Where's the rest of him? An analysis of the political cartoons of Jeff MacNelly and Pat Oliphant about President Reagan

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University of Montana
WHERE'S THE REST OF HIM?

AN ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL CARTOONS
OF JEFF MACNELLY AND PAT OLIPHANT
ABOUT PRESIDENT REAGAN

By

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This study examines the portrayal of President Ronald Reagan by political cartoonists Pat Oliphant and Jeff MacNelly. Specifically, the author sought to answer the question, "What impression of President Reagan would two people have, one seeing only MacNelly’s cartoons and the other only Oliphant’s?"

MacNelly and Oliphant were chosen for this study because they were the two most widely syndicated political cartoonists during the Reagan presidency, and because they reportedly had different political affiliations. MacNelly was expected to present the conservative president in a more favorable light than was Oliphant.

The author examined all of MacNelly’s and Oliphant’s cartoons about Reagan during his presidency. Of the twelve hundred cartoons examined, about two hundred and fifty representative examples are discussed within the text, and eighty-nine of these are displayed as illustrations.

The study found that despite their reportedly different political affiliations, both MacNelly and Oliphant most often drew similar, unfavorable cartoons about Reagan. Unfavorable characterizations of Reagan predominated within each category of cartoons examined, including Reagan’s handling of foreign policy, the economy, U.S.-Soviet relations, domestic policy, and the Iran-Contra scandal. Both cartoonists’ most prevalent image of Reagan was found to be that of an amiable but out-of-touch, incompetent president.

Comparing the cartoons with recent scholarly appraisals of the Reagan presidency, the author found that MacNelly and Oliphant accurately conveyed Reagan’s weaknesses, but largely ignored his strengths. The findings reaffirm the idea that political cartooning is an inherently negative, one-sided medium, which is best suited to point out the shortcomings of its subjects, and which leaves more balanced criticism to editorial writers and columnists.
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What if a future historian wanted to know what people had thought about President Ronald Reagan, but the only surviving evidence was political cartoons? What would this historian think, for instance, comparing the work of a cartoonist who believed Reagan to be a "very good-looking man,"¹ to that of another who thought the president "a really ugly man"?² What would he make of "Ron Headrest," Doonesbury cartoonist Garry Trudeau's wisecracking, computer-generated Reagan? (fig. 1)³ Of "Zippy the Pinhead" creator Bill Griffith's mummy-faced oaf with the bizarre, multi-tiered pompadour? (fig. 2)⁴ Of illustrator Ralph


Steadman's depiction of Reagan as the assailant of Lady Liberty? (fig. 3).  

(Fig. 1)

(Fig. 2)

(Fig. 3)

The vast number of Reagan's different cartoon incarnations, of which the above examples are but a few, might at first make the historian want to throw up his hands.

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in defeat. Through persistence, however, he might find patterns of representation, common threads between the cartoons' differing portrayals, from which he could ascertain a general or dominant portrayal of Reagan in the body of each cartoonist's work.

This thesis, which examines cartoons about Reagan by Pat Oliphant and Jeff MacNelly, seeks to fulfill part of the hypothetical historian's task. It attempts, by analyzing the roughly twelve hundred cartoons Oliphant and MacNelly drew about Reagan during his two terms, to determine each cartoonists' overall characterization of the president. In other words, it attempts to answer the question, "What impression of President Reagan would two people have, one seeing only MacNelly's cartoons and the other seeing only Oliphant's?"

MacNelly and Oliphant were chosen for this study because they were, during the Reagan presidency, the two most widely syndicated editorial cartoonists in the United States. As such, their Reagan cartoons were among the most highly visible and influential editorial commentaries about the president during his two terms in office.

The two cartoonists were also chosen because of their reportedly different political affinities. MacNelly, by all accounts, leans toward the Right. The Washington Post, for instance, once frankly labeled MacNelly's cartoons
as "conservative," and according to Newsweek, MacNelly was "heavily influenced by his conservative family." Oliphant, on the other hand, defies ideological categorization. He is most often described as a politically unaffiliated cartoonist, equally attentive to shortcomings on either side of the political spectrum. This supposed ideological distance between the two cartoonists was expected to provide a useful contrast between their Reagan cartoons, in that MacNelly was expected to present the conservative president in a more favorable light than was Oliphant.

The Cartoonists

Pat Oliphant was born in Adelaide, Australia in 1935. He began his newspaper career while in his teens, as a copy boy for the Adelaide News, and before long became the editorial cartoonist of the Adelaide Advertiser. He came to the United States in 1964, to replace Paul Conrad as political cartoonist for the Denver Post. In 1966 he won a Pulitzer Prize for his work. He moved to Washington in 1975 at the behest of the Washington Star, where he worked until that paper folded in 1981. After this he drew cartoons directly for the Universal Press Syndicate. During the


Reagan presidency he was the most widely syndicated political cartoonist in the United States, with more than five hundred newspapers subscribing to his work.

