

# The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

An independent weekly internet magazine  
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,  
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,  
analysis and investigations on issues affecting  
African Americans and the African world.

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**Nov 1, 2012 - Issue 492**

## **We Were Told What They Would Do and We Paid No Attention**

**Solidarity America**

**By John Funciello**

**BC Columnist**

For decades, writers and pundits have tried to explain why wage-working Americans continually vote for the people who intend to do them harm.

Even when told specifically what was in store for them if they voted for Candidate A (who promised major cuts to social programs that directly benefited them), they voted for the candidate and he did exactly what he promised. Cut government and cut more.

And they called it governing the country for the benefit of all. Take the election of Ronald Reagan, as an example. Fresh from his Right Wing governance of the once-great State of California, he promised during the presidential campaign that he would reduce the size of government, which was his general, overweening pledge to the people. He declared that government was not the solution to any problems, but that government *was* the problem. Elected in a landslide, he began the long process of reducing the government to ineffectiveness.

It has taken the full 30 years to accomplish what he set out to do (even letting slide the multiple times he raised taxes, which his adoring fans on the right blot from their memory), the country's Right Wing seem to be right on schedule. Some parts of government are smaller than they were, but that doesn't seem to make much difference in the cost of government.

A large part of that phenomenon has come from the privatization of everything that can be privatized. Government itself might have been downsized, but the operations of government have continued and they continue to grow. It's just that now, the money does not flow as freely to the bureaucratic agencies of government; it goes to corporations that presume to carry on the work.

To keep the money flowing freely to those corporations, said corporations do not have to satisfy the people, as in a democracy. Instead, they merely have to satisfy the politicians who make the decisions and pass laws to keep the money flowing. Inexorably, the people are cut off from control or even influence of the democratic process. It becomes a compact between the power of government and the heads of corporations. And, the process of democracy is slowly eliminated. There should not be any question about why the people do not vote. They don't feel that they are part of the compact any more.

Part of Reagan's promise to the people was that he would rein in the power of such institutions as organized labor and he wasted no time after his inauguration in doing so. He showed that he would be as tough as his cowboy acting roles as president, by firing the air traffic controllers, and the Right Wing applauded, knowing that the floodgates were open to breaking unions and preventing their formation.

During the campaign, Reagan promised much that sounded good, even to those who would suffer from his political impulses. He would cut taxes (mostly for the rich), but the tax cuts reduced federal government revenues so alarmingly that he had to increase taxes several times in his two terms.

Sam Smith, a founder of at least one alternative newspaper in the mid-1960s, in Washington, D.C., had this to say about the president from Dixon, Ill.: "Ronald Reagan is still regarded by some as one of America's greatest presidents. That was his skill. He sold political lies just like the ones that gave people lung cancer from Chesterfield cigarettes. As Robert Lekachman put it, 'Ronald Reagan must be the nicest president who ever destroyed a union, tried to cut school lunch milk rations from six to four ounces, and compelled families in need of public help to first dispose of household goods in excess of \$1,000.' Yet that was one of the great assets of TV. It could make virtue seem stupid and greed appear noble."

George W. Bush of the Bush-Cheney Administration said: "I learned more from Ronald Reagan than from anyone..." At the time he said it, the Lesser Bush was probably as much throwing a dart at his father, George H.W. Bush, also a former president, as he was lighting a candle to Reagan. But he was mouthing the same St. Ronald talking points that have been taken up by Right Wing politicians and pundits today, along with a broad spectrum of the electorate, as well as most of those in the mass media.

During the Great Communicator's two terms of office: The number of families living in poverty tripled, the national debt tripled, he refused to utter the word "AIDS" for six years, and he invaded Grenada, a folly of a "war" that reminded one of a scene out of "The Mouse That Roared," except that it was the most powerful nation on earth that played the part of the mouse. But this list does not even scratch the surface of the ills that were visited on the American people as a result of governmental policies that began with Reagan.

There is a reason that Reagan should be remembered at this time of nearly complete polarization of the American people (along with the politicians who pretend to represent them). In the presidential campaign that is coming to a close, the people are hearing the same things from Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan, the Republican candidates for president and vice president, respectively, as were heard in Reagan's campaign in 1980. At that time, unions and other liberal organizations analyzed the campaign rhetoric and told their constituencies exactly what the promises meant to everyday working people. It could not have been clearer.

Yet, when it came time to cast their votes, more than 40 percent of union members voted for Reagan (the so-called Reagan Democrats), and they voted in nearly the same percentage for him in his re-election campaign. This happened despite that Reagan may have been the first president to destroy a union. Without question, he began the attack on social programs that have had a negative effect on workers and their families to this day.

