

# White House Politics

## THE DEVIL AND MR. REAGAN

by Fred Barnes

In a stretch of about three minutes in the first presidential debate last October, two different Ronald Reagans appeared on stage in Louisville and before a television audience of millions. The question was about taxes—not a bad question either, since I happen to have asked it—and Reagan uncorked a sweeping answer. “I’m not going to increase taxes,” he declared flatly, absolutely, and without qualification. That was Reagan the conservative ideologue talking.

But quickly the ideologue exited, and Reagan the Washington, D.C. pragmatist rushed to the podium, arriving just in time to handle the follow-up question about whether he had really meant to rule out, once and for all, any tax hike in his second term in the White House. Well, not really, this Reagan said. Why, he could imagine a circumstance under which all the fat had been cut from the budget and all conceivable revenues collected from the economic recovery—and still a federal budget deficit was looming large. In that happenstance, maybe he’d raise taxes.

The appearance of two Reagans in Louisville fits nicely with the conventional wisdom about the man, namely that he is a committed ideologue surrounded by clever pragmatists. Thus, he was first expressing his own view and then that of his advisers. As an

unswerving conservative, a rallying point of the American right for two decades, he has no intention of raising taxes, and that’s just what he said. But his aides, many of them anyway, are not so ideological, and they whisper in his ear a lot. Be pragmatic. Never say never. Compromise. And sure enough, Reagan, reflecting their influence, backed off from any unqualified statement on taxes. At least that’s the conventional way Reagan is regarded in Washington.

This is hogwash, of course. There aren’t two Ronald Reagans. There is but one, and he happens to be a blend of ideologue and pragmatist. It is his genius as a politician. As an ideologue, he has an agenda, and he has been remarkably effective in imposing it on Washington. As a pragmatist, he is able to deal, to compromise, even to surrender if that suits him. By combining the two styles, Reagan has become the most successful President in four decades. And if his second term is not marred by a deep recession, major scandal, or foreign policy failure, he is likely to emerge alongside Roosevelt as one of the twin towers of twentieth-century politics.

Still Reagan is a frustrating figure, especially for conservatives. It is not easy to predict what he is going to do. Conservatives can never relax in the comfort of knowing that Reagan will automatically stick to the right line. This is the guy, remember, who pushed through the historic three-year, supply-side tax cut of 1981, then followed it with four tax increases over the next three years. That’s right, four—the “tax reform” hike in 1982, the gas tax boost and the Social Security tax increase in 1983, and the deficit “downpayment” last year. Given that record, does anyone accept at face value Reagan’s assurance that he won’t raise taxes in 1985?

Under the fashionable two-Reagans approach, it will be easy to assess the blame if Reagan succumbs to pressure for a tax increase. Since Reagan doesn’t want one, it will be his aides who are responsible. This is akin to saying the Devil made him do it. White House aides always make a convenient scapegoat, and you can almost gauge

a President’s success by the amount of blame that is heaped on them. The more the aides are pilloried, the more the President stays above the fray, looks statesmanlike, and is swimmingly successful. Roosevelt was the master of this tactic, allowing the slings and arrows of friends and enemies to be directed at his Brain Trust and Cabinet. Reagan lets the darts fly undeterred at James Baker, Michael Deaver, and Richard Darman, the triumvirate that runs the White House staff. He’s the ideologue, they’re the pragmatists.

But would Reagan’s decisions be different should there be another cast of advisers strutting in and out of the Oval Office? Probably not. The pragmatist troika accedes when Reagan goes on an ideological binge. It was Baker, after all, who masterminded congressional passage of the 1981 tax cut. And it is now Darman who seems most eager to make what there is of a Reagan Revolution permanent through forcing the Federal Reserve to stop strangling economic growth and by bringing about historic tax reform with lower rates and fewer loopholes. True, both of these aides have sought to scale back the military buildup and to script Reagan’s appearances with happy talk about arms control. However, this was prompted by constraints of the re-election campaign and the budget deficit; practically any White House aide would have given Reagan the same advice.

