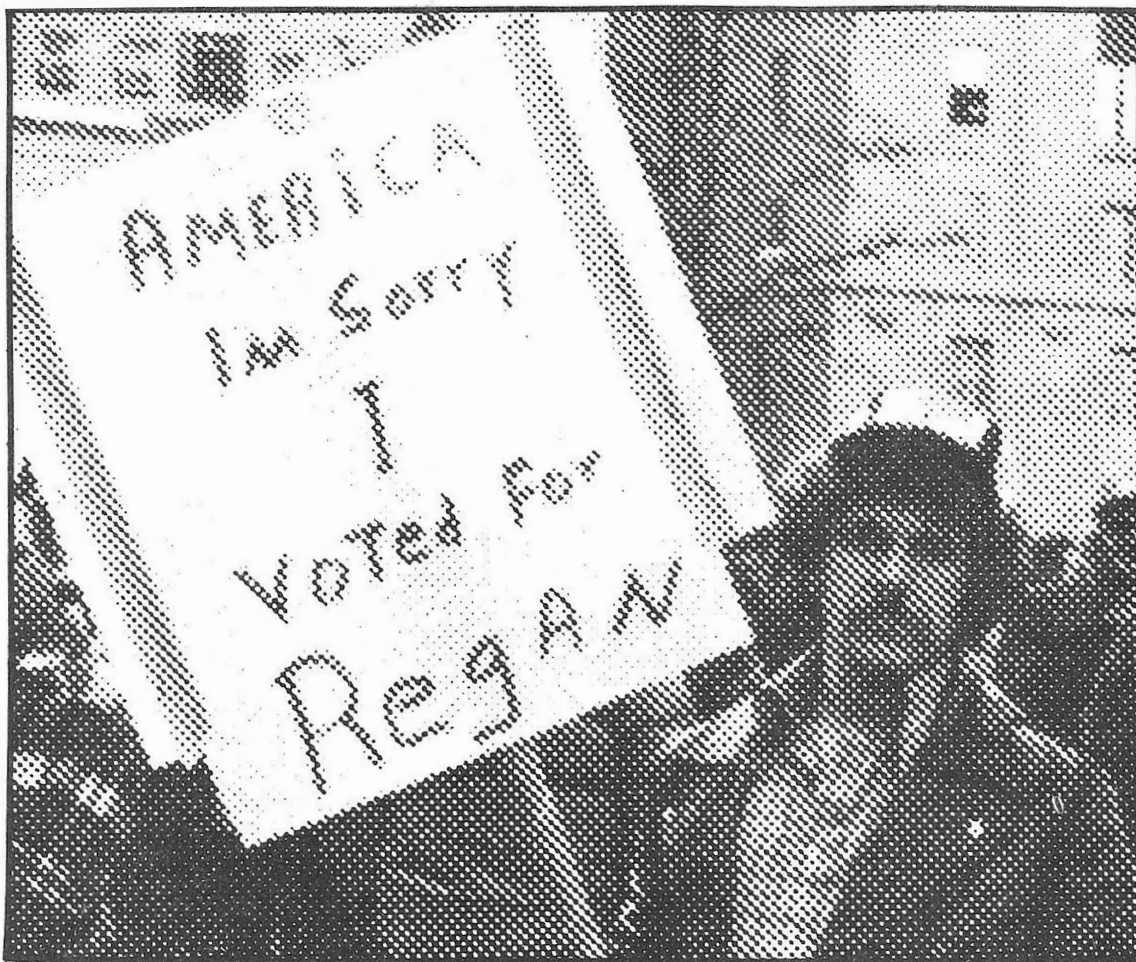


# Reagan: The Second Time As Farce

**No Right-Wing Mandate from the people  
he inherits a deepening crisis**



Miner at United Mine Workers' demonstration in Washington, D.C. against government cuts in black lung benefits. To say that the American people have swung to the right is the big lie of this period.



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## by Tom Whelan

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In his Inaugural address, Ronald Reagan chose to paraphrase Winston Churchill with the statement, "I have not taken office in order to preside over the dissolution of the world's strongest economy." What Churchill "did not want to preside over" was "the dissolution of the British Empire." Churchill, of course, was disappointed. He presided over precisely that. Reagan will preside over his piece of the dissolution of imperialism just as Churchill did over his. That he would choose to make such a comparison at all — and at such a moment — will confirm the opinion of many that he is a half-wit. At the least, he forfeits all pretensions to being a Roosevelt.

The new Reagan government has taken office with its back already to the wall. The economic crisis, never respectful of political honeymoons, continues to accelerate; it is attested to by slumping industries, unemployment, wildly gyrating financial markets and runaway inflation. Overseas even the European alliance is now shaky, and a trade war with Japan looms, while progressive and revolutionary movements in the third world press forward everywhere. No honeymoons are being observed in Namibia or El Salvador.

The scope and severity of the crisis are no long to be denied. The media report openly that the situation "parallels" the 1930s, and even this rare concession to candor is being revealed as false optimism. The crisis is the deepest ever. George Will, the most widely read columnist of the "new right" comes closest to the truth when he calls Reagan's predicament "more dangerously dynamic than Roosevelt faced in 1933." The Roosevelt analogy became such a fad — not only in the press but among Reagan's advisors — that it had to be scrapped. Calls for a "declaration of economic emergency" or even an "economic Dunkirk" were abruptly silenced and condemned as alarmist.

Nevertheless, the comparison lingers; and not mainly because of Reagan's passion for quoting FDR's speeches. Reagan is simply playing out the role which Marx characterized with a famous aphorism: "Historical facts and historical personages occur, as it were, twice... the first time as tragedy and the second time as farce!" For in consciously evoking the ghosts of 1933 the new government unconsciously reveals the deep anxieties of the ruling class generally, and the desire to tap some hidden well-spring of sympathy and support among the people. They try to conjure up the images and emotions of the past. But instead of an FDR we see a two-bit Hollywood cowboy who is plainly out of his league. Reagan can hardly get through a simple press conference without becoming muddled. Instead of a New Deal we get a strange blend of "supply-side moonshine," Hooverism and attempts at mass psychology. And instead of promising peace and reforms, the farce turns ugly. The

new government hints darkly of war, intervention and a new campaign against "subversives" and "terrorists."