Jeff MacNelly (b. 1948) was the second most widely read editorial cartoonist during the Reagan presidency, with about four hundred newspapers buying his work. MacNelly, the son of a former editor of the *Saturday Evening Post*, began cartooning professionally in the late 1960s while attending the University of North Carolina. MacNelly, however, was "more interested in his $120-a-week job as a cartoonist for a weekly newspaper than he was in campus academic activity," and soon dropped out of school. Shortly thereafter, he gained national attention while cartooning for the *Richmond News Leader*, where he won Pulitzer Prizes in 1972 and 1978. In 1981 he took an eight-month break from political cartooning to devote himself to his syndicated daily comic strip, *Shoe*. After this hiatus he joined the *Chicago Tribune*, from which come most of the MacNelly cartoons examined in this thesis.

Both MacNelly and Oliphant define their job as a stripping away of the veneers of people and issues, with the aim of getting at the truth. Oliphant compares his role as a cartoonist to that of writer H.L. Mencken, who, in the first half of the 20th century, devoted his career to "throwing

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*Busmiller, D4.*
dead cats into sanctuaries," that is, hammering at pretention and idiocy without regard for politeness. Because of his combatative approach, Oliphant is sometimes charged with being too mean (Similarly, Mencken was widely known as "the man who hates everything.") Oliphant defends himself from this charge by pointing out the abundance of people he feels deserve mean treatment:

I owe America much for providing...[an] overabundance of charlatans of all shades--wonderful Barnum politicians of varying degrees of shamelessness, cabinet opportunists, self-aggrandizing public servants, shiftless bureaucrats, and assorted lickspittles, greedmongers, and common thieves--all of them exciters of the linkage between brain and drawing hand.¹⁰

Like Oliphant, MacNelly asserts that a good cartoonist "should be an assassin," unafraid of giving offense.¹¹ MacNelly, however, is more apologetic than Oliphant in explaining his editorial purpose:

Political cartoonists violate every rule of ethical journalism--they misquote, trifle with the truth, make science fiction out of politics and sometimes should be held for personal libel. But when the smoke clears, the political cartoonist has been getting closer to the truth than the guys who write political opinions."¹²

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¹⁰ An aide to President Carter once complained of Oliphant: "He's another Westbrook Pegler. He's mean for the sake of being mean." See Adler, et al., 78.

¹¹ Pat Oliphant, in Wendy Wick Reaves, Oliphant's Presidents: Twenty-Five Years of Caricature by Pat Oliphant (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1990), 11.

¹² Busmiller, D4.

Jeff MacNelly, in Adler, et al., 74.
Given, then, that MacNelly and Oliphant see their job as a kind of quest for truth, this thesis will attempt to determine what each cartoonist saw as the truth about President Reagan.
CHAPTER ONE
FIRST IMPRESSIONS

MacNelly's and Oliphant's first cartoons of President Reagan cannot be adequately analyzed without at least a brief look at the cartoonists' treatment of candidate Reagan. Similarly, their portrayal of the new president must be examined within the context of their portrayal of his predecessor, President Jimmy Carter.

In cartoons from the 1980 presidential campaign, MacNelly and Oliphant are united by an unflagging disparagement of President Carter, with both cartoonists portraying him as weak, insignificant, and incompetent. However, despite this uniformly negative depiction of Carter, the cartoonists differ as to the desirability of a Reagan presidency, in that Oliphant portrays Carter and Reagan as equally undesirable, while MacNelly tends to depict Reagan as far the lesser of two evils. MacNelly admits going easy on candidate Reagan, explaining, "you hammer at what outrages you that day. I think that basically Reagan hasn't outraged me as much as Carter."13

13 Adler et al., 75.
Oliphant's election cartoons betray no such partiality: we are given a choice between a dwarfish, incompetent Carter, and an ancient, half-asleep Reagan. A 1980 pre-primary Oliphant cartoon, for instance, depicts a highly-wrinkled Reagan asleep in a wheelchair outside the White House, as a passer-by worries that Reagan "could make that joker inside look half-way good."\(^{14}\) Another cartoon has Carter, all teeth and lips, and Reagan, all wrinkles and pompadour, sitting at the foot of a bed in which a disgusted wife asks her frightened husband, "are they still there?"\(^{15}\)

In MacNelly's campaign cartoons, malicious references to Reagan's age are absent. In fact, MacNelly's Reagan is often a paragon of youth and vigor compared to the MacNelly Carter. Fig. 4, which contrasts the dour campaign style of President Carter with Reagan's more upbeat manner,\(^{16}\) is a two-leveled instance of MacNelly's "old" Carter vs. a "young" Reagan.


\(^{15}\) Oliphant, "Are They Still There," in Adler, et al., 75.