Although this is not an exact replay of the Reagan campaigns, it is close enough that rank-and-file voters should be paying attention. There is much that is similar in what Reagan said and in what Romney and Ryan have said over the past several months.

In 1965, Reagan said of Medicaid recipients that they were a "faceless mass waiting for handouts." Romney was caught on camera early in

2012 saying much the same thing: That 47 percent of the people would never vote for him, because they prefer to play the victim and will not move to take care of themselves. So, for him, as it was for Reagan, the right thing to do is reduce those programs and cut government, thus encouraging them to stand up and be self-supporting...just like the rich.

The big issue now is "reducing entitlements," which Romney and Ryan describe as programs that need to be changed, reduced, and privatized. As always, the beneficiaries are bound to be the giant corporations - insurance companies, banks, hedge funds, pharmaceutical conglomerates, while the losers will be the young, minorities, the elderly, the chronically ill, the disabled.

As if to minimize the damage to those "entitlements," the proponents of vouchers and privatization always say to those who are in the programs now, "Don't worry. Your benefits will continue as you expect. We're changing it for those who come after you." It is as if they can't imagine that the people in those programs have children or grandchildren. And what about them? Are they lesser beings? Do they alone deserve to be vouchered or privatized out of any government program?

The presidential election campaign might not be so painful if there were two equal sides to this equation. However, on the one hand, there is the GOP, which controls one house of the Congress and has managed to stop any meaningful legislation from occurring during President Obama's first term. If the roles were reversed, nothing would have stopped the Republican onslaught against everything governmental (except the military and defense, of course). On the other hand, the Democrats, in their unwillingness to take the fight to the GOP, have become like an appendage of their opposition. Both parties are moving inexorably toward reduction and privatization, as if they all believe that they should "starve the beast (government)."

Although there is enough betrayal of the people's interests to go around among all of the so-called leaders of the free world, there are some things that just cannot be tolerated. Reagan, when he was president of the Screen Actors Guild, a union, informed on his fellow actors to the FBI. Union members still voted for him in huge numbers. Romney, in his impulse to riches, formed Bain Capital, bought up smaller companies, took the money out of them, fired the workers, and moved work to other countries. Then, he moved his money to countries that gave him tax relief, helping him achieve his estimated

\$250 million fortune (That may be just a portion of his riches. We don't know, because he hasn't come clean about his various incomes). Now, he wants to reduce taxes on the rich, which includes him and his family.

Climate change deniers have drummed up enough support among politicians to slow or halt any action to stop human-induced greenhouse gases from killing us. They can do this because of the vast amounts of money they are willing to spend, just like they do with our electoral politics. It works for them, or there would not be a virtual tie in the presidential campaign. The *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision paved the way for money to destroy what was left of democracy. That vast pool of corporate and billionaires' money is used, as well, to continue to plunder the planet, making huge parts of it uninhabitable.

Thirty years ago, the country could withstand the kind of treatment it got from Reagan because there was still some substance to the nation, economically, politically, environmentally, and socially. Now, we are approaching the bottom of all that and there is not too much farther to go to hit bedrock.

Throughout this campaign, there has been little mention, let alone discussion or debate, of the monumental issues of hunger, poverty, education, and the attack on the environment in which we all live. It's as if these issues don't exist for either party.

On the issue of the economy, both candidates have simply used the mantra of "job creation," as if the U.S. economy can regain its post-World War II vigor. The idea that the country will return to being a vast manufacturing powerhouse is nonsensical. It will not happen and nothing will bring back tens of millions of high-paying jobs from low-wage countries.

For many of our politicians who deny climate change, Hurricane Sandy has meant nothing, even though climate change is pointed to by scientists of every stripe as the primary reason for the fury of the storm (except those who are bought by Corporate America, or who buy into the denial). Both parties continue to pursue the hapless notion of "energy independence." Therefore, we can't expect they will rise to meet the incredible challenge of shifting our nation to a different kind of economy. That takes guts and there is not a lot of that in either party. The major parties are afraid of telling the electorate the hard truths.

If their idea of “improving” the economy through job creation that involves more spending on the military and defense (for more and endless adventures around the globe, and more death and destruction), along with exploiting sources of some of the dirtiest energy sources we have, and more tax cuts for the rich and for Corporate America, it’s safe to say that we won’t survive much more of their help.

***BlackCommentator.com*** Columnist, John Funciello, is a long-time former newspaper reporter and labor organizer, who lives in the Mohawk Valley of New York State. In addition to labor work, he is organizing family farmers as they struggle to stay on the land under enormous pressure from factory food producers and land developers. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Funciello.



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