It is the objective severity of the crisis of capitalism which is tempting Ronald Reagan to play a role far beyond his own capacity and put on the mantle of Roosevelt. But memories have a way of playing tricks. When we look at his cabinet and think back, we tend to get stuck on Richard Nixon. We have seen these faces before: Haig, Bush, Weinberger, Casey and, just behind the scenes, a grey eminence: Henry Kissinger himself. Not even people with poor memories have forgotten Viet Nam — or Kent State — or the Christmas bombing. And there is a growing awareness (heightened by Reagan's mediocrity) that these men are often more important than the presidents they "serve." Certainly, presidents come and go while they endure.

So yes, it is the same old crowd in Washington — but with one unmistakable difference. The gloating euphoria of Strom Thurmond, Jesse Helms and Paul Laxalt now mingles with that of Jack Kemp and David Stockman, the golden boys of the "new right." This camp is indeed the Reagan base, which many (including themselves) assumed would be appointed to dominant positions of power after the election. Reagan's hour is theirs also and they claim a right-wing mandate to "stay in power for two generations." But we also hear them grumbling at the meagerness of their reward. Their song goes that they stuck with Reagan through thick and thin, only to be jilted at the convention which dominated him — and dumped in the selection of the cabinet.

Understanding why this happened and how it was accomplished will take us a long way toward understanding the American political system itself. But the mere *fact* that it happened underscores the hollowness of the right wing's claim to a mandate. They have not received the mandate of the Republican Party — so much less have they received one from the American people.

### The Big Lie of a "Right-Wing Mandate!"

An examination of the November election returns helps to clarify this point. In spite of media manipulation of the simple number of voters, we saw the lowest turnout *rate* since 1948 — only 48% of all eligible persons cast ballots. More significantly, the largest new bloc of abstainers came from those strata of society which traditionally vote most often; the petty-bourgeoisie and the better-situated workers. One interview poll featured the statement of one of these: "I voted in the last election," she said, "and the election before that. But this year I just couldn't bring myself to do it again." People everywhere were caught between their desire to do *something* to change the direction of the country and their sense of futility of voting.

The most prominent feature of the campaign was the popular dissatisfaction over the choices. A new catchword ("volatility") entered the political dictionary. Among the 75 million who voted, almost 25% couldn't



make up their minds until the last week of the campaign. Many stated in after-voting polls that they didn't decide until the last day, or even the last minute before they stepped into the voting booth. And when we look at the reasons cited as the eventual basis of the choice, the real nature of the Reagan "mandate" comes out.

By far the most frequent reason given for a Reagan vote (about 4 in 10) was simply "it can't get worse than Carter." More than seven out of ten declined to say that they strongly favored Reagan, expressing a variety of reservations and doubts along with even stronger criticism of Carter. Barely 10% gave Reagan their vote because "he's a real conservative."<sup>2</sup>

This was Reagan's "landslide victor,," First, a massive rejection of Carter. Second, a protest and a reflection of the deep feelings of the people that our society is in deep trouble. And not at all anything like a "swing to the right" among the masses. At the height of his popularity (which has already peaked for good) Reagan could count ten percent of *his own* votes as votes for "real conservatism.": 2.5 percent of the total electorate. The opportunist, always fearful of the bourgeoisie, sing the same tune. They say that significant numbers of Americans have shift to the right. This is the Big Lie of the current period. It expresses not reality but the fervent and desperate wish of the ruling class.

This is becoming increasingly clear only months into the Reagan administration. Reagan got a temporary boost after the attempted assassination (according to the New York Times), but a few weeks before, "President Reagan's handling of his job after eight weeks in office won less approval from the public than any newly elected President in 28 years," said a Gallup Poll! While 59% of those polled supported the president, at comparable times in their terms, Carter was approved by 75%, Nixon by 65%, Kennedy by 73% and Eisenhower by 67%. The percentage of the public that expressed disapproval of Reagan's handling of the office compared to his predecessors was even greater. 24% of them said they disapproved of Reagan. The comparable rating was 9% for Carter and Nixon, 7% for Kennedy and 8% for Eisenhower. Most important, the trend is for Reagan's support to erode quickly. Disapproval of the Reagan presidency grew rapidly, climbing to the 24% mark from 13% in January.<sup>3</sup>

The categories which best describe the state of the working class of our country are volatility, disorientation and searching. The danger of the masses turning toward fascism is real, but the other side of the coin is that they are also open to communism as never before. The main thing people want is a fighting chance.

It is not the people but the ruling elite which has swung quite sharply toward the right — and given the arch-reactionary political elements whatever "mandate," power and position they now have. For this is the main purpose of the new right, including Reagan himself: to create a domestic political climate of fear and intimidation. To this end a new un-American activities committee has been created around Strom Thurmond, which will try to create a red-scare hysteria disguised as "anti-terrorism." Another storm warning was the unanimous passage of the Blitz amendment, barring communists and other anti-government persons from federal job pro-

grams. End-of-session technicalities prevented it from being attached to the main legislation, but the vote was accompanied by widespread talk of enforcing the mind-control Smith Act of the 1940s. This is the law — still on the books — which makes it a crime to "advocate" revolution, even if no criminal act is committed. These are but the first rounds of a new right offensive which is already intensifying. Its targets are the labor movement as shown by the NASSCO 3 case, and the political left (as in the case of the Blitz amendment and SWP suit).

It is in this vein that The Nation talks of the new administration's calculated policies:

The massacre of the innocents in Atlanta may be a big media whodunit now, but for months the city suffered in virtual silence. In New York and Buffalo ugly racial murders have gone unpunished. The Greensboro, North Carolina, acquittals hark back to an era of all-white juries and lynch law. Miami had to burn to draw attention to itself. And now we have a Government whose policies write off whole sections of the American poor as expendable. Is all this coincidence?