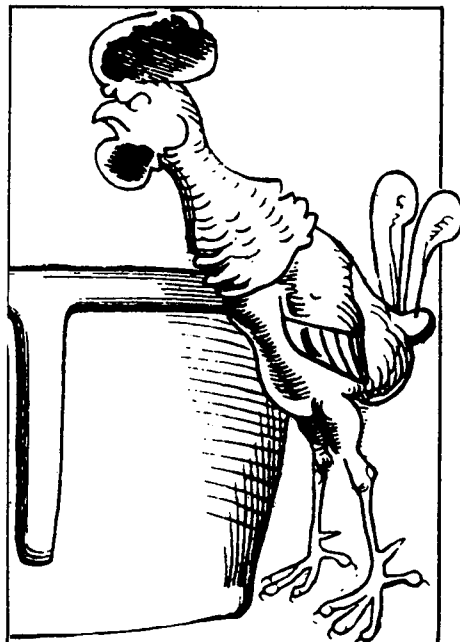
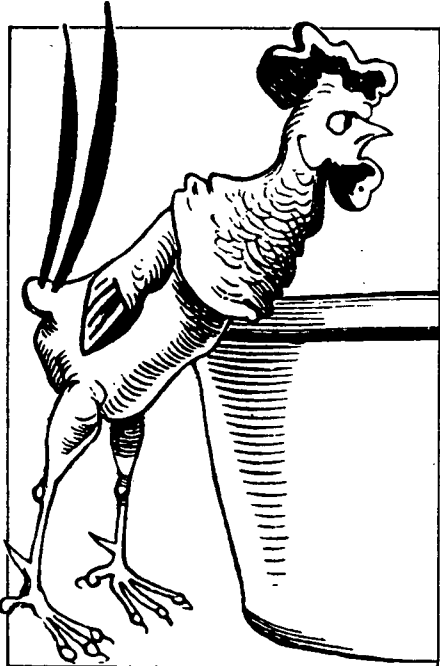
What is misunderstood about the Reagan Administration is where the tension lies. It’s not between a saintly President who wants to do the conservative thing in all instances and perfidious aides who are closet liberals. It’s between the two sides of Reagan, ideological and pragmatic. And this isn’t going to change, no matter whom he staffs his Administration with. It’s not that aides don’t matter; it’s that they don’t matter much. Reagan, in fact, doesn’t appear to give a hoot about who fills what job. When William Clark left as national security adviser in 1983 to become Interior Secretary, the President went along with a scheme that would have made Deaver the White House chief of staff, replacing Baker, and Baker the new national security chief. Reagan wasn’t dragooned into it; he readily agreed

and a press release announcing the changes was prepared. The scheme was undone only when Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, CIA Director William Casey, U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, and Clark got wind of it. They protested vigorously, and Reagan readily agreed with them.

A new personnel shift is brewing for the second term, one dependent largely on Baker’s ability to fulfill his ambition to get a top Cabinet job. Three, four, and five cushion shots are talked about. Paul Volcker resigns as Fed chairman. Treasury Secretary Donald Regan or Secretary of State George Shultz replaces him at the Fed. Baker jumps in at either Treasury or State. Clark returns to the White House as chief of staff. Deaver and Darman, both Baker’s boys, leave the White House, if they haven’t already. A phalanx of conservative ideologues moves in, including Kirkpatrick as the new national security adviser. Believe me, there is more than mere idle chatter about this scheme. But would it really make any difference? The answer is not much, for Reagan would still be torn. Not between his instincts and his aides, but between the two sides of his political personality.

Let me hammer away at this point from another angle, namely the over-rated philosophical split that ripples through the entire Administration. Once more, it’s between the ideologues

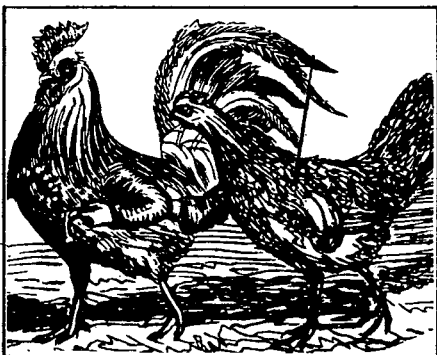
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and the pragmatists. They disagree on nearly every major issue that confronts the second Reagan Administration: the economy, tax reform, Central America, arms control, social issues. The ideologues want to go with an undiluted conservative agenda, push it relentlessly and take no prisoners. The pragmatists want a sharply modified conservative agenda, one less likely to clash with the institutional arrangements and business-as-usual political culture of Washington. And what does this disagreement between the ideologues and pragmatists represent? Nothing more than the ambivalence of Reagan himself.