\(^{16}\) For instance, President Carter waged a negative campaign that attempted to make his opponent a campaign issue, by portraying Reagan as "dumb and dangerous." Though Reagan's campaign also focused on Carter's perceived inadequacies, his campaign contained more optimistic themes, such as the slogan "Let's make America great again." Cannon, 830.
First, there is a political "old" vs. "young," with the direct Hoover-versus-Roosevelt analogy, and its connotation of a "New Deal" triumphing over outmoded policies. Second, there is the easygoing "cowboy" Reagan—easily recognizable despite the Roosevelt grin, cigarette and jutting chin—who, even with crow's feet and a neck wrinkle or two, looks decidedly younger than the worried, stuffy-looking Carter in the high collar and stodgy double-breasted suit.¹⁸


¹⁸ MacNelly's FDR-Reagan link has been echoed by a number of political observers, including Cannon, who writes that Reagan "resembled FDR in recognizing that Americans respond to assertions of optimism even when solutions are not in easy sight." Cannon, 830.
President Reagan

While they draw different versions of candidate Reagan, MacNelly and Oliphant are alike in their first depictions of President Reagan. For a couple of months after the inauguration, both cartoonists drew "neutral" portrayals of the new president, in which they pitted Reagan against formidable obstacles without pre-judging the outcome. President Reagan was inaugurated on January 21, 1981. MacNelly, who attended the inauguration, drew cartoons of the occasion that are optimistic, yet are tempered by a hesitancy to unquestioningly embrace an as-of-yet unproven president. In one such cartoon, Reagan drives into Washington in a Rolls-Royce marked "Beverly Hills," past a departing decrepit pickup with Georgia plates. Another cartoon is more directly political: as the inaugural limousine makes its way past the "FEDERAL DEPARTMENT OF...," Reagan thumbs his nose at employees. This portrayal of Reagan-as-enemy-of-Big-Government, however, is offset by another cartoon, a standard portrayal of a janitor labeled "reality," carting off inaugural banners heralding "promises."

During the first few months of Reagan's presidency, Oliphant's cartoons show a marked similarity to MacNelly's,

though if Oliphant's newly elected Reagan looks somewhat more promising than his predecessor, it is solely by comparison. A cartoon from the eve of the inauguration exhibits a kind of default-confidence, in that the new president certainly couldn't do worse than his pint-sized forerunner:

(Fig. 5)²⁰

This kind of neutral portrayal of Reagan runs through the first few months of his presidency. Rather than attack the untried president, Oliphant faces Reagan off with the problems he had promised to tackle during his campaign, and leaves the viewer to decide how he will come out. Before the election, Reagan had promised to get tough with

Communism, improve the economy, balance the budget, and reduce government spending. Oliphant reminds Reagan of each of these promises. For instance, Reagan has barely taken his coat off on his first day in the Oval Office before Oliphant puts an enormous-fanged monster, labeled "The Economy," in his closet. Other cartoons have him trying to defuse an unexploded bomb marked "Inflation," attempting to shoot a Castro-insect off Uncle Sam's nose, and peering into a dark tunnel called "Nicaragua." Ominous activities, certainly, but it is significant that Oliphant does not forecast their outcome. That Oliphant has not yet "made up his mind" about President Reagan is evident in two similar cartoons:

"What's this? Oh, the old executive order for a breeding freeze ... Say, did anyone ever tell you you're kinda cute?" (Fig. 6)

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1 Oliphant, *The Jelly-Bean Society*, 22 January 1981, 83. (Reagan's first official act as president had been the signing of an executive order placing an immediate freeze on the hiring of civilian employees in the executive branch.)
Though both cartoons favorably portray Reagan as the enemy of bloated federal spending, fig. 6 shows him as powerless, while there is no doubt that the Reagan of fig. 7 will accomplish some substantial budget-cutting. Such a flip-flop is characteristic of the caution and ambivalence of Oliphant's first Reagan cartoons.

Similarly, MacNelly's first few cartoons of President Reagan serve to remind the new president of the problems he had during his campaign promised to solve. These cartoons depict the new president being confronted by a host of menacing obstacles, and we are left to decide whether Reagan will overcome them. MacNelly's Reagan faces off with

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Soviet tanks, quarterbacks against monstrous football players named "Inflation" and "Khomeini," and, most frequently, tries to corral rampant government spending. Two MacNelly cartoons in the last category provide a useful counterpart to Oliphant's early "Reagan vs. government-spending" cartoons. Fig. 8 shows the president-executioner facing a much trickier foe than Oliphant's bloated federal pig (MacNelly saves grotesque pig imagery for use on prominent Democratic politicians):

(Fig. 8)

Likewise, fig. 9 pits a confident president against an unexpectedly resourceful opponent:

\[^{23}\text{MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 10 February 1981.}\]
The idea in the two cartoons is that if the president initially fails in his goals, it is through no fault of his own; the earnest cowboy and pragmatic executioner will simply have to apply more sophisticated tools than fences and guillotines.