...It is not unreasonable to say that this Administration's calculated and open indifference to the rights and needs of blacks and other minorities has only worsened the climate of bigotry and violence in this country.<sup>4</sup>

Reagan's approach is nothing new. It is basically a rehash of Thatcherism. One result of Thatcher's policies is that a policy of open government intimidation of unions and workers in a period of worsening unemployment worked to reduce the level of resistance — at least for a while. Only after almost two years of Thatcherism did labor's resistance begin to rise. Moreover, Thatcher's policy of lifting wage controls (which had united workers in a fierce struggle against the government) and allowing individual unions to fight individual companies served to divide the workers's struggles. Strong militant and organized unions got nothing. All the while, Thatcher's economic policies caused joblessness to skyrocket and inflation to remain high. Of course, all workers in Britain bore the brunt of the crisis worsened by Thatcherism.<sup>5</sup>

What gives perspective is the recognition that every move the bourgeoisie now makes is a gamble. Whether in economic, foreign or domestic political policy they are *forced* to gamble and commit stupidities — because their overall position has never been weaker or more vulnerable. There is no great need to rehearse that we are entering a crisis which is deeper, more extensive and more "dangerously dynamic" than the Great Depression. Newsweek and the New York Times are now rehearsing it. The desperation of the billionaires is out in the open and is growing daily. The purpose of selective attacks is to facilitate general attacks on the people. These cannot be so selective, because they are dictated by the uncontrollable economic crisis itself. The impoverishment of the proletariat and the working petty bourgeoisie is built into the very nature of capitalism. As the crisis deepens, any course or policy the Reagan government turns to will only accelerate the decline of living standards and, through this very process, drive the economy deeper into the ground.

The ruling elite's shift to the right as dictated by economic and political necessity presents incalculable



dangers to their rule. Having lost the material basis to carry out even existing reform programs and forced to cut them back wholesale, they are driving the fires of resistance from the tree tops to the very tree trunk — the vast majority of workers and poor in this country. The very policies they put forth to forestall economic disintegration create conditions to ignite massive political movements. Encompassing the country is new political scenery, moreover, which threatens to undermine the bourgeoisie's very rule.

## **“The Big Lie of a ‘right wing mandate’ expresses not the reality but the desperate wish of the ruling class”**

### **Continuing and New Directions of Declining U.S. Imperialism**

The continuing decline of U.S. imperialism is an objective factor in history, independent of the will of any person, class, party or nation. This decline dictates a large portion of U.S. policy and denies the imperialists many options which they once had. In this regard, the relationship between continuity in government policy and changes in it is a combination of objective and subjective factors. Among the options which remain to them, there are both substantial choices and choices which are matters of form only — questions of presentation and public opinion, i.e. subjective factors. Who is elected president — and the ideological baggage associated with him — play a large role in determining the form of policy; how it is cloaked and presented. It plays the very smallest role in policy-determination itself.

As the torch now passes once again to General Haig it is useful to remember that he, along with Bzrezinski, Vance, Harold Brown and Carter himself are all members or past members of the same Trilateral Commission and the same Council On Foreign Relations. And so were virtually all top-level cabinet members in all post-war administrations. These councils are training centers for the elite diplomatic, military and governmental servants of the billionaire class. They are presided over and funded by the billionaires themselves — David Rockefeller, the heirs of J.P. Morgan, the Mellons, duPonts and the rest.

This private, almost invisible superstructure is the basis of both continuity and new directions in government policy. This has been amply documented over the course of many years. To the ruling class, labels like “liberal” and “conservative” are labels of convenience; and the late Nelson Rockefeller said as much in his book, *Unity, Freedom and Peace*.

“Such labels (conservative, liberal) are misleading, and out of date, in the context of the massive problems that we face. Rather I would say that today, we must be conservative in our loyalty to eternal truths that define the nature, the freedom, the dignity of man. *We must be liberal in our constant and tireless quest to find ever new*

*ways to meet ever new threats to this freedom and dignity. As we must be progressive in a spirit that rejects escape to yesterdays that perhaps never existed, while looking ahead with optimism and confidence to the tomorrows of ever more secure liberty, more universal justice, more fruitful peace...<sup>6</sup>*

Defining these fine abstractions in terms of ruling class goals is one of the prime functions of the Councils, Commissions, Roundtables etc. maintained at considerable expense by the billionaires. The graduates of these academies, and of the numerous satellite think-tanks (Georgetown Center, Brookings, American Enterprise Institute, etc.) fill the top slots of all the departments of the executive branch. They also staff the committees of Congress, sit on countless judicial benches, and run the vast secret complexes of the CIA, National Security Agency and the Pentagon. The presidents of the United States are the more-or-less capable, more-or-less energetic custodians of this system. The system does not depend upon or revolve around these, its least permanent members.

This is not to say that all presidents are equally figureheads, although some were (e.g. Eisenhower and Coolidge) and Reagan almost certainly will be. The point is that he can be. The real machinery of state power is constructed around a stable core of professionals which can, if necessary, carry the President along and make his decisions for him. The signals that the ruling class now considers this quite necessary can be heard in the slogan, “cabinet government.” This method of running things has never been more highly praised than in the period since Reagan's election. And it is ironic that the other “role models” (other than Roosevelt!) now being tossed around for Reagan are — Eisenhower and Coolidge. A wise line of retreat.

### **Reagan The “Communicator”**

The system made Ronald Reagan president, but the man is a mediocrity. His past life reveals no hint of exceptional talent, intellect or accomplishment. He was a small time movie star, a stooge for Joe McCarthy in the actors' union, a TV announcer and later the Governor of California. But those who praise his governorship all point to his “ability to delegate authority” as the key to his success. It was “cabinet government” in miniature.

Reagan's only talent is that of a facile “communicator.” Through his campaigns, and through countless speaking engagements, Reagan has perfected a modest, easy-going style which is undeniably charming. More importantly, it is different and refreshing. His speeches are an artful blend of Mr. Nice Guy and Mr. Irate Citizen. Only the content is ugly. Reagan's violent chauvinism is packaged in affability and sincerity.

Reagan also impresses his audiences by taking sides — he's combative. He doesn't present the world or society as one big happy family. Unlike most of the politicians, he doesn't get caught stressing patience or compromise or the “complexity” of it all. People are mad. They want answers. They want action. So Reagan gets mad, he gets irate, and the simplicity and vagueness of his solutions help rather than hinder him. He just sticks up for the little guy — the middle-class guy with bills and a mortgage and a kid to put through school. Everybody



else is the problem; the poor and the rich alike. The bums on welfare, "Big Government," and the "Liberal Eastern Establishment."