For some breathtakingly naive reason, a large number of conservatives believe that Reagan would dearly love to settle the disagreement in his second administration, embracing the ideologues as brethren and dismissing the pragmatists as interlopers. Fat chance. Reagan isn't given to grand gestures like that on either personnel or policy. Only when the split confronts him in the form of some specific unavoidable issue is Reagan willing to pick sides. And he doesn't always pick the same one. As he prepared for his second term, Reagan backed Weinberger, an ideologue, on protecting the military buildup while tacitly supporting Shultz, a pragmatist, in his replacement of conservative political appointees at the State Department with bureaucrats from the striped-pants set. If only Reagan knew what Shultz was up to, conservatives moan. But he does; he reads Evans & Novak and the *New York Times*. Reagan simply doesn't mind what Shultz is doing. He's not so flaccid that he wouldn't act were he upset about it.

Reagan's ambivalence, which he cherishes because it serves him so well politically, makes it hard to chart the course of his second term. It'll be conservative, but how conservative? Reagan doesn't know yet. And how hard is he willing to work, at 74 and counting, on behalf of his conservative agenda? The popular feeling in Washington is that he'll dog it for the next four years, spending so much time at his ranch in California that the term "Western White House" will regain



respectability. Gag writer Robert Orben says Reagan will stay in Washington so little that he'll start showing slides of his precious moments at the White House to his California pals. Thomas DeFrank of *Newsweek* jokes that when Reagan gets whipped up about some issue he might even be spurred to spend a few sleepless afternoons in the Oval Office.

Funny, huh? You don't have to worry about Reagan's energy level, though. He's always willing to work hard if the

## There is but one Ronald Reagan, and he happens to be a blend of ideologue and pragmatist.

goal is significant and achievable. Which is why you shouldn't expect to see Reagan breaking his back to push \$40-odd billion in spending cuts every year. A package of cuts that large is illusory for two reasons. One, the numbers are inflated; the actual amount being cut is far less. And two, Congress won't go along anyway. Even if Congress were willing to knuckle under in a fight, what's in it for Reagan to expend a full measure of political capital to be remembered as the President who pared the deficit from \$200 billion to \$175 billion? So look for Reagan to compromise on this, getting what cuts he can without jeopardizing his political manhood.

The tricky question involves a tax increase. There is enormous pressure from Republican pragmatists in the Senate to boost taxes as part of a deficit reduction package. Go for a tax hike and you'll be able to bargain for more spending cuts, the Republicans, including folks in the White House like budget director David Stockman, tell Reagan. Maybe he'll fall for it; he has before. But there is a counterpressure this time. This is the opportunity to enact a landmark reform of the tax code that lowers personal and corporate rates, tosses out uneconomic tax preferences, and invigorates the entire economy. Talk about an ornament for a second term. Compared to this, a package of spending cuts and a tax increase is a piffle, an achievement of Jimmy Carter proportions. It's the difference between something that is event-making and eventful.

Shortly after the Treasury Department issued an elegant, if improvable, tax reform plan, Irving Kristol declared in the *Wall Street Journal* that the whole issue was "dead" for 1985. He couldn't have been more wrong. Democrats who had jumped out front in opposition to the Treasury plan quickly figured which way the momentum is drifting; people like Governor

Mario Cuomo and Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York reversed themselves. And those in favor of tax reform, like Senator Bill Bradley of New Jersey, proclaimed themselves ready to negotiate a bipartisan compromise. Some business lobbyists suggested a few changes in the Treasury bill might get them on board. Naturally, pragmatists in the Congress and the White House—but not Darman, whose influence was growing—complained that tax reform wouldn't help the

deficit. Besides, it's difficult to achieve. Nonsense. All Reagan has to do is forge a compromise, which is no easy feat, and lead the tax reform army as it conquers Congress.

The vigor with which ideologues and pragmatists fight over economic issues pales next to the fury of the combatants in the two major foreign policy issues of Reagan's second term, Nicaragua and arms control. Here the disagreement is fundamental. The ideologues question whether treaties are worth the paper they are written on, whether they are reached with the Sandinistas or the Soviets. The pragmatists insist that treaties, if carefully crafted, can insure a secure peace. And guess who has played the issue both ways in his public comments over the years? Reagan.