MacNelly quit editorial cartooning at the Richmond News Leader in May 1981, and for eight months devoted his efforts entirely to Shoe, his daily comic strip. After this break, however, he joined the staff of the Chicago Tribune, where he would draw three political cartoons per week for the rest of the Reagan presidency. That MacNelly felt

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confidence in the new president, evident in his first few Reagan cartoons, is also apparent in his—admittedly somewhat glib—explanation that he had quit political cartooning because: "I thought the country had straightened out eight months ago when I left this business, but I see we’re not so it’s time to come back." But MacNelly’s explanation also underlines a problem Reagan’s presidency presented for the conservative cartoonist. Nixon, Ford, and especially Carter had provided ample fodder for wonderfully abusive and pointed cartoons, but Reagan was different: to conservatives, he was hard not to love. To draw a mean cartoon about him would be like spitting on one’s grandfather. MacNelly continued to draw cartoons that seemed to go out of their way to avoid criticizing the new president. Even the zealously conservative National Review noticed the pulled punches:

When Carter departed, MacNelly lost a beat. All conservatives, in their various ways, did...But, after a hiatus, he began swinging again. And though he doesn’t home-run quite as often as he once did, he has lifted some pitches memorably out of the park.25

MacNelly began to hit "home-run" Reagan cartoons again upon joining the Tribune, when problems beginning to beset the president provided a fresh harvest of targets.


 Brookhiser, 33.
CHAPTER TWO

MONEY MATTERS: THE U.S. BUDGET AND THE ECONOMY

By January 1982, when MacNelly returned to political cartooning, the "honeymoon" was over for both cartoonists. While both MacNelly's and Oliphant's Reagan cartoons during the president's first few months in office are unjudgmental or laudatory, the subsequent emergence of substantial issues, especially those of a monetary nature, engendered a more critical appraisal.

Budget Struggles

While as candidate and president, Reagan espoused a budget policy with three basic tenets. In 1980 Reagan declared, "We must balance the budget, reduce tax rates and restore our defenses."27 While Reagan achieved to some degree the last two goals, it was only at the expense of the first. That is, massive increases in military spending, coupled with reduced tax revenues, had increased the national debt from $908.5 billion in 1980, to $2.684 trillion by the time Reagan left office in 1989.28

28 Cannon, 21.
Even aside from their contribution to the deficit, Reagan's tax and defense budget proposals were not in themselves immune to problems. Though Reagan successfully cut federal income taxes during his first year in office, he had, by 1986, added $80 billion in disguised taxes, called "user fees" and "revenue enhancements."2 And with Reagan's so-called restoration of national defense came the controversial MX missile and the Strategic Defense Initiative, programs with enormous price tags and questionable usefulness.

On Reagan's military spending and tax vacillations, MacNelly and Oliphant are in agreement. On these subjects, both cartoonists usually portray Reagan as an oafish, dishonest huckster, indifferent to economic truths. But on Reagan's efforts toward balancing the budget, (the pruning or elimination of federal programs such as child nutrition and subsidies for mass transit, and a brief, abortive attempt to slash Social Security), the cartoonists differ as to the degree of criticism they feel President Reagan merits. Oliphant's Reagan is by turns ineffectual and heartless (see Chapter Three,) but MacNelly, though his cartoons eventually become skeptical of the president's budgetary wisdom, initially praises Reagan. MacNelly's first

2 Cannon, 253.
budget cartoons, for instance, depict a president heroically battling the fiscal excesses of the Democrats.

During the skirmish over the second Reagan budget in 1982, MacNelly translated the concurrent Falklands War into the "Battle of the Squawklands," in which Reagan, in 17th-century costume, vies with a similarly-dressed Tip O'Neill for control of the "budget" island. O'Neill blusters: "we've taken this godforsaken pile of useless rubble and we'll defend it to the last drop of blood!!" In this cartoon, Reagan serves only as a counterpoint to the true target: the foolish contentiousness of the Democrats. Though both Reagan and O'Neill are dressed in somewhat silly-looking Napoleonic garb, the latter, owing to his corpulence and more elaborate costume, looks so ridiculous as to divert almost all attention away from the president. Also, it is significant that all the "squawking" is being done by O'Neill. Reagan, though his sword is raised in a challenging manner, utters not a single squawk.

MacNelly's Reagan, however, faces opposition not only from the Democrats, but from his own party as well. By the spring of 1982, the worsening effects of a recession were turning many Republican lawmakers, worried about the autumn congressional elections, away from the president's
budget proposals.\textsuperscript{31} Fig. 10 portrays President Reagan as the
driver of a "budget" stagecoach driven by a reluctant
Republican elephant:

(Fig. 10)\textsuperscript{32}

President Reagan is here a strong and decisive leader,
unfortunately caught between Republican obstinacy and the
arrows of Democratic savagery.

Oliphant's cartoons display less sympathy toward
President Reagan with regard to Republican perfidy over his
budget. Fig. 11, for instance, depicts Reagan as a somewhat

\textsuperscript{31} One Republican congressman, for instance, called for
"thinking men everywhere to raise their voices against this
murderous mandate [Reagan's budget plan] that is being
carried out." Robert Dallek, \textit{Ronald Reagan: The Politics of

\textsuperscript{32} MacNelly, \textit{Chicago Tribune}, 9 May 1982.
Unlike MacNelly's independent and dauntless budget driver of fig. 10, Oliphant's Reagan, in failing to rally Republican support for his policies, is merely ineffectual. The president's thin neck and outsized ears enhance the impression of political feebleness. (The cartoon, however, is not completely devoid of compassion for the president's failure: Punk, Oliphant's trademark wisecracking penguin, charitably explains to Reagan that the fleeing "congressmen" value their political "hides" more than they do allegiance to his budget plan.)

Oliphant's portrayal of President Reagan's handling of the federal budget remains the same with the passing fiscal years. Reagan remains a weak and deluded president, unable to grasp budgetary realities. In 1985, three years

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33 Oliphant, Ban This Book (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1982), 24 February 1982, 119.
after the appearance of fig. 11, Oliphant drew a cartoon in which Congress struggles to help a "budget" horse to its feet. One of the congressmen suggests, "Hey! Why don't we ask Mr. Reagan to help? He knows a lot about horses!" An indolent, feeble-looking Reagan replies, "I can't do any heavy lifting."34

In time MacNelly's cartoons, as shown in fig. 12, move closer to Oliphant's estimation of President Reagan's budgetary leadership:

![Cartoon of Ronald and the Sacred Cows](image)

(Fig. 12)35

Ronald and the Sacred Cows

34 Oliphant, Between Rock and a Hard Place (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1986), 30 July 1985, 22.

35 MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 8 February 1985.
This lumpy, almost Carteresque Reagan has fallen far from his previous role as the decisive stagecoach driver of fig. 10. Though MacNelly does not question the president’s intentions (this "budget" cow could certainly stand some milking), the cartoonist seriously questions Reagan’s aptitude for the job. 

Having reached a kind of consensus as to President Reagan’s fiscal leadership, Oliphant and MacNelly after 1985 scarcely touch the subject. But while Oliphant's remaining budget cartoons leave Reagan out of the picture altogether, MacNelly sometimes reasserts the negative depiction he established in his mid-80s cartoons. For instance, fig. 13 (following page) portrays President Reagan’s final budget proposal as the stuff of fairy-tales.

MacNelly, however, sometimes depicts Reagan as a more competent foe of government overspending. Two days prior to the appearance of fig. 12, the cartoonist drew a cartoon in which "farmer Ron" plots the death of two "Big Spendus Democratus" pigs, which look a great deal like Ted Kennedy and Tip O’Neill. Toward his ends, Reagan feeds his obese pigs only tiny scraps from his "86 budget" bucket, prompting the O'Neill pig to ask the Kennedy pig, "what's he trying to do, Ted, starve us to death?" Chicago Tribune, 6 February 1985.
Here, MacNelly has mercifully removed Reagan from the messiness of the budget farm (fig. 12) and placed him where he won't be soiled by financial truths. By now the president's budget policies have as much to do with reality as children's stories.

**Defense Spending**

President Reagan's budgets provided for defense spending at levels considerably greater than they had been during the Carter presidency. Though the magnitude of the

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funding increases was rather startling, it was insignificant compared to the degree of controversy generated by certain components of the president's budget requests, namely the MX missile and SDI, and these were the issues MacNelly and Oliphant focused on in their cartoons.  

Though President Reagan vetoed the Air Force's original plan for the MX, a truncated version of the missile (and its deployment system) remained one of the most controversial aspects of Reagan's budget agenda during the first half of his presidency. Oliphant relentlessly attacked the MX—as did a good portion of Congress—as unnecessary and extravagantly expensive, and portrayed Reagan's unflagging promotion of the weapon as obsessive. One Oliphant cartoon depicts President Reagan asleep, cuddling the MX as though it were a teddy-bear. Another cartoon suggests that the president, in advocating the MX, is confusing the reality of Washington with the artifice of Hollywood:

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3 On the subject of Reagan's overall defense budgets, Oliphant's few cartoons are negative (Reagan serves pie an obese "defense department" as a civilian goes hungry), while MacNelly zigzags. In the handful of MacNelly's cartoons on the subject, the president is either a pragmatic budget-trimmer, or a defender of extravagance. In one cartoon, for instance, Reagan "guillotines" the defense spending requests of Defense Secretary Weinberger, and in another he prepares to maliciously sabotage Tip O'Neill's defense budget-cutting plans.

Here, Reagan lapses into movie fantasy while attempting to explain his plans for the MX. The president's doubtful grasp of reality is enough to make even Pentagon officials—for Oliphant usually symbols of reckless greed and folly—to have second thoughts about the weapon they had previously craved.