This theme flows smoothly and effortlessly into the next: the whole country is getting pushed around. The Panamanians want to steal our canal. The Arabs want to steal our oil, which we prospected and drilled for. The Africans want our minerals, the Japanese want our auto markets, the Russians want to blow us off the map! They're all jealous. They want what we've got — crushing debts, a depression and inflation. It doesn't slow him up a bit.

But the Nice Guy/Irate Citizen routine of Reagan loses its magic instantly just as soon as the complainer is put in the position of having to *do* something about it. This process is rapidly consummating itself. The familiar Inaugural Excuse has been duly delivered: It's not my fault, it took a long time to get this way and you can't change things overnight. This sort of thing wears thin in a crisis. Reagan's shortcomings as a manager have already been recognized — and institutionalized — as "cabinet government."

### **The Basic Flaw of the Imperial Non-Presidency**

It is indeed ironic. In times of crisis, classes and parties look to their leaders for direction and a sure guiding hand. Committee decision-making left unguided by an authoritative leader is the last resort of slow-moving bureaucrats, political cowards and incompetents. That this administration has had to resort to it shows the depth of the leadership crisis they face and how bad a choice Reagan was for the bourgeoisie.

In this light, Reagan's much publicized "cabinet government" and his easy going 9-to-5 approach of the duties of the presidency is a fundamental sign of weakness. At a time when U.S. imperialism is beset on every side, national and international, with complex crises and fewer and fewer options, the lack of an authoritative leader leads inevitably to contradictory policy and actions and ultimately political paralysis. The concept of the "imperial presidency," of activist political leaders like Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon who firmly held the reins of authority and power in their own hands, was not determined by the personality who held the office, so much as the necessity driven by increasingly acute challenges to the U.S. bourgeoisie.

Because of these challenges and the complexities of policy in every area, it has also become necessary at the same time for the bourgeoisie to create around the office of the presidency a whole layer of key decision makers with power in their own right. It has become conventional to speak of a "super cabinet" within the executive branch of the government, referring to the most important and powerful policy-making areas and the men who run them. This is to distinguish them from the formal cabinet, which contains departments and bureaucrats of decidedly less power and influence. The super cabinet includes powerful posts which are not formally cabinet-level at all. Generally, it includes the departments of State, Defense, Justice and the Treasury; and also the heads of the CIA, the National Security Agency, the Office of Management and Budget and the various White House insiders, such as the chief of staff Baker and presidential counsel, Meese in the Reagan

Administration.

Historically, the bourgeoisie has become aware of some of the problems of the "imperial presidency" and the super cabinet. For one thing, while unleashing the initiative of strong presidents, it also allows them to also make fundamental mistakes. While Johnson was able to push through the reforms of the Great Society, he was also able to drag the U.S. into a thorough political and military defeat in Vietnam. While allowing Nixon to go hat in hand to the People's Republic of China, his delusion of omnipotent power also led to the disastrous Watergate.

Another problem more relevant here has been that of the existence itself of a super cabinet with greatly enhanced powers in dealing with their areas of authority. This leads to problems of coordination exacerbated by substantive crises. Look, for instance, at the question of steel and auto imports. Not only is this an economic problem internal to the U.S., but also one of importance for foreign policy. Moreover, a resolution internally limiting imports contradicts U.S. interests internationally, as it could spark a trade war.

The existence of highly visible and prestigious representatives of the bourgeoisie in these posts complicates the problem even more. Because of the bourgeoisie's world outlook of arrogance, individualism and ego-tripping, they fight over turf and over pecking order more viciously than animals. Failure to win out over rivals in policy decisions leads to quarreling and vendettas, unprincipled backbiting and — as in the case of Vance — resignation.

The structure of power, therefore, demands that the president be able to mediate and finally adjudicate the conflicts built into the super cabinet system. While there

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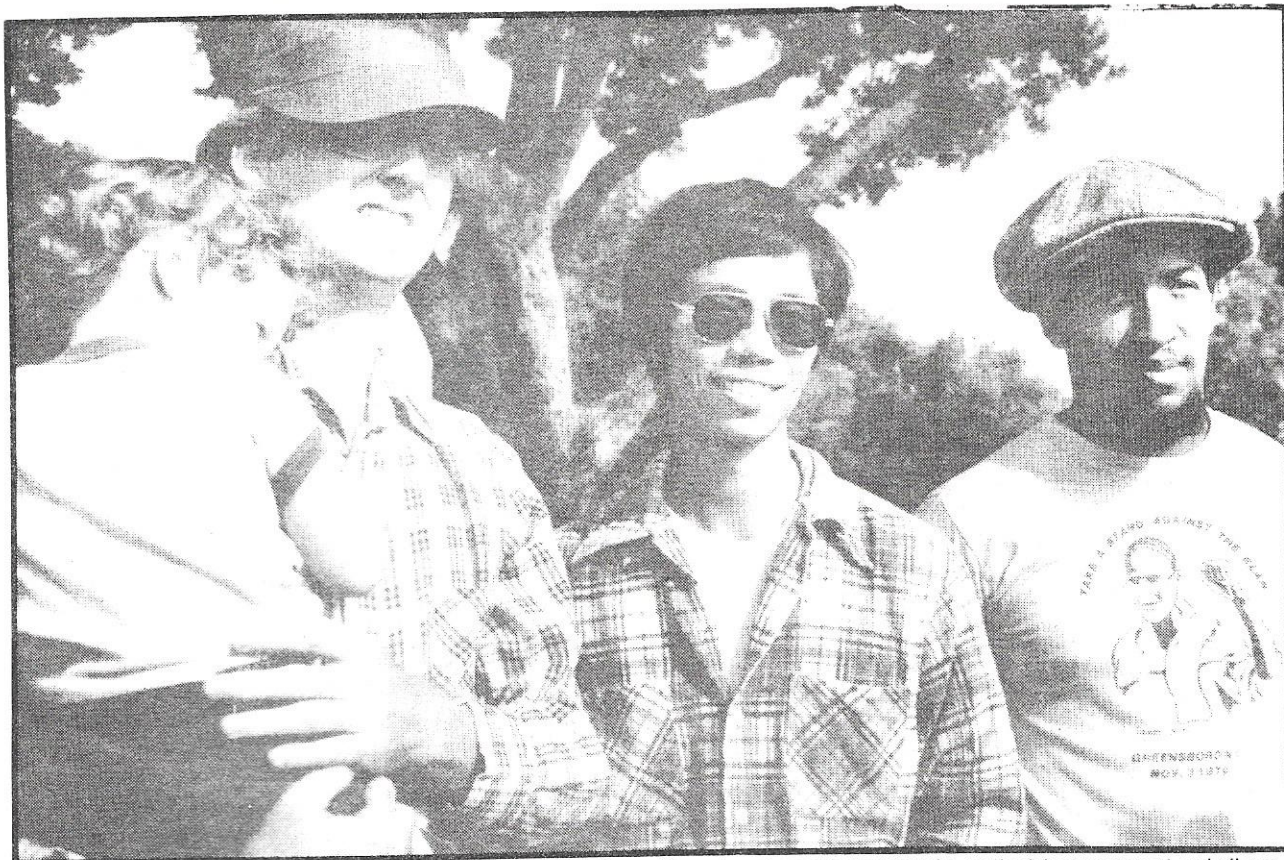
## **"Reagan's only talent is that of a facile 'communicator' "**

