

## THE FADING LIBERALS

*(First published September 1981)*

The liberals in Congress and their long-time supporters of press and television are having a rough go these days. From the time of the Kennedys, more than twenty years ago, they have been accustomed to having their way and have enjoyed the self-important feeling that they exerted a strong influence on shaping government policy and public opinion. Now suddenly the influence has vanished and they've become a whimpering minority. Even the poor, the ethnics and the downtrodden masses, in whose behalf they claim to have labored so diligently, seem no longer to believe in them.

During the last presidential campaign, they low rated Mr. Reagan as a simple and senile actor politician whose chances of unseating an incumbent were marginal at best. After his impressive victory at the polls, they retreated only to the point of labeling his mandate a nonmandate—an illusion, they said, due to lack of voter interest. They felt confident then that by spring, once the congressional honeymoon was over, compromise and delay would render him immobile and government business would proceed as usual. So far, nothing has turned out the way they had hoped.

One after another of the President's appointments have come under liberal attack—Haig, Stockman, Watt, Casey, Helms—and each time the critics and objectors have been repulsed or outmaneuvered by the administration. Reagan's success with Congress, first with budget and then with taxes, have further depressed the liberal coalition and disorganized the Democratic opposition. They long for some misstep or some handy scandal to come to their rescue. They need a victory, any kind of victory, to boost their morale.

Reagan's performance to date has been remarkable and steady; his success at turning the government to the right has been greater than even his most ardent supporters expected. After the lackluster Carter years, the liberals were almost certain that little could be done by any administration to change significantly the progressive leftward drift toward socialization. But they entirely misjudged the degree of public disillusionment, and they entirely underestimated not only Reagan's determination to effect major change but also his ability to do so. They also failed to appreciate the basic conservatism of the American people which for too long had been ignored or brushed aside by the so-called opinion molders. Their current attempts to paint all conservative sentiment into the image of a narrow-minded Bible thumping, "Moral Majority" movement have not been very successful.

The Reagan opposition now has reluctantly admitted his popular appeal and has grudgingly conceded his political wizardry. The liberals have been surprised and upset to discover that a President can function without their advice and help. But, of course, they have not given up. Their present strategy has been to stake out a position of wiping the slate clean by disclaiming responsibility for the social juggernaut they helped create and by making sure that we all know that it is now Ronald Reagan's ball game; that the responsibility for any failure in the future is his alone. They find it difficult to wish him luck, even with their fingers crossed. They silently hope for failure, and they are ready to batter him in the headlines at the first sign of it. Like an earlier *bête noire* of theirs, Douglas MacArthur, they plan to return. Old liberals never die, and they seldom fade away gracefully.

(c) *The Bulletin of the Muscogee County (Georgia) Medical Society*, "The Doctor's Lounge", Sep 1981, Vol. XXVIII No.9, p.11