Intimidation*, in the malignant utterances of right-wingers at the National Review and the howls of protest from the rich and privileged—long before Reagan took office. His charisma facilitated the blossoming of a peculiar “flower of evil,” a profound warping of American civilization whose main features were relentless, anxious self-adulation, greed and destructiveness, at home and abroad.

The Reagan Era—more than another chapter in capitalist misrule—is still with us as seen in our country’s recklessly criminal leadership, its militarism, its pervasive cultural glorification of rapacity and institutionalized avarice. As David North so eloquently points out, it has yet to play out all the damage done to the United States.

The coming years in America will be ones of crisis and a move toward a police state, a rehearsal for which is now under way by US occupation forces in Iraq. Of that I have no doubt whatsoever.

Thanks to David North for producing an obituary that may well prove a prophetic prelude to future history.

LM

Jersey City, New Jersey

9 June 2004

The obituary of Reagan summed up the political impact of one of the worst American leaders we have witnessed. Reagan was clearly committed to defending the indefensible, attacking the vulnerable and appealing to the worst instincts of his supporters. However, in any

discussion of his crimes and misdemeanors some mention should be given to the infamous Laffer curve. An absurd economist, Laffer argued that slashing income tax would swell state coffers by unleashing the dynamism of entrepreneurs. This suited the oligarchy Reagan represented and the result was a predictably huge fiscal deficit. This policy, based on dogmatism and stupidity, and with terrible social consequences for ordinary Americans as you rightly stress, seems to epitomize Reagan’s politics as much as his murderous foreign policies you also mention.

JL.

9 June 2004

Dear WSWS,

I liked your obituary on Reagan. It’s a lot closer to reality than anything else I’ve seen. I remember even the right-wing newspapers here in Florida were bashing Reagan at the end of his second term. You would never know that happened from what the fascist media are saying now.

But I think you left out some other significantly horrible things this man (or his handlers) did. There was the savings and loan scandal which he manufactured by cutting regulators and regulations. Also the destruction of the Bill of Rights caused by the insane “war on drugs,” and along with it the increase in incarceration rates. Then there was the intentional importation of crack cocaine by the CIA to fund the “contra” wars and provide fodder for the “war on drugs” assault on the population. And finally the consolidation of the media and the rise of 24-hour propaganda outlets like CNN took place during the Reagan years. This last item I believe to be the really significant thing though: no more free press. How can one have a democracy when all the information is propaganda?

We live with the results now, a police state where the only “assistance” given to the public is in the form of jails and more jails. Slavery is back, wealthy white-collar robbers, murderers and thieves are rewarded or pardoned, while poor people are given life terms in prison for petty theft to support corporate slavery. The environment is in serious decline and with global warming it is going to get much worse. Forget about health care insurance, doctors cannot be trusted anyway anymore. You can’t trust your neighbors or have friends because the incredible level of propaganda has turned what would be nice friendly reasonable people into virtually insane, dangerous nut cases, with no concept of right or wrong or community.

These are bad times indeed, corruption and dishonesty have spread into our entire society, “our” government is completely dysfunctional, and the big change began with the Reagan administration.

Keep up the good work, when it comes to editorials, you are the best out there as far as I can tell.

Sincerely,

RR

9 June 2004

Your jealousy as well as your stupidity is humorous. You would make the north end of a southbound jackass laugh at both ends because of your envy, jealousy and downright stupidity.

GS

9 June 2004

Philip Roth in one of his novels writes about terrorist as the substitute for Communist. Carried further one can see Axis of Evil as substitute for Empire of Evil and Reagan as Big Brother now morphed into George Bush who will save us from destruction. What comes to mind is a scene from the film *1984* based on George Orwell's novel. When the protagonist, along with his fellow man, is forced to watch an endless repetition of hypocritical propaganda, such as—we are at war with Europa, not Eurasia then the next day it is Eurasia we hate not Europa—and all of this orchestrated against a backdrop of Big Brother, we the audience understand that what is important, and consequently the point of the film, is that hate and/or love can be triggered, mobilized, and directed at will. In this case by Big Brother.

I remember how shocked members of my generation were when Ronald Reagan became president, a third-rate film actor without any foreign policy experience. However, I have not heard one word of criticism during this week's media blitz, a blitz like none other—an outpouring of love—according to the media, of almost mythical proportions that dwarfs anything expressed for President Kennedy or even Princess Diana. Indeed, the total mobilization of the American media is an awesome spectacle.

KL

New York City

9 June 2004

Bravo! Thank you for the corrective, educational obituary on the 40th president. I'm forwarding this piece.