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may be vicious quarrels going on in cabinet meetings — as reportedly happened many times in the Kennedy Administration — the president has to invoke and use his authority over the final decision. Lack of a vigorous and authoritative president leads to inevitable anarchy and cacophony in policy. Thus it is no accident that in the first few months of the Reagan presidency we have already seen Defense Secretary Weinberger's slip on the deployment of the neutron bomb in Europe, the disastrous attempt by a State Dept. spokesman to play down the issue of El Salvador, the Pipes statement on "inevitable war" with the Soviet Union, the contradicting of Stockman by Treasury Secretary Regan on government intervention in the economy, and most revealing of all, the crisis over crisis management and the question of cabinet authority, the last brought on by the attempted assassination of Reagan.

Some of the bourgeoisie's propagandists think the problem is with individuals, like Haig. The New York Times' Tom Wicker, for instance, has said, following Haig's performance after Reagan was shot by a neo-nazi, "But those few disastrous minutes on the home screen





The NASSCO 3 case, a FBI and company frame-up, represents the cutting edge of government attacks on the labor movement and all progressive people in the bourgeoisie's overall swing to the right.

followed Mr. Haig's Inaugural Day reach for total control of foreign policy, his overwrought statements concerning El Salvador, his suggestion that four American missionaries killed there may have died in an 'exchange of fire' when they tried to run a roadblock, his childish public pouting over Vice President Bush's selection to be the Administration's crisis manager," and White House-inspired reports that he had threatened to resign "eight or nine times."

"After only two months in office, Mr. Haig appears, therefore, less the cool, experienced, knowledgeable bureaucrat once advertised than an uncertain man too eager for power to be trusted with it."

The fundamental problem with this view is that it forgets why the post of crisis manager was created in the first place and why Haig could even think that he could or should have complete control over foreign policy. Up to now, the president's authority as having the last word on any question has been something understood, unspoken. That the Reagan Administration has been forced to institutionalize the crisis manager as a formal separate division of labor from the paistdency shows clear lack of confidence in Reagan and is an admission of weakness in command and central authority. Without a clear chain of command and a central authority, the government would be totally paralyzed in a crisis. Moreover, in times like these where crises explode with regularity for the U.S. imperialists, to have an indecisive philistine that allows his own Secretary of State to doubt the truthfulness of his word — was Haig informed or not about the decision to make Bush crisis manager by the

White House? — is tantamount to digging its own hole. Moreover, its self-created crises of authority presages total paralysis in face of an immediate crisis.

### The Splits

#### Threatening the Reagan Administration

So far we have talked about the structural problems facing the Reagan government. That aspect is just one side of the coin. The other side carries the real divisions in policy among different members of this administration, compounding in turn the structural problem.

Another variant of the thesis that "Haig is the culprit" is run by various groups like the Workers World Party. They see Haig as a vicious militarist — which he is — who *really* represents the right-wing "military industrial complex." The simple fact is that they don't understand Haig's role and what's happening in the Reagan government. First and foremost, as we said, it is not Haig alone who represents right-wing views. The whole bourgeoisie has swung to the right.

Haig himself is no ordinary military officer who just happened to have made it to the White House, first as an aide to Henry Kissinger, then as White House Chief of Staff in the chaotic Nixon Watergate period. It is no accident, that after a tour in a strategic post of Commander in Chief of NATO forces, he has been picked as Secretary of State. Haig's rise was not dependent on being part of some general right-wing "military-industrial complex" as Workers World states. His rise was tied directly to being plucked *from* the military to take his place at the side of the Rockefeller-directed Henry Kissinger, groomed to im-



plement the policy of the Council of Foreign Relations and Trilateral Commission. No ordinary bird colonel rises to become Secretary of State in a few years. The reason is clear. Far from being an equal partner in a "complex," the military is more like a leashed dog at the beck and call of their finance capitalist masters.

Perhaps the clearest way to show that Haig is no simple representative of the "military-industrial complex" but an agent of the more sinister dual tactics of the dominant CFR/Trilateral Commission clique is to look at the open struggle in the White House over foreign policy. A recent *Newsweek* article states that Haig and Reagan have the same world view "most notably a hard-line approach to the Soviet Union and the Soviet-supported troublemaking in the Middle East, Africa and Central America." This reflects the overall unity of the line. But then the real difference in how to implement it comes out.

