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Bigot, liar, mass murderer
Good riddance

June 11, 2004 | Page 5



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THE CORPORATE media have filled the airwaves with days on end of nauseating tributes to Ronald Reagan. Here, ALAN MAASS and LEE SUSTAR tell the truth about this disgusting bigot.

IT WAS natural that George W. Bush and the Republicans would scramble to the microphones to praise their fallen leader after Ronald Reagan died last weekend. After all, Bush must hope that associating himself with "the Gipper" could pump up his plummeting popularity.

The eight years of Reagan in the White House during the 1980s dragged mainstream politics to the right--and set the tone for U.S. politics to this day. To take an obvious example, many of the neoconservative "hawks" responsible for Washington's disaster in Iraq were Reaganites: Paul Wolfowitz, John Negroponte, Elliot Abrams, John Poindexter and Richard Perle--who even named his dog Reagan.

But the "opposition" Democrats, too, have been "Reaganized." Thus, Bill Clinton's presidency in the 1990s carried through right-wing measures such as welfare "reform" and repressive crime legislation that Reagan never could have gotten away with. Mainstream Democrats today willingly accept proposals to cut the capital gains tax, thus putting even more money in the pockets of the rich--a proposal of "Reaganomics" that henchmen like David Stockman were considered crackpots for promoting.

We should celebrate the death of this man who caused so much violence and suffering around the U.S. and the world. But we have a long way to go before we can celebrate the destruction of Ronald Reagan's foul legacy.

REAGAN BEGAN his political career in the 1940s as a Hollywood union leader and liberal. But he secretly fingered his colleagues to the FBI and collaborated with studio bosses to rid the movie industry of Communists in the 1950s. That got him a job as corporate mouthpiece for General Electric.

As the Republican right whipped up a backlash against the struggles of the 1960s, Reagan won two terms as California governor. At the end of the 1970s, Reagan presented his hard-line conservatism as the savior of the Republicans after the Watergate scandal and the collapse of the Nixon presidency.

Reagan was a widely seen as dimwit--even by his supporters. "Poor dear," remarked British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, his closest international ally, "there's nothing between his ears." But Reagan's corporate backers realized that his grandfatherly image was indispensable in packaging their agenda--and in using vile scapegoating to make racism respectable again.

That's why Reagan launched his 1980 presidential campaign in Philadelphia, Miss., a town with a notorious Ku Klux Klan history. He denounced "welfare queens"--a code word for Blacks--for living off "government handouts." As the AIDS epidemic began to claim tens of thousands of lives, Reagan refused to even use the name of the disease for six years. In fact, according to his authorized biography, he once said, "Maybe the Lord brought down this plague" because "illicit sex is against the Ten Commandments."

To the employers, Reagan was the ideal candidate to accelerate the turn to the right begun under Democratic President Jimmy Carter. Reagan fired 11,000 striking air traffic controllers in 1981, signaling an open war on organized labor that continues to this day. His budget cuts forced 1 million people off food stamps and denied Social Security disability benefits to 500,000.

Reagan cut the tax rate for the richest Americans from 70 percent to 28 percent with the promise that the benefits would "trickle down." Yet economic growth in the 1980s was slower than in the 1970s, despite the stimulus of military spending, which created massive federal budget deficits and tripled the federal debt.

Moreover, Reagan's policies accelerated a wave of factory closures that drove up unemployment rates to their highest levels since the 1930s. In a 1982 visit to Pittsburgh, Reagan was met by thousands of furious steelworkers chanting, "Fuck Ronald Reagan!"

To roll back the social movements of the 1960s and '70s, Reagan stuffed the federal courts with hard-line conservatives. He named right-wing fanatic Antonin Scalia to the U.S. Supreme Court and made William Rehnquist the Chief Justice.

REAGAN'S PRESIDENCY represented the determination of the ruling class to rebuild U.S. military power after its defeat in the Vietnam War. Again picking up from the agenda pursued by Jimmy Carter, Reagan sharply increased military spending.

Millions of people rightly feared that Reagan was a madman with his finger on the nuclear trigger--all the more so after he was caught on microphone before a speech joking about ordering a nuclear attack on Russia.

Reagan sent troops to Lebanon in 1983 and ordered the invasion of Grenada, a tiny Caribbean island, the same year. He promoted "constructive engagement" with the racist apartheid regime in South Africa and branded Nelson Mandela's Africa National Congress a "terrorist organization"--but the anti-apartheid movement pressured Congress into passing sanctions on South Africa over Reagan's veto anyway.

Reagan also escalated the Cold War with the USSR by placing cruise missiles in Europe. After the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan, Reagan's CIA funneled money and guns to the Afghan resistance--which included Osama Bin Laden.

But Reagan's twin obsessions--reasserting U.S. control over the Middle East and destroying the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution--nearly blew up his administration. Reagan administration operatives organized an army of

counterrevolutionaries, or "contras," to wage a guerrilla war against the left-wing Sandinista government in Nicaragua, but revelations of human rights abuses by the contras forced a cutoff of U.S. aid.

Reagan's henchmen then organized a deal in which the U.S., via Israel, secretly supplied its archenemy in the Middle East, Iran, with weapons for its war with Iraq--and used the proceeds to illegally fund the contras. Iran, in return, used its influence to win the release of U.S. hostages in Lebanon.

Reagan denied that it ever happened--and then denied knowing about it, as various administration officials were forced to resign. But in 1992, a memo surfaced showing that Reagan had given his direct approval.

"Hillary and I will always remember President Ronald Reagan for the way he personified the indomitable optimism of the American people, and for keeping America at the forefront of the fight for freedom for people everywhere," simpered Bill Clinton. The Democrats' new liberal star, Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm, added: "He was gentle and kind, and every American can learn from his example."

Fight for *freedom*? Gentle and *kind*? The truth is that Reagan was an ignorant bigot who, every day of his political life, displayed contempt for the "ordinary working Americans" we're now told he cared so much about.

More than any other figure, Reagan symbolized the ruling-class counteroffensive--both in the U.S. and internationally--against the social reforms and the spirit of struggle that had dominated the preceding years. Reagan was the establishment's used-car salesman--putting a spit-polish shine on an old-fashioned agenda of making the rich richer, attacking working-class organization, promoting U.S. imperial power, and abusing the most vulnerable in society.

For mainstream politicians today, however, all is forgiven--because, they claim, Reagan "triumphed" in the Cold War against the USSR "without a shot being fired." Tell that to the survivors of the massacres by Reagan-backed military dictators in El Salvador and Guatemala. And when you hear about how Reagan renewed "optimism" and "confidence" in America, tell it to the hungry and homeless in the U.S. inner cities left defenseless by Reagan--and every president since.

The wealthy, the powerful and their hangers-on are all nostalgic for Reagan because he delivered so much them. As far we're concerned, we're glad to see him finally gone.

RABBLE ROUSER.