Shultz and his minions are pursuing the treaty option, negotiating to see if a pact can be reached that would prevent Nicaragua from becoming another Cuba, exporting Communist revolution. In all likelihood, such a treaty is a figment of the imagination. The evidence is too strong that the Sandinistas are hell-bent on turning all of Central America into a swatch of near-totalitarian countries that would be the delight of visiting American clergymen. Reagan knows this. Besides, ideologues such as Casey and Weinberger are constantly reminding him that the Sandinistas are not agrarian reformers. And Reagan thinks of the contras as freedom fighters, which they are, and any treaty acceptable to Nicaragua would sell them out. Don't look for a treaty; look for encouragement of the contras. On this one, Reagan is likely to go with the ideologues.

The opposite may be true on a nuclear arms control agreement with the Soviets. At the outset of the second Reagan Administration, Shultz is clearly in charge on arms control, and he

wants a treaty. To get one, he is willing to make some concessions, not big ones, to the Soviets to get them back to the bargaining table. To the ideologues, this is wrongheaded in the extreme. Four years of toughness have softened the Soviets, they argue, so let them crawl. It's their turn, not the Reagan Administration's, to come up with a concession or two. If only Reagan knew what Shultz is doing, you say. He does, he does. The simple truth is that Reagan wants an arms treaty with the Soviets of one kind or another; it's not lip service. And like the good pragmatist he often is, he's willing to let Shultz deal to get one. But the ideologues can probably count on the Soviets to save the day by demanding such a one-sided pact that Shultz and Reagan will have to balk.

Finally, there are social issues—abortion, school prayer, tuition tax credits, feminism. Reagan loves these issues, and he talks like a sincere ideologue about all of them. But there's a rub; he doesn't do much to see these issues through. Were he to fight as aggressively for an anti-abortion bill as he did for the tax increase of 1982, it might come close to passing. As a sheer political matter, Reagan uses social issues brilliantly, talking them up enough to win the cheers of New Right conservatives but not enough to alarm conservatives and moderates who abhor them. This helps Reagan and keeps the issues alive. It is an approach that is at once ideological and pragmatic. It is classic Reagan. Expect it to continue.

Come 1987 or thereabouts, things change. The great reconciler of the two factions will become something of a lame duck, the more so as the race for the 1988 Republican presidential nomination accelerates. And that's when fragmentation is threatened, the ideologues going one way, the pragmatists the other. Only Reagan is a strong enough force to overcome the centrifugal force that pulls them apart. He is one politician both factions agree on, the ideologues because they think he's one of them, the pragmatists because they admire his ability to sway voters and win elections. Would the ideologues settle for strong words but little action on social issues from George Bush? Nope. Would the pragmatists who want to raise taxes defer to Jack Kemp the way they have to Reagan? Don't count on it. Kemp is too ideological for the pragmatists, Bush too pragmatic for the ideologues. Reagan alone is both at once.

Think back when there was another political figure of this sort. He was on the left. His name was Roosevelt. □



# Environment

## RECLAIMING CONSERVATIVE GROUND

by William Tucker

Last September, I was invited to Washington by the Heritage Foundation to join a group of people meeting with William Ruckelshaus, then director of the Environmental Protection Agency, to discuss second-term issues.

The group was generally drawn from that army of Washington lobbyists who spend their time buzzing around congressional committees and federal agencies, trying to get them to omit a comma here, or reinterpret a clause there, in a way that will ultimately mean millions of dollars to their clients.

After about an hour of complaining over recent EPA decisions from these people, I managed to pose "one last question." Why, I asked Mr. Ruckelshaus, did the Reagan Administration have to be so passive about environmentalism? Why sit back and accept the portrait foisted on them by the press and environmentalists that Republicans are the enemies of the environment, while Democrats are the knights in shining armor rushing to save Mother Nature from the clutches of Big Business. (The *New Republic*, for example, had just run a cover story called "The Reagan Chain-Saw Massacre," which debated whether the Administration's policy toward the environment has been a "seduction" or a "rape.")