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## **"The necessity for 'cabinet government' and a 'crisis management' team led by Bush shows how bad a choice Reagan was for the bourgeoisie"**

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The article continues:

"But while Reagan's view is generally instinctive (read: simple-minded, based on gut reaction, not on a grasp of the world situation and U.S. strategy) developed on the conservative lecture circuit(!), Haig learned the realpolitik of diplomacy serving as Henry Kissinger's deputy and top man in NATO. Almost inevitably, this puts him at odds with some conservatives in Congress, at the National Security Council and at the highest levels of the White House. For the most part they differ only on matters of tone, tactics, and timing, but even these disagreements may have a *far-reaching impact* (emphasis ours) in several critical areas. Among them: relations with Western Allies, China and Taiwan, and Southern Africa... But Haig also seems determined to resist a swing so far to the right that the nation's interests are undermined by rigid conservative ideology."<sup>8</sup>

We have already mentioned Haig's fight with Richard Allen over statements that a pacifist wave was sweeping Europe, this occurring days after Allen's East European expert, Richard Pipes, stated that the United States might be forced to go to war with the Soviet Union and that the West German Foreign Minister was a dupe of the Soviets. This last statement forced Haig to personally send a letter of apology to his West German counterpart. Haig has also floated rumors that the NSC, and particularly Allen himself, is delaying policy papers from him to the President so they don't get to Reagan in time for action.

There is more. There are differences on how to play the strategic "China card." Reagan and his close advisors are longtime friends of the Chiang clique on

Taiwan. Michael Deaver, one of the White House triumvirate of aides closest to Reagan, was once the Chiang clique's public relations consultant. Haig clearly sees the strategic necessity of setting up China to lure the Soviets to attack to the east, away from Europe. Strategically, only by dragging these two socialist countries into a prolonged land war can the U.S. hope to reestablish its imperialist hegemony. The line of restoring close ties to the Chiang clique on Taiwan is in direct conflict with the "China card" line of the Council of Foreign Relations represented by Haig. It is thus no accident that high level emissaries like Bush and Ford were dispatched to China to try to patch things up. It's too important for the U.S. bourgeoisie to let the simplistic right-wingers fool with the line.

### **Foreign Policy: Economic Crisis Limits U.S. Military Options Today**

The analysis of the insoluble problems which U.S. imperialism now faces in the various regions of the world is a very big subject, and is here only begun. One of the biggest and most overlooked problems is the growing strain in U.S. relations with Europe and Japan. At the bottom of it is a whole new international trade war spawned by the economic crisis. It is not lost on these countries that U.S. calls for import "restraints" by Japan and reindustrialization schemes are aimed directly at them. They have been soaking up and suffering from the domestic inflation in the U.S. economy for twenty years, and at an ever-increasing rate. Now they are offered the prospect of being driven out of the U.S. market and attacked in their own home markets. As this trade war heats up and the economic crisis gets worse, the strain will get more and more acute.

The United States has proven itself unable even to guarantee their oil supply, and the Carter Doctrine did nothing to reassure them. Its main purpose was to prepare American public opinion for the prospect of military intervention in general and seizure of the Persian Gulf in particular. It should be remembered that a very large majority of the U.S. people received this "Doctrine" with anger, hostility and contempt. But whatever we think, the billionaires can't survive without other peoples' oil, and they will force us into a fight before they will give it up. They hope we can be led to think of this as righteous and in our own interest. But they had the same hopes — and more credibility — in Viet Nam.

But the most pressing problem facing the Reagan administration, for which they are marshalling all their energies, is the economy, in particular the problem of inflation. This has important implications for the Reagan administration's foreign policy in the immediate future.

Since Reagan has to control the rate of inflation as his top priority, he must keep the federal deficit — already a record \$80 billion this year — as low as possible. Massive budget cutting in social programs, farmers' price supports, trade readjustment act money paid out to workers, social security, food stamps and others is already in the works.

This is accompanied by the biggest armaments buildup in U.S. peace-time history. In the face of rising challenges by national liberation movements and coun-



tries of the third world and especially with the growing military strength of the socialist Soviet Union, the U.S. imperialists have recognized the tipping balance of forces against them. They now recognize that they are today not able to deal militarily with the forces aligned against them. As a recent report sponsored by the powerful and authoritative Council on Foreign Relations stated: "On the American side of the equation, we obviously failed to recognize early enough the unfavorable turn in military trends. Hence the obvious but so far neglected need to develop a clear sense of basic defense requirements for the next decade, based on projections of Soviet and other potentially hostile military forces and of military contingencies likely to confront us. Even as we set about this task, we must undertake to reverse dangerous military trends." To carry out this massive rearmament without sparking hyperinflation, the bourgeoisie needs to buy time (and not least of all to implement the return to the military draft, called for in this and other Council of Foreign Relations reports).

This affects the ability of the United States to immediately carry out a full-scale war in places like El Salvador or other third world countries, particularly the sending of large numbers of troops. Any large-scale intervention now would mean an immediate large increase in federal spending, a deeper deficit and would mean throwing all credibility about fighting inflation out the window. For all the bluster of the U.S. government, its military options are limited today — using the CIA, military aid and advisors, proxy troops — as long as the inflation rate has not been stabilized, or at least until they abandon their current economic game plan.

The United States is also forced to seek a new SALT agreement with the Soviet Union. For the reasons outlined above, the United States has no choice. It cannot af-

## “Haig is no simple representative of the so-called ‘military-industrial complex’ ”

ford an uncapped arms race at this time, forcing quantum jumps in defense spending over and beyond what's already projected. It's no accident that the United States is on the one hand talking tough about the Soviet Union, as Haig did recently, and at the same time saying that it is willing to continue SALT negotiations. In this case, talking tough is about the only thing they can do.

In this regard there is only one quality of Reagan's which the bourgeoisie is glad to have, but even this is a mixed blessing. This quality is intimidation at home and abroad. In the eyes of the world, Reagan is no Mr. Nice Guy, but a “Mad Bomber” — an image cultivated by Nixon — only more so. The bourgeoisie needs this and will use it to the hilt. The corollary to intimidation and redbaiting here is political and military intimidation of countries which stand up for their rights. The world knows little of Reagan the sleepy “delegater of responsibility.” It remembers Reagan's violent denunciation to any concession to Panamanian sovereignty over the Canal Zone. It remembers the many times Reagan has called for military intervention — in Angola, Zimbabwe, Nicaragua, Iran and even Peru. The billionaires hope to use this subjective factor to instill fear in the movements for national liberation in the third world. They hope to use it — as Nixon did — to gain an advantage in negotiations.



Reagan and Haig. A poor choice for the bourgeoisie, Reagan's failings have already been formalized as “cabinet government” and the appointment of Bush as “crisis manager.” And Haig is far from just a simple representative of the so-called “military-industrial complex.”



This is the significance of Haig's hammering on the theme of "international terrorism." By conscious manipulation of the hostage-taking in Iran, the United States wants to transfer the image of "terrorism" to the various national liberation movements threatening U.S. interests. A good example is the U.S. current stance toward El Salvador, where those resisting the fascist junta — practically everybody — are now being slandered as "terrorist." In this way, the government hopes to maneuver public opinion against the liberation forces and box them in politically. They do the same thing domestically, particularly to revolutionaries and communists.

The tough talk of the Reagan Administration, however, is a blade that cuts both ways. The same toughness on the question of El Salvador has only alienated the vast majority of the American people and given rise to a broad movement against a whole spectrum of Reagan's policies. Pushed to front-page headlines by Reagan, the furor caused by this "next Vietnam" forced him to accuse the press of "blowing it out of proportion," angering the media bosses who carried out what their master demanded. Moreover, the government's tough talk has succeeded in alienating the vast majority of Catholics, angered over Haig and UN Ambassador Kirkpatrick's insinuations that the American nuns murdered by junta troops "ran the roadblock" or were actually covert revolutionaries.

### **"Human Rights": Reagan's Acute Problems in Carrying Out Dual Tactics in Foreign Policy**

El Salvador is actually a prime example of the many difficulties the government faces in carrying out its necessary dual tactics in foreign policy, particularly in the third world.

Reagan's election bolstered up all right-wing forces around the world. And to be sure the ruling class desires that they be given a shot in the arm. South Africa, Taiwan, South Korea and all fascist regimes in the third world are propped up by U.S. imperialism, and their confidence in it was at a low ebb. But Reagan is just too exhilarating to them for the bourgeoisie's best interest. The fascists are not subtle in anything and they expect Reagan to back them exclusively, as they were backed in the cold war period of global containment. They will be disappointed. The United States has abandoned only the discredited *slogan* of "human rights." The factors of decline and decay which compelled them to these *policies* have not changed. They will re-emerge in other forms as El Salvador has shown.

The real meaning of both the "human rights" version of U.S. intervention and Reagan's "standing up to terrorism" — that is the just struggles of the people, has recently been expressed as a simple formula linking the two.

Richard Feinberg, a Latin American specialist on the Policy Planning Staff to the Secretary of State, summed up how the United States dealt with the situation in El Salvador. In an interview on the PBS documentary, "El Salvador: Another Vietnam?," Feinberg said,

"I think there have been basically three phases in U.S. policy towards El Salvador. In each case our objectives have been human rights and security. Security defin-

ed as keeping the left out of power. The first phase was when President General Romero, the old military dictator, was in power. We saw him as both a violator of human rights as well as an incompetent ruler, who was only serving to strengthen the sympathy of the population to the left. So, in both human rights and security grounds, he was no good and so those two objectives of human rights and security melded. OK. Once Romero was out and overthrown a new government comes in, a civilian military junta. At that point we thought we could have it all. We could have a centrist, democratic govern-

## **"The problems of the economy have important implications for Reagan's ability to implement foreign policy"**

ment protecting human rights that would include a portion of the left, but not the extreme left, that would serve both our human rights and our security objectives."<sup>10</sup> At every one of these stages, however, the U.S. imperialists face inherent problems in executing the policies.

In El Salvador, the U.S. move was too little, too late, and the results backfired. The military continued their repressive campaigns and the people flocked to the left. Two months after Romero was kicked out, the entire civilian cabinet of the government resigned in protest over the military's domination of the government. The United States chose to continue support of the military. Feinberg explained, "We saw the military as the only sure force between power and the left. So, for security reasons, we gave low priority to human rights."

### **Land Reform: Too Little, Too Late**

To establish the military junta's claim to legitimacy, the United States quickly flew Duarte, a member of the Christian Democratic Party and opposition candidate to Romero in the 1972 election, back from exile to join the junta. Through Duarte, the United States hoped to woo liberals, social democrats and other reformers into supporting the government. An agrarian land reform program covered the state of siege and resumption of U.S. military aid.

The purpose of land reform was never to benefit the peasants. A wealthy landowner admitted to the New York Times, "The purpose of land reform was not to help the poorest because they were poor, but to keep them from joining the left." Less than 15% of the country's farmland was affected by the land reform act: 85% of the coffee, 75% of cotton and 69% of sugar cane plantations are still controlled by the ruling oligarchy of 14 families. More than 59% of El Salvador's peasants still remain landless. The land reform plan exposed the government more and the peasants became more polarized against the government.

The government didn't win any support from the peasants, and the stepped-up campaign of repression also alienated the reformers, liberals and social democrats. Archbishop Romero (no relation to General Romero)





May 3rd demonstration in Washington, D.C. The hundred thousand people on May 3 brought out a hell of a shade in the government's "human rights" policy — mass resistance to direct intervention in the third world.

personally wrote a letter to Carter, urging him not to send military aid. A month later, he was assassinated while conducting mass. At his funeral, attended by clergy from all over the world, government troops ambushed and fired into the crowd of mourners. By 1980's end, more than 13,000 people had died as a result of this campaign of terror by the government. The indiscriminate murder of peasants, lawyers, engineers and priests, and the growing list of missing persons kidnapped by government troops have sickened everyone and turned the whole country against the government. As a Salvadoran working in a refugee center said, "The only solution left to us, after everything else we have tried has failed, is the road we are following right now — all the people making the revolution, everybody is joining the revolution. Even those who didn't want to believe in it. Because people are willing to make any sacrifice, even to die, so the rest of us can live in a better world."

### **No Choice For U.S. But Support for Junta**

At that point, the United States had no choice but to back the military junta all the way and pumped in military aid. A 36-man team of U.S. military advisors

was sent to train the Salvadoran troops in methods of counter-insurgency. Guatemalan and Honduran troops, trained by the United States, have also been deployed at El Salvador's borders to attack the guerrilla camps. The United States decided to cut off \$75 million of economic aid to Nicaragua because of that country's support for the opposition front in El Salvador. All these acts of intervention are justified by Reagan who insists that the regime is "moderate," even though its clear that it is the junta who is massacring the people.

### **U.S. Military Intervention in El Salvador Gives Rise to Mass Movement**

The last stage, U.S. direct intervention, has brought in its wake another crucial problem — perhaps the most crucial — for the U.S. government. That is the tremendous mass movement in the United States sparked off by the military support given to the Duarte fascist junta. The 100,000 marchers at the May 3 demonstration in Washington, D.C. and others around the country representing a broad spectrum of forces put the bourgeoisie on notice. All the lies of the "swing to the right" of the masses and of "putting Vietnam behind us"



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## **“At every one of the stages of the ‘human rights’ tactics, the government faces critical problems of implementation”**

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evaporated practically overnight.

That such a massive demonstration occurred when the movement is just beginning shows the bourgeoisie that they have managed to whip up a mass movement against their imperialist policies. As Henry Kissinger once remarked, public opinion in the United States is the foremost problem facing the bourgeoisie on the foreign policy front. The response of the U.S. people to U.S. intervention in El Salvador shows that they indeed have a strategic problem on their hands.

### **South Korea and Philippines: El Salvadors in the Making**

The same conditions as in El Salvador simmer in South Korea and the Philippines. Last year, tens of thousands of Korean students and workers rose up in the towns of Pusan and Masan demanding democracy. A revolutionary situation later erupted in the town of Kwangju. For nine days, the Korean people took over the city. Only after surrounding the city with tanks and street-to-street fighting involving 40% of the country's paratroopers was the government able to control the city. In the Philippines, the New People's Army under the leadership of the Philippine Communist Party and the Moro National Liberation Movement has conducted years of protracted people's war. Already they control large sectors of the countryside and have the sympathy and support of the peasants. Demonstrations against Marcos are increasingly frequent in the capital of Manila. Strike waves and work stoppages have hit the U.S. military bases in the country. An International Tribunal with delegates from around the world met in Belgium a few months ago and indicted the U.S./Marcos dictatorship for crimes against the people.

The United States is sitting on a rumbling volcano. With 40,000 troops in South Korea and over 20 military bases in the Philippines, the United States could be dragged into a war in case of a general uprising. There is little option like in El Salvador of using Honduran and Guatemalan troops to do dirty work while they ponder their next step.

The United States wants to avoid another El Salvador. Although the United States' "human rights campaign" is dead and buried, the United States still uses reform tactics to maintain their rule and attack the growing liberator forces. That is why Marcos and Chun were told to end martial law and try using "carrots." Selective attacks on the left must replace blanket repression and torture. To broaden his base of support, Marcos freed 341 prisoners, including 159 opposition members. In a similar move, General Chun commuted Kim Dae Jung's death sentence to life imprisonment. Kim Dae Jung is an internationally-known figure in the opposition who for

decades worked for democracy and freedom in Korea. His mass support among the Korean people could make or break General Chun's regime.

Marcos and General Chun have both announced presidential elections later in the year to give the illusion of a freely and democratically elected government and counter unfavorable world opinion. It is also no accident that Marcos ended martial law weeks before the Pope's visit to his country. International news media following the Pope's every word and footstep put pressure on Marcos to present the best possible image to the world and to lift martial law. At the same time, the Pope has a chance to give Marcos his blessings. In a country that is 85% Catholic, this would be a big boost to the regime. Some clergymen are turning to the communists as the only alternative to the reign of repression.

### **Time Bomb That Cannot be Defused**

The United States cannot prevent the downfall of Marcos or General Chun because the cosmetic changes have hardly fooled anyone. Just before lifting martial law, Marcos added a series of new laws to guarantee his undisputed power. A "Public Order Act" allows him to censor the press and hold anyone in jail simply by announcing that a "grave emergency" exists in the country. Other decrees gave Marcos virtually unlimited power over rural banks, agricultural marketing and food distribution. Strikes and unions are still prohibited.

The same is true for General Chun. The news media in Korea is severely censored. A series of business reorganizations imposed by the military junta placed the press under direct control of the government. General Chun had announced that he was willing to "guarantee sound criticism by the press" as long as it took into account the "constant threats of our security." Strikes are also banned. Many professors have lost their jobs for speaking out against the regime and universities have been closed. Student organizations have been disbanded and those remaining are controlled by the government.

In both countries, presidential elections are a farce. In the Philippines, opposition parties exist in name only. Gen. Chun disbanded all opposition parties. The main opposition leaders like Kim Dae Jung are in jail and cannot run for office. Under the South Korean Constitution and election laws which General Chun rewrote, all delegates for the presidential election are under his thumb.

Unfulfilled promises of democracy and liberalization alienate more and more people. In El Salvador, election frauds in 1966, 1972 and 1977, with continuing repression, turned peasants and workers to the left as their only alternative. Increased repression built the left even more. Now, all of El Salvador is united against the government. The same will happen in South Korea and the Philippines.

### **Conclusion**

Again, what gives perspective is seeing how fundamentally weak the imperialists are — that every move they make is a gamble, and with every gamble the odds get worse for them. It has been a losing game for them for a long time. Their successes have been local and short-lived. Their defeats have been disasters. Yes, they will gamble more with Reagan — not because of Reagan but because they have to.



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## Study Questions

1. Why is it a big lie to say that there is a right-wing mandate from the masses for Reagan? What are the consequences for that line under present conditions in the class struggle? How should public opinion be described today under the conditions of capitalist destabilization?
2. Why is Reagan a "bad choice" for the bourgeoisie? What is his strength and his weaknesses? What are the possible consequences for the bourgeoisie?
3. What are the difficulties the bourgeoisie faces in implementing its "human rights" policies in the third world? What is the significant "shade" that came out over El Salvador?
4. Why is it difficult for the bourgeoisie to militarily intervene with large numbers of troops in the third world anytime soon? What would the economic consequences be?