Oliphant is no less critical of President Reagan's advocacy of the "Strategic Defense Initiative," a program meant to provide a defense against incoming missiles in the event of a nuclear war. One cartoon has Reagan, champagne in hand, ready to christen his SDI program. He confronts his research scientists, who have yet to get the project off the blackboard: "Are we ready to launch, guys? I don't have much

''Oliphant, But Seriously, Folks!, 17 December 1982, 92.
time left in office." One wag replies, "some would say that ain't a bad thing."\(^{42}\)

As with the MX, the cartoon depicts Reagan's obsession with certain weapons as blinding him to their practicality. In fig. 15, Oliphant applies the taint of chauvinism to the president's embrace of doubtful technology:

(Fig. 15)\(^{43}\)

Here, Reagan's fetish for the costly space-weapons not only blinds him to the fiscal realities of the "costs of SDI" and


\(^{43}\) Oliphant, Up To There in Alligators, 16 October 1986, 50.
"deficits," but reduces him to jingoistic sloganeering as well.

MacNelly, though he drew comparatively few cartoons on the subject, echoes Oliphant's objection to the president's espousal of controversial weapons systems. For instance, MacNelly curtly dismisses President Reagan's cherished SDI as a "tooth fairy." (See Chapter Five.) As for the president's insistence on the MX, MacNelly draws Reagan, in frightening close-up, as the possessor of a inhumanly stubborn mind-set:

"Peacekeeper" in hardened silo

(Fig. 16)

"MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 18 May 1984."
MacNelly here again uses the unflattering close-up, with its tendency to multiply wrinkles, to enhance the impression of unreasonable obstinacy. And, as with Oliphant’s Reagan of fig. 15, the president’s eyes, usually vacuous cartoon dots, have here narrowed into a myopic squint.

**The Deficit**

MacNelly and Oliphant, evidently sharing the view that "the budget is not controlled by the Executive Branch but by the Congress," do not in their cartoons directly blame the president for the considerable deficits created by the passage of Reagan-sired budgets. Rather, the cartoonists portray President Reagan as shamefully neglectful of the problem. MacNelly, for instance, depicts a president who blithely ignores or pays lip-service to enormous deficits, as in fig. 17, where he recklessly heads out to meet the deficit "hurricane."

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"Donald T. Regan, *For the Record: From Wall Street to Washington* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 155. MacNelly and Oliphant, however, do not place the blame for the deficits entirely on the Legislative branch, as Regan does: "what goes up the Hill in the form of the President’s budget has little meaning. What comes down the Hill represents the fiscal reality of the U.S. government, and it is invariably a command to spend according to the whim and the myriad political debts of Congress." Regan, 155."
The surfboard is not a reassuring detail. The impression is that of a president outrageously ignorant of the real nature of "hurricanes." Another MacNelly cartoon depicts a similarly befuddled president. Reagan, back in his old cowboy outfit, has tied steer's horns to an enormous, vicious-looking bear labeled "deficit." The cowboy-president attempts to assuage our fears (and perhaps his own) by dismissing the insufficiently-disguised monster as a "bull."
When MacNelly's Reagan isn't ignoring or wishing away deficits, he is applying outlandishly impractical solutions to them. One such portrayal has the president as a Willie Nelson-style singer attempting to "sing away" the problem at a "Deficit Aid" concert. Reagan—wishing long hair ( ! )—sings "In the Red again..." In another cartoon, Reagan, atop an enormous deficit (a dead beached whale), is dismayed when the air freshener he has ordered fails to make the problem go away.***

Oliphant's Reagan employs a similar kind of wishful thinking in approaching the deficit. In one cartoon, the president, climbing a staircase, tries to avoid an immense shadowy "deficit" monster, while nervously reciting Hughes Mearns' famous poem:

As I was going up the stair  
I met a man who wasn't there.  
He wasn't there again to-day.  
I wish, I wish he'd stay away.**

In the cartoon's last panel, Punk reminds the escaping president: "he's still here!" Even when forced to confront

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*** MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 7 January 1983.
the deficit at close range, Oliphant's Reagan only reluctantly acknowledges its existence:

(Fig.18)\textsuperscript{32}

The cartoons scolds a president who seems more interested in making foreign policy gestures\textsuperscript{33} than addressing serious domestic economic problems. Reagan's feeble attempt at "recognition" comes only through the giant's application of arm-twisting. The president's nervousness during this encounter suggests that the deficit-giant is an acquaintance he would rather forget, and this is the only evidence in Oliphant's cartoons that Reagan is even faintly aware of the unpleasantness of the problem. Most of Oliphant's other

\textsuperscript{32} Oliphant, Make My Day!, 25 April 1985, 154.

\textsuperscript{33} President Reagan is here embarking on his controversial Bitburg visit. See Chapter Seven.
Reagan cartoons depict the president as entirely ignorant of the deficit. Or blind to it, as in fig. 19:

(Fig. 19)\textsuperscript{33}

Again, Oliphant avoids blaming either Reagan or Congress for the problem, instead censuring them for ignoring it. (Though Punk's comment that the beast is "not house-trained" might seem to be intended to remind the president that he shares responsibility for the deficit with the Legislative branch.)\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{33} Oliphant, Between Rock and a Hard Place, 25 July 1985, 21.

\textsuperscript{34} Another Oliphant cartoon assigns Congress a more positive role, depicting it valiantly fighting a "deficits" dragon. Reagan, oblivious as ever, looks down from his castle and asks, "what's all that racket down there?" Oliphant, But Seriously, Folks! (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1983), 16 May 1983, 165.
The central features of President Reagan's economic program included tax cuts for individuals and businesses, and the easing or elimination of federal business regulations. These measures were meant to foster economic growth by freeing up money for entrepreneurship and business investment. The president's program, labeled "Reaganomics," also attempted to reconcile the goal of a balanced budget with increased military spending and tax cuts. According to Robert Dallek:

[Reaganomics] was aimed at reducing spending on social programs and lowering taxes. Lower taxes were supposed to fuel a major economic expansion, which, in turn, would cut unemployment and provide more tax revenues to lower the federal deficit and pay for higher defense spending.\(^5\)

Initially, it seemed as though Reaganomics was taking the country toward economic disaster. The first two years of Reagan's presidency saw a recession, the worst since the Depression, send unemployment and interest rates skyrocketing. In 1983, however, an economic recovery began that would become the longest peacetime boom in American history. Yet this recovery, despite its overall increases in average income, and decreases in unemployment and inflation, was brought an uneven distribution of prosperity. According to Cannon, "the very rich became much richer while the

\(^5\) Dallek, 64.
differences between those who prospered and those who didn't...became demonstrably wider." Even David Stockman, Reagan's budget director during his first term, admitted that Reaganomics was merely a euphemism for the older, largely discredited theory of "trickle-down" economics, which was the idea that tax cuts that favored the wealthy would eventually provide economic benefits to the lower classes.

While both cartoonists drew relatively few cartoons on the subject of Reagan's economic performance, MacNelly focuses on its positive aspects, while Oliphant concentrates on the negative. In this subject, Oliphant frequently criticizes Reagan by juxtaposing him with perceived victims of his economic policies, including the poor, the homeless, and senior citizens. In the exceptions to this approach, Oliphant depicts the president's relationship to the economy in broad symbolic terms: a "recession" wheel falls off Reagan's speeding stagecoach; a massive "unemployment" figure holds Reagan in the palm of his hand; and, in fig. 20, Reagan attempts to revive an ailing "economy" patient:

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56 Cannon, 831.

57 See Chapter Three for an examination of these cartoons.
Oliphant here reminds us of George Bush's pre-nomination contention that Reagan's proposed "trickle-down" policies amounted to "voodoo economics." Oliphant seems to share the vice-president's previous contention, and his prognosis is not optimistic. The presence of Edwin Meese, counselor to the president, Treasury Secretary Donald Regan, and Budget Director David Stockman--easily recognizable despite the voodoo get-up--is also hardly reassuring.

MacNelly, unlike Oliphant, uses his few cartoons on the subject to praise Reagan's economic performance, and lambaste the president's liberal detractors, in grandiose symbolic language. A reduced inflation rate under Reagan

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"Oliphant, Ban This Book, 28 April 1982, 148."
(under ten percent in 1982 for the first time in four years) induced the Tribune cartoonist to "knight" the president:

(Fig. 21)"

The inhabitants of the castle are the perfect MacNelly victims: liberal "nabobs of negativism" unable to praise the indisputably heroic deeds transpiring under their very noses. Though often obviously laudatory toward Reagan, MacNelly seldom reached such unabashedly worshipful heights. How often, in editorial cartoons, do you see a president of the United States drawn--seriously--as a knight in shining armor?

"MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 16 May 1982."
A program of income tax cuts was central to President Reagan's economic policy, and though Reagan successfully passed a number of such cuts, he also signed into law (or was compelled to sign, depending on one's view of Congress) a number of tax increases. While MacNelly pays equal attention to both the cuts and the increases, Oliphant tends to focus on the increases, depicting the president as a con-man who disguises his tax thievery with innocuous-sounding jargon. For instance, when Reagan in 1982 approved a $98.3 billion tax increase, Oliphant drew the president as devious "super salesman" who confronts the skeptical denizens of rural "South Succotash" with his tax increase: "...am I selling tax increases? Nosir! These here are tax reforms, yessir! Reforms!"

Fig. 22 (following page) repeats this kind of evasive jargon:

"Reagan, complaining of news coverage of the effects of his budget policy, asked, "is it news that some fellow out in South Succotash someplace has just been laid off?" Dallek, 102.