Why not, I asked, put forth a Republican environmental agenda—featuring, among other things, some of the "market mechanisms" that have been proposed by economists in recent years for dealing with pollution problems? Then let the Democrats and environmentalists respond to the *Republican* agenda, instead of always leaving the Administration on the defensive.

Ruckelshaus's answer was short. "I guess we should have quit before this last question," he said. Then he reminisced a bit about the day in 1972 when he and Senator Edmund Muskie went down to the Internal Revenue Service and tried to get them to accept a "pollution tax" as a way of dealing with sulfur emissions into the atmosphere. ("No way," said the IRS, "the tax system shouldn't be used as a vehicle for dealing with pollution.")

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"We tried that under Nixon and it didn't work," he concluded. That was it.

This dispirited performance amazed me. Why is it that the Republicans continue to squander one of their best opportunities of the decade to rid themselves of a false issue, and instead continue to hand over the diadem of environmental purity to the Democrats? For the life of me, I can't understand it.

Environmentalism has always been a conservative issue. By all odds, it should be a Republican issue. In fact, it once was. Around California, right through the early 1960s, being in the Sierra Club was almost the equivalent of membership in the state's Old Republican Guard. When Sierra Club Director David Brower took sides in the 1956 election, he ran considerable risk by announcing himself a "Republican for Stevenson."

Theodore Roosevelt was a Republican, as was his fellow Conservation leader, Gifford Pinchot. On Earth Day in 1970, Barry Goldwater was the featured speaker at one liberal Long Island University. James Buckley has always been an enthusiastic environmentalist, and still writes indignant editorials about endangered species. In Europe, environmentalists have nearly always been members of the "activist" aristocracy. Britain's most publicly outspoken advocate for

wildlife preservation is Prince Philip.

The question of what happened in the United States during the 1970s to make environmentalism a "liberal" issue is one worth long pondering. In my book, *Progress and Privilege: America in the Age of Environmentalism*, I spent considerable time trying to explore how this process occurred.

In the 1960s, I believe, a lot of upper-middle-class people reached unprecedented levels of material comfort. At first, they used their new security to patronize black radicalism and the "youth rebellion." But these movements soon became much more violent than even the radicalized upper-middle-class people of that era were willing to tolerate.

Instead, upper-middle-class people needed something that was at once "anti-establishment," but not so obviously dangerous. What they soon discovered was another kind of "anti-establishmentarianism"—the old, aristocratic, anti-business attitudes that have been lying around among the "old rich" since the early days of the Industrial Revolution. Upper-middle-class liberals took their new-found political activism and fused it with this old, aristocratic condescension toward nouveau-riche business classes. The result was what I called the "conservatism of the liberals"—modern environmentalism.

When 1960s liberals became 1970s environmentalists, they brought with them their entire set of intellectual bag-

gage. Environmentalism, for example, has always been a huge growth industry in academia. If you want to solve an environmental problem, the first thing to do is to hire an academic consultant to write a 3,000-page environmental impact statement. Private motivation—"greed," as it is called—is always the cause of environmental problems. Benign government intervention is always the solution.

Republicans have been helpless against this onslaught. The Democrats present them with an agenda—"trees or factories"—and the Republicans can only hang their heads and mutter "factories." Democrats grandly announce that government will clean up every toxic waste dump in the country, and when Republicans try to enlist the financial support of business to undertake this monumental task, they are "taking polluters to lunch."

When confronted with an environmental issue, Republicans automatically cede the high ground to the purists. Democrats and environmentalists propose, while Republicans prevaricate. Democrats consort with the angels, while Republicans wallow in the industrial mire. Every environmental debate begins with this inevitable format. All the Republicans can do is hold their breath and hope the public won't judge them too harshly on the issue.

Yet this picture is completely false. A clean environment and a healthy economy is not an either/or proposition. Pollution is not a matter of "big corporations versus the public interest." It is a question of the public's desire for industrial prosperity versus its countervailing desire to minimize pollution.

Everyone is in favor of clean air. There is no point in debating that subject. The real questions are: 1) What kind of standards of purity are we going to try to achieve? 2) How are we going to do it? and 3) Who is going to pay for it? To these questions, everyone has different answers.

In this kind of situation, the responsibility of government should be to construct a mechanism by which people can choose the kind of environment they want. Yet this is exactly what we don't have now. Instead, we have a system where Washington bureaucrats are given blanket authority to carry out

