

---

# REAGAN AND PSYCHOHISTORY

by

Robin Shoet

---

A further review of *Reagan's America* by LLoyd de Mause; Creative Roots Inc.(1984) which seemed to be called for in the light of the recent Libyan adventure.

This book is disturbing. The Author is founder of a discipline called psychohistory and looks at historical events in terms of people's unconscious wishes and fantasies which the leader of a nation, as a result of their own personal needs and pathology, obligingly acts out for their country. As Lloyd deMause says in a previous book (1), "Rather than history being how public events affect private lives, you will see history more as how private fantasies are acted out on the public stage . . . . Rather than how a few leaders maintain power over masses of individuals, you will examine how groups delegate tasks to leaders . . . . Rather than wars being terrible "mistakes", you will discover them to be **wishes**." This book builds on these ideas and applies them to Reagan's America. Written in April 1984, it is especially disturbing in the view of the recent bombing of Libya (April 1986). The book and psychohistory explains and predicts such events with almost surgical precision (to coin a phrase).

One of the ways a nation's unconscious wishes and fantasies are conveyed to the leader is via the press. If a leader is out of touch with people's wishes, messages are conveyed to him/her via the media. Psychohistory gathers its evidence from decoding the hidden (and sometimes not so hidden) messages contained in newspaper headlines, journal covers and features. So in February 1983 for example, Reagan's popularity was lower than any American president's at this point in office. He was portrayed in a cartoon in the Washington Times as a 'political Tootsie', a man in woman's clothes. When a nation's morale is low, it is traditionally time to dump the bad feeling on an outside enemy. deMause shows how, with Reagan still hesitating in designating an outside enemy, the American press produced the greatest outpouring of 'go to war' imagery that had been seen since just before Vietnam. Since most of the world was at peace at that time, the words 'Declare War' had to be hidden in whatever guise was at

hand, producing such headlines as 'Farmers declare war', 'The war on kidney stones', 'The coming tax war', 'War inside city council'. 'Reagan should come out shooting!' Reagan, says deMause, could no longer mistake the urgency of America's demand. "He would have to find us an enemy and prepare for war so we could shift the poison abroad"

In the next month he gave three dramatic speeches to announce 1. Why we had to go to war (March 8th. 'Evil Empire' speech) 2. Whom we would have to invade (March 11th. 'Central America' speech) 3. How we would handle the guilt for our invasion (March 23rd. 'Star Wars' speech.) His popularity soared. He had finally caught the mood of the nation!

deMause spends some time looking at the Falklands War. In describing the build up, he says, "A developed nation usually begins a war by sending hidden messages to another country which has poor impulse control, messages that a war would now be desirable, and then sitting back and waiting for the impulse prone nation to help it act out its unconscious wishes. The process is identical to the way parents give their children hidden commands to act out their parents' secret wishes and then punish their children for being 'bad'. Most modern nations keep several impulsive 'children' around to be able to use them when they need a blood sacrifice. Britain kept her dispute alive with Argentina over the Falklands for decades for just this purpose." deMause then describes how these hidden messages were conveyed to

Argentina who needed an external war for reasons of their own.

At this moment Reagan is 'playing' with one of his favourite 'children'. The day before he bombed Libya the Guardian (2) said of the terrorist attacks which had supposedly provoked the Libyan bombing, "Whatever the answer to these attacks may be . . . it does not consist of two aircraft carriers, 25 combat support ships, 150 strike aircraft massed off the Libyan coast. Still less does it consist of F-111 aircraft based in Britain for use in a Nato emergency" And in another article in the Guardian the same day, (3) "I do not believe that Mrs. Thatcher could be so foolish as to allow her friend Ronny to launch his F-111 bombers against Colonel Gaddafi from British soil, whether or not it is pronounced legal by her advisers."

Reading psychohistory we see why Reagan's answer which will breed the very terrorism he supposedly wanted to stamp out was inevitable, as was Mrs. Thatcher's supposed foolishness. Through using birth imagery and psychoanalytic insights and then applying them to political speeches and news, this excellent book helps make sense of much of a nation's psychotic behaviour.

## References

- 1 *Foundations of Psychohistory is available from Psychohistory Press at 3, Henrietta Street, London WC2E 8LU*
- 2 *Guardian leader: April 14th.*
- 3 *Guardian, April 14th. 1986 Ian Aitkin's commentary column.*