W

9 June 2004

Your article just goes to show how ignorant the far left is. As proof here is a little info that you probably won't hear from any of the Reagan bashers. These stats were pulled from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the CNN/Fn and the CATO Institute.

From Jan 1981 to Jan 1989: the unemployment rate went from 7.2% to 5.3% (down 26%); the Dow Jones industrial average went from 947 to 2168 (up 229%); real economic growth averaged 3.2% under Reagan years versus 2.8% during the Ford-Carter years and 2.1% during the Bush-Clinton years; and real median family income grew by \$4,000 (up 11%).

Not to mention the Soviet Union started imploding, we gave Muammar Qadhafi a nervous breakdown (when the French wouldn't let us over their airspace).

JF

9 June 2004

Thank you for your article on Reagan's death. After the shocking, undeserved praise Nixon received upon his death, I expected the same from Reagan's passing but, like you, I still find it stunning. I work at the University of Texas and we've just been told that the entire 50,000-student university with all its faculty and staff will be shut down for a day of honor and mourning this week. I've just had a normally apolitical, pop-culture-obsessed coworker casually exclaim that Reagan is more popular than Kennedy. It does increase the feelings of isolation and disconnection from others that many of us feel.

Reagan was already being mythologized in the early '90s here in the US. During that decade, I was surprised several times by the response of various, otherwise liberal and activist Americans in their 20s when I would criticize Reagan: "But he was the most popular president in history!" "He saved the country!" "He destroyed communism!" etc. And this was from people who considered themselves "liberal" and activist-oriented. They'd just been taught in school that Reagan was a paragon of virtue and the decline in education funding and increase in anti-intellectualism that Reagan oversaw ensured that they didn't know how to do research to question what they'd been taught.

One of the Reaganites' greatest propaganda coups was to call his radically destructive policies "conservative," implying that they're

marked by wise caution and are time-honored. Here in the US, the use of that term for Republican policies continues to fool the young. Reagan's disastrously cruel policies were anything but cautious and time-honored. As for his popularity, I remember that when Reagan was a presidential candidate in 1980, his marketers were proclaiming him the "most popular presidential candidate in history." Even then, I wondered how they could know such a thing was true. Many Americans, though, seem to have believed it, whether it was true or not. As you know, nothing he did was beneficial to society or anything else, quite the opposite. I still feel that he should have been writhing in a lot more pain than he suffered, considering all the death and suffering he deliberately caused. Especially since the long-term social changes he brought in—increased societal bellicosity, anti-intellectualism, destruction of social programs, homelessness, massive incarceration for nonviolent crimes and conscious racist sentencing, unabashed anti-environmentalism, active pursuit of Armageddon, the rise to power of Christian fundamentalists, etc—were all deliberate and intended to continue long past his regime.

DG

Austin, Texas

9 June 2004

I take issue with only one point in Mr. North's obituary of Ronald Regan. I strongly feel the most hated president since Hoover is Bush! Then Reagan, then the old Bush.

Great work Mr. North.

PM

Jersey Mills, Pennsylvania

9 June 2004

Wow! How refreshing to finally hear somebody call it how it happened.

MR

9 June 2004

Dear friends,

A good recap of the Reagan years. The union-busting was reenacted in Britain at the time under Thatcher. To take on the miners she brought in McGregor who wanted "tanks" to be used. Thatcher declined at the time as it was not politically possible in Britain because it might have meant the TUC would have called a general strike.

There was also the curious assassination attempt by the psychotic Hinkley. The great lift at that time was when every school in the USA broke it gently to the youngsters "That someone has shot the President of the USA." Almost all of the youngsters broke into wild cheers. The teachers were supposedly stunned—though it's doubtful.

Great articles,

MF

New Zealand

9 June 2004

This is a good one that might even be great! I can't say any more than that, except why do humans have this thing about putting others up on pedestals and then failing/ignoring the truth about that person on the pedestal?

LB

9 June 2004

Bravo! Thank you for your wonderfully lucid way of exposing the truth about Ronald Reagan, FBI Informant No. T10. Your web site rocks! LB

David,

In addition to your listing of RWR's fiscal crimes against the middle and lower-middle classes, you might add the myth of the "tax cut" as exemplified by his ending tax deductions for fees and interest on credit cards, auto loans, and other long term debt. Only mortgage deductions remain, thanks to intense lobbying from the real estate sector.

He disgusted me then—all 16 years of him as I also suffered through his cruel tenure in California—and now. He was mendacious and mean-spirited—stupid and delusional. I loath him.

SE
Santa Rosa, California
10 June 2004



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact