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EDITORIAL

THE REAL SMOKING GUN

Ever since "smoking guns" entered the discourse of journalistic investigation, the press has focused more on the weapon than on the crime. When Walter Mondale cited evidence, contained in an article by Patrick J. Sloyan in last week's *Nation*, that President Reagan had rejected a recommendation by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to pull the marines out of their Beirut barracks in advance of the airport attack a year ago, he meant to criticize the Administration's entire policy in Lebanon. The article had provided that critical context, but the barrage of charges and denials subsequently launched by both the Democratic and Republican campaign staffs, through the press, has obscured the pre-eminent point: the policy was mistaken and disastrous, and the unheeded recommendation was merely a byproduct of its failure.

We stand by Sloyan's story. Using every trick in the political spokesman's book, Administration officials have tried to explain away the fact that a serious disagreement between the Joint Chiefs and the National Security Council was decided in favor of the White House wing for political reasons, and that hundreds of lives were lost as a result. But the press should not let the President get away with his version of the details.

Another smoking gun surfaced in the candidates' debate: the terror-and-torture manual produced by the C.I.A. for its *contra* commandos in and around Nicaragua. Again, the news media remained content to concentrate on the particular instrument rather than the political program it served—the massive campaign of terrorism Reagan directs in Central America. If the press widened its view, if it shifted its focus from figure to ground, it would see that there are more important issues at stake than a single shot on a narrow range.

ISSUES AND QUESTIONS
Richard Falk
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A MAN AND A MOVEMENT

THE AGE OF REAGANISM

ANDREW KOPKIND

Not since the era of the late junior Senator from Wisconsin has an American political figure given this country an eponymous ism. Reaganism is now an established movement and an important historical event. Its roots can be discerned in periods long past, and its consequences will carry beyond the Presidential tenure, and perhaps the earthly existence, of the man who gave it a name. In the coming few years, at least, it will surely engage and dramatically alter the institutions and activities of American civic culture.

Like other native American movements—Populism, Progressivism and the various "new radicalisms" of this century—Reaganism lacks sharp ideological definition and programmatic coherence. It has not yet produced a unitary creed to resolve the differences among its components: the Moral Majority, the corporate class, blue-collar ethnics and the country-club set. The contest between monetarists and supply-siders is still undecided. Reaganism seems vague, trendy, spontaneous, opportunistic, impressionistic and contradictory. But not always: those who are making the movement have a precise idea of their goals and a fair sense of the strategies to achieve them. They have located a social base to support their campaign; they have developed an institutional network to maintain it; they are fashioning an economic system to feed it; and they have invented educational policies to supply it with manpower for generations to come. However amorphous any of those elements may look at the moment, the whole Reaganist project has the spin, the feel, the significance of a force of history.

The rise of Reaganism is focused in the electoral arena this year, but it is not primarily a
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**Alexander Cockburn on the PRESS.
Andrew Kopkind on the CULTURE WARS.
Stephen F. Cohen on the SOVIET UNION.
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Christopher Hitchens on WASHINGTON.
Bird and Holland on GLOBAL POLITICS.
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Reaganism

(Continued From Front Cover)

phenomenon of political campaigns, public office or even Republican Administrations. A landslide victory for Reagan and his allies next week would certainly advance the movement, but a good Democratic showing would not stop or reverse it. For power is already in place to continue the movement's mission in the coming years. The first targets of choice are clear: all those liberal institutions that have defined and shaped American culture for fifty years or more—the press, the churches, unions, academia, local public education, urban government, philanthropic foundations, the artistic establishment, Hollywood, publishing, Federal service, the liberal professions and their organizations. They will come under increasing pressure to redirect their orientation along lines that have already been drawn, to change their social roles, to reassess their values. Even the term "liberalism" has been dropped from polite political discourse. A major ideological conflict is under way.

It's not necessary to establish a conspiracy or identify a cabal to confirm the reality of Reaganism. The course of the movement may be directed, as an editor of *The Times* of London once said of his paper's editorial policy, "by a committee that never meets." Actually, subcommittees do meet: the Madison Club of right-wing strategists in Washington, working groups of religious leaders and their political associates, forums of economists, military experts and foreign affairs specialists. But the degree of self-consciousness is less significant than the amount of motivation the movers and shakers possess. And anyway, a committee of conspirators with a published *nomenklatura* would offer too easy a target for critics eager to personify the enemy.

Reaganism underscores the issues and subsumes the symbols of the electoral debate. Grenada, Central America, the Pentagon budget, taxes and deficits, school prayer, abortion, family values, patriotism, leadership—those words have specific referents, and in an ordinary campaign they would acquire no larger meaning. But this is no ordinary election. Its ideological character makes a sensible pattern of disparate factors. And that, of course, is what ideology is for; it creates a consciousness that can be laid over random subjects as an outline traced on paper assembles scattered dots into a picture. Grenada, then, is no isolated adventure but a tactic in the strategy of rollback—Reaganism's long-term policy of destroying socialism and preventing revolution in the Third World (and that is only the beginning). Defense spending is not a set of figures but a way of increasing militarization of America's political economy, and its cultural life as well. Taxes and deficits are tools for increasing the power and enriching the coffers of the corporate class. Family values refer to more rigid social controls, leadership means authoritarianism, school prayer and support for religious education are means of hastening the privatization of American society—a key strategy.

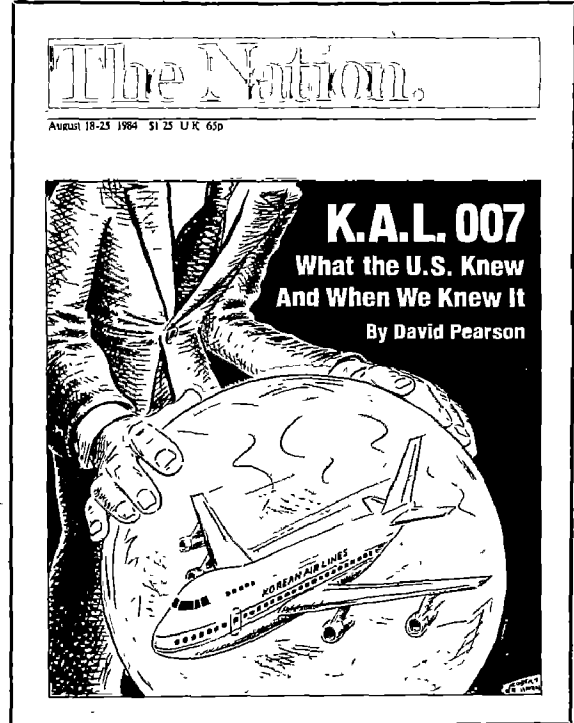
The unusual level of polarization that most political commentators noticed in the campaign earlier this year was a

symptom of its ideological nature. It is a truism of political science that candidates move to the middle to maximize their appeal as the voting day approaches. But Ronald Reagan and his allies around the country have been different. For the most part, they have sharpened rather than leveled debate, hardened rather than softened positions, divided rather than merged constituencies and generally occupied extremes rather than the center of the spectrum. For a moment it seemed that Reagan was bidding to become the peace candidate, but he used his *pro forma* meeting with Andrei Gromyko to emphasize his toughness.

The ideological thrust comes almost entirely from the Reagan side. Mondale and most other Democrats, as well as the few surviving "moderate" Republicans outside the Reagan camp, are still waging a pragmatic campaign. Mondale waffles on Grenada and Central America, military spending and the economy, cheering his core of liberal supporters one day, reaching out to conservatives the next. The President makes no such concessions. For his purpose is not simply to win votes but to organize and train the movement. Reaganism feeds on divisiveness, pitting fundamentalist and orthodox religions against liberal ones, whites against blacks, the Sun Belt against the Rust Belt, the service and technological industries against primary and manufacturing sectors, the upper classes against the lower, men against women, families against the unwed, individuals against the state. As Reaganism articulates those values it moves its constituencies—perhaps already the new majority—toward an ideological pole. That is not coalition making but movement building, and it has been as effective as anything seen in American politics since the early days of the New Deal.

Reaganism has developed from the several trends and transient phenomena that followed the convulsive social activity of the 1960s. It takes ideas, energies and some personnel from such varied elements as the George Wallace movement, neoconservatism, the New Right, neoliberalism, fundamentalism, post-feminism, the "back to basics" movement in education, the "return to roots" trend in Judaism, Catholic orthodoxy, the white backlash to integration and affirmative action, the straight-male hostility to women's liberation and gay rights, the Anglophone aversion to bilingualism. It also draws on historic American Populism, especially its racist, nativist and regionalist themes. It twines with some curiously contradictory threads in Progressivism: America Firstism and moral imperialism, a distrust of politics and politicians, an antagonism to Wall Street and monopolies. For its personal values it draws on social Darwinism, but its economic vision looks quite the other way, to a heavenly city of corporate control. Chronologically, Reaganism belongs to the late period of America's imperial drama, as fear of impending doom and a sense of inevitable loss prepare the actors for unwonted roles.

Many people or groups of people feel that they lost something, or lost out, in the Vietnam era and after. It is among those who see their power diminished, their profits dissipated, their mobility curtailed and their security endangered that Reaganism finds its social base. Included are



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whites in general and men in general; conservative political figures of both parties; the military and defense community; some Jews, most European ethnics and entry-level yuppies. They all have different reasons to resent the old liberal order. There's simple, straightforward racism and male chauvinism, to begin with, and it would be hard to underestimate the strength of those factors in Reaganism's support. Anyone who probes the political consciousness of white American males usually finds that what they like most about the Reagan Administration is the way it puts blacks and women in their places.

To be sure there are critical contradictions within Reaganism's base. George Wallace's old following, which in many areas folded into Reaganism, included Northern blue-collar workers who were devastated by the course of regional decay and technological development accelerated by the Vietnam War. But some of them have been alienated by Administration policies that slight the older regions and their industries. Many Catholics dislike the dogma imposed by their hierarchy on social issues, and refuse to go along with its support for Reaganism. A number of Jews like some parts of Reaganism but worry about its aggressive Christianity. And a small but energetic group within the world of finance capital still thinks that Reagan is practicing voodoo economics, and fear that he could blow up the world (and their banks) if the spirit moves him.

Although some of those people may vote for Reagan—for good reason, or no reason at all—a vote for the man does not mean an enlistment in his movement, nor is a vote against him an expression of opposition to the movement. Most liberals and moderate Democrats who voted for George McGovern did not thereupon join up in the New Left that promoted the candidate. Membership in Reaganism requires a deeper commitment, and for that an institutional base is being built.

At the cornerstone are the fundamentalist churches and their rapidly growing school system, which threatens the health and even the life of public education; about a thousand new religious elementary schools were opened this year. Alongside are the foundations and think tanks, the military and militaristic institutions, sports and celebrations, broadcasting and publishing, volunteer and charitable institutions and a new breed of ideologically oriented businesses. Amway sales agents are Reaganist cadre; so are R.O.T.C. trainees, weekend "survival game" players, religious disk jockeys and Bible salesmen, and certain professional athletes. Everyone who watched the World Series heard that the San Diego Padres' pitching staff is stuffed with John Birchers. The Olympics became a Reaganist spectacle, and the chant "U.S.A.! U.S.A.!" was appropriated for Reagan-Bush rallies.

The Administration actively supports institutions that promote its designated values. It wants to give tax credits to private schools, it encourages private patriotic displays (such as the Statue of Liberty extravaganza which promises to be next year's Olympics), it places ideologues in key positions (such as in the National Endowment for the Human-

ities and the Federal Communications Commission), it gives government access to Reaganist organizations like Accuracy in Media. Such support makes perfect strategic sense. Institutions teach people to think in specific ways. Private institutions teach "private" values: competitive enterprise over collective endeavor, the family unit over the heterogeneous community, male authority over sexual democracy, patriotism over internationalism, selfishness over altruism, having over sharing.

There is nothing new or inherently sinister in the *process* of ideological institution building. Liberals did a good job of it for many decades and succeeded in creating a liberal value system for the whole country. Radicals made a stab at the same thing in the 1960s. Underground newspapers and FM stations, "new age" restaurants and businesses, non-competitive sporting events, rock concerts, the many expressions of a new feminist culture, black studies programs and gay organizations all were designed to give their participants an opportunity to reorient their individual values and social consciences. If history is a question of consciousness, the way to transform the world is to change people's minds. Reaganism grasps that simple and profound reality, and is taking appropriate measures.

As Reaganism was gathering steam, liberalism began looking for the proper response, a way to recapture the terms of political debate, to re-enter the social discourse, to gain the moral high ground or the upper hand of power. Simple right-baiting would not work. The day has passed when just the "conservative" label was enough to discredit its bearer. Nowadays it is worn proudly, while "liberal" has become the pejorative of choice.

For a long time liberals carried on a painful search for "new ideas," a self-defeating maneuver which merely confirmed the popular impression that the liberal intellectual and political program was finished. Next, liberals began adopting Reaganist constructs—family values, national security, patriotism—and attempted to give them progressive content. Gov. Mario Cuomo's wildly applauded speech to the Democratic Convention in July represented a bid to capture the family issue. Mondale has tried to appropriate the security issue by announcing his plans for humane, safe and cheap interventionism: a quarantine of Nicaragua rather than an invasion, military expeditions to save American lives rather than to topple governments, a leisurely advance in the arms race rather than a blitzkrieg dash to global supremacy. Various leftists and liberals keep insisting that the flag belongs to everyone and that patriotism is the first refuge for citizens of all creeds and colors; they rarely speak of internationalism.

The liberal cultural establishment has fallen into the Reaganist trap. It accepts the shape of the new discourse so long as it can play with the language. Films, television and the press say things like "Family values are fine if the families are kind to blacks"; "Patriotism is good if we talk with the Russians"; "Sexism is inevitable, but men should do the dishes"; "The media can reorient itself as long as it is objective." But consider how much things have changed in only a few years. American culture used to present pictures

of traditional families in disarray, its castoffs looking for new arrangements; of an America that was at least as much an enemy to the rest of the world as a friend; of a press battling for justice and supporting the poor against power and privilege.

Culturally, Hollywood has responded by dishing up the new themes with the old humane details thrown in for filler. The clutch of new films set in the country defer for atmosphere to the Reaganist nostalgia for a mythic American heartland, but the people brim with liberal values of racial integration, collective struggle against greedy profiteers, and kindness toward the handicapped. For the first time some out-and-out examples of Reaganism are creeping into Hollywood (the premise, if not the conclusion, of *Red Dawn*), and the struggle is heating up on television, where the value systems are locked in nightly combat.

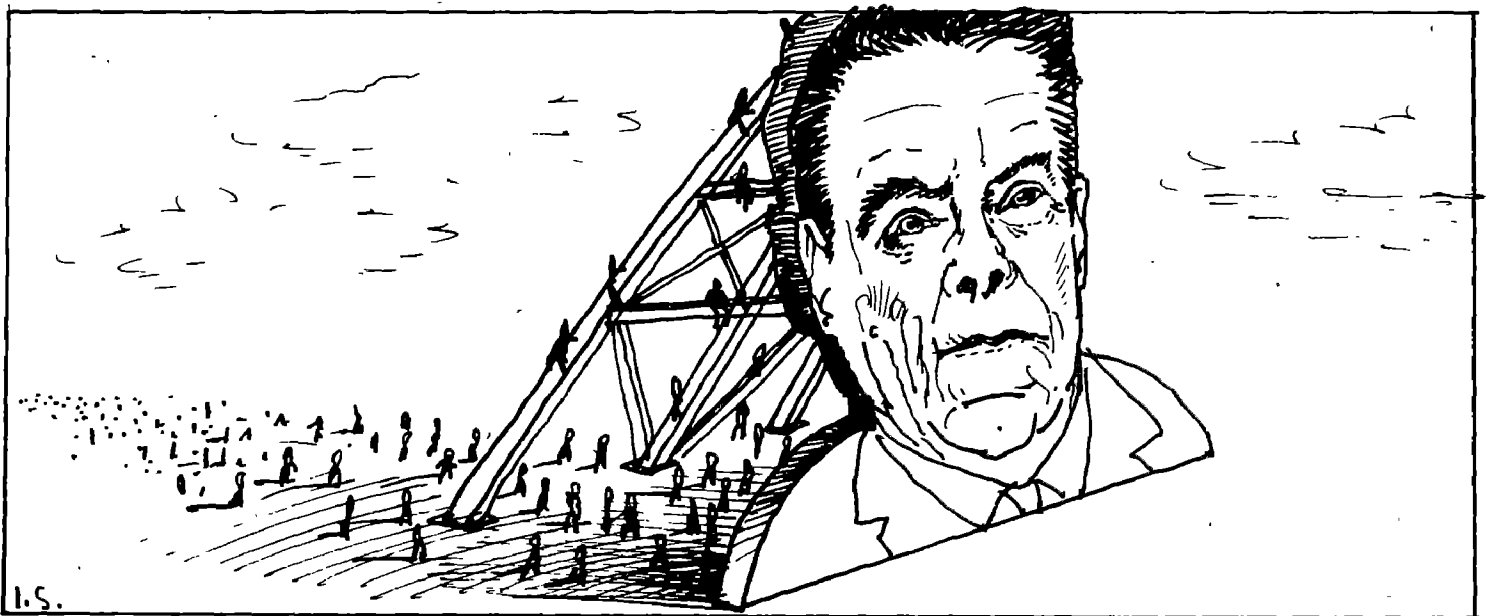
Since Reaganism sets the terms of the debate, it need not be overly concerned about the details. It holds the high ground; what happens at the lower levels is curious but not crucial. Reaganism can live with ideological pluralism, but it still will strive for the upper hand.

What is the Reaganist project? It begins with the idea of rollback: not only in international affairs, where it is directed against revolution in the Third World and, finally, against Communist Eastern Europe, but also in domestic matters, where it aims to repeal the progressive developments of a century of liberal action. If that seems far-fetched, conjure a more radical fantasy: Turn-of-the-century America has a politically active military establishment directing a militarized economy in a Christian nation. Civil rights and civil liberties are subject to circumscription by a Supreme Court whose members are vetted by religious leaders and ideological overseers. Foreign adventures arouse little opposition because the pool of potential protesters has shrunk with the degradation of democratic education and the repression of radical and liberal institutions. All but the most pliant labor unions are decertified. The old middle class has vanished and a Reaganist class of service

managers, franchise owners and venture capitalists sits on a huge underclass of burger wrappers and security guards. The press is assiduously neutral, the airwaves are full of hymns and sermons, and libraries are divided into a section of dog stories and Gothic romances for the public and locked stacks of books with more controversial subjects for expert eyes only.

If that seems unlikely, as it certainly is, the reason is contained in the contradictions within Reaganism as well as in the opposition. The divisions between the fundamentalists and the corporatists; the ethnics and the yuppies; the blue-collar workers and the technocrats; the Northeasterners and the Southwesterners, could be glossed over this year, while electoral triumph was in sight, but those conflicts of interest must sooner or later erode the strength of the movement. Although Reaganism is wider and deeper than Reagan himself, his presence and performance hold the abrasive elements together.

It is the dual nature of Reaganism's strength—its personal and ideological character—that offers the best opportunity for opposition from the outside. The political fight against the Reagan Administration, primarily but not exclusively in the electoral arena, can be transformed into the fight against the ideology. Just as the liberal and left attack on McCarthyism was waged largely against Joe McCarthy, so this battle must take advantage of the organizational symbol. Beyond that, Reaganism's social and political system is bound to produce specific counterattacks. The conditions that produced revolution in the Third World, the black struggle at home, the women's movement and the demands for economic and social equity only a few years ago have not essentially changed. Reaganism cannot work quickly or efficiently enough to alter the consciousness that developed then, nor can it effectively remove the conditions or erase the demands. It will have to rely on repression and neglect to maintain its forward motion and, finally, its stability. And we all know what happens then. It's not too soon to start thinking about the heady days to come as the age of Reaganism begins to darken. □



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