

This edition of the Agenda for Non-Collaboration newsletter was written and edited by Norman Solomon.

(Editor's note: The day after the election I wrote an op-ed piece that tried to sort out some lessons of the 1984 campaign. A few paragraphs from that Pacific News Service piece follow:)

President Reagan's re-election victory was a dramatic rebuff to freeze hopes, but it was an echo of an even more profound loss gradually suffered this year prior to the election. The nuclear weapons issue slipped away.

Sincere activists and campaigners, transfixed with the importance of preventing nuclear war, have been discovering that rhetoric cannot be patented by a social movement or a political ticket. In the presidential race this year, nuclear arms opponents witnessed something worse than a loss of the debate: they saw an evaporation of it.

Thus, as Ronald Reagan addressed thousands of supporters packed into a Los Angeles ballroom on election night, he was a mockingbird for freeze-inspired rhetoric. Contending that children "are what this campaign was all about," Reagan pledged to pursue a policy that could "ultimately reduce nuclear weapons and banish them from the face of the earth entirely." The applause from the Reagan-Bush campaigners, if not deafening, was substantial.

....In the person of Walter Mondale, millions of Americans voted for -- and many worked for -- someone backing weaponry they detest. The logic was, of course, to defeat an even more repugnant candidate. But by now much of the language accompanying freeze advocacy has been so trivialized that the firm disarmament constituency in this country is likely to find it more of an encumbrance than a boost in the future. There is something to the old adage about saying what we mean and meaning what we say. In the long run such an approach -- while running the risk of appearing insufficiently savvy -- avoids a far graver risk: outmaneuvering our own deeper beliefs....

The more that counterfeit items appear to be genuine, the less likely we are to discern the distinction. Mondale was imbued with sincerity, and frequent Reaganoid flashbacks to Being There made Mondaloid utterances seem positively comforting at times -- but if Mondale was a force for disarmament then Harry Truman was Mohandas Gandhi. Makeup and syntax were not the problems.

....With the next Congress virtually indistinguishable from the last one, certainly we will hear that the lobbying/elections cycle has simply moved along to another phase of an arduous Realpolitik process. Yet I'm reminded of the classic scene in Charlie Chaplin's Modern Times film, in which the endearing and hardworking fellow walks along the street still making the wrenching motions he had grown so accustomed to on the assembly line. The reflexive form of the movement is understandable. But does it make much sense?

....In these waning days of 1984, we could find it useful to reflect on the reality that when language loses meaning then all manner of atrocities become more possible. For Americans who crave authentic disarmament, the anguishing search for lessons from this Orwellian year may uncover the importance of saying what we mean and meaning what we say, every step of the way.

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