Like the "super salesman," the "baffle box" Reagan spouts flagrant bureaucratese. Graciously, Oliphant provides us with a translator: we know from the man in the black suit that "revenue enhancement," is merely a euphemism for the tax increase, and "user's fee" means a (five-cent-a-gallon) gas tax.\footnote{Oliphant, \textit{But Seriously, Folks!}, 15 November 1982, 76.}

MacNelly provides a more negative translation of the president's proposed "user fee." One cartoon depicts Reagan siphoning gas from a car driven by Uncle Sam, who complains, \footnote{This tax was intended to pay for repairing the nation's highways and bridges.}
"make that 'usee fee'." As for the 1982 tax increase, MacNelly drew Reagan as a kind of reverse Robin Hood:

(Fig. 23)

MacNelly, here reacting to the president's support of a tax increase, has drawn a very odious (MacNelly seldom gives Reagan an evil grin) version of the president.

Conversely, MacNelly's cartoons about President Reagan's income-tax cuts constitute the highest praise. During the budget battles of 1982--before Reagan's approval of the $98.3 billion tax increase--MacNelly lauds the president's efforts to further reduce income taxes (Reagan


in 1981 had pushed into law a three-year, 25-percent cut), and ridiculed Congress' anxiety about the president's efforts. One cartoon depicts Reagan, having successfully cut down a "taxes" tree, encountering a weak and indecisive Congress:

(Fig. 24)""

Reagan, back into his cowboy clothes, is here a paradigm of can-do simplicity. Though he had failed before with such a direct approach (i.e. the fence and guillotine of figs. 8 and 9), the president's direct, no-nonsense approach, this time symbolized by the chainsaw, finally triumphs. In another cartoon, a variation on the "Sir Ron" theme (see fig. 21), Reagan slays a "Taxes" dragon, only to have it

carted off in an ambulance by a "Congressional Rescue Squad.""

Tax Reform

Throughout most of his presidency, Reagan ardently promoted "tax reform," which in practical terms meant the closing of loopholes and the establishment of a flat tax rate. Such a tax was meant to "simplify the entire tax code so that all taxpayers, big and small, are treated more fairly." The proposed changes, however, met with tough opposition from Congress, and passed only after considerable alterations. Though both cartoonists acknowledge President Reagan's good intentions, Oliphant's cartoons meet the president's initiative with ridicule, while MacNelly depicts a gallant Reagan, battling a corrupt Congress in the name of honest and necessary reforms.

Oliphant, for instance, depicts President Reagan as ignorant of the true implications of his proposed tax changes. In one cartoon, Reagan urges a frightened taxpayer to grasp a "harmless little tax reform snake," unaware that it is in fact the tail of an immense snake, the rest of

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"7 MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 14 July 1982.

"8 Regan, 202.
which lies just out of his sight. Another, nearly identical cartoon has Reagan urging the same taxpayer to grasp a "simplified tax snake," only this time the "snake" is the tail of an enormous tiger.

Other Oliphant cartoons on the subject ridicule a politically feeble president. Fig. 25, for example, gives us a Reagan whose insignificance surpasses even that of Oliphant's Jimmy Carter:

(Fig. 25)

Another Oliphant cartoon, in which Reagan, as a policeman, confronts a "tax system" mugger, portrays a similarly ineffectual president. Reagan tells the mugger: "well...I've

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"Oliphant, Make My Day, 5 December 1984, 89.

"Oliphant, Between Rock and a Hard Place, 10 July 1985, 13."
decided to put an end to this daily mugging!" The mugger, his victim, and a passing congressman reply in unison, "sure you will." Even Punk's comment that the mugger will "end up in reform school" meets with a skeptical "sure he will."

Like Oliphant, MacNelly depicts a Reagan who, despite his good intentions, is hardly a match for the political opponents of tax reform. But MacNelly's is a somewhat nobler Reagan than Oliphant's, because the Tribune cartoonist, rather than blaming the president for the sluggish progress of tax reform legislation, instead berates Congress and special interest lobbies. In one cartoon, for instance, Reagan is the manager of a furniture refinishing shop which has been contracted to restore a "tax reform" table. He tells a customer: "it's just about ready...the boys are polishing it up out back." The "boys," however, are congressmen who are viciously defacing the table with "loopholes," "tax gimmicks," and "deductions."

President Reagan's good intentions are likewise undone by bureaucracy in other MacNelly cartoons, where Reagan's tax reform drive is compared to the American Revolution. Fig.26, for instance, casts Reagan as a revolutionary hero:

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72 Oliphant, Between Rock and a Hard Place. 3 September 1985, 42.

73 MacNelly, Chicago Tribune. 28 November 1984.
Though the intrusion of 20th century bureaucrats casts doubt on the chances of Reagan's success, the president still retains the righteousness of his cause. Though he looks a little confounded, his dignity and valor are still intact. A second installment of this series has "General Reagan" commanding his troops not to fire upon the enemy "'til you see the whites of their eyes!!" Reagan, however, hasn't noticed that the approaching "special interests" Redcoats are all wearing dark glasses. As in fig. 26, Reagan is a

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75 MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 2 June 1985.
befuddled but noble revolutionary, hampered by the devious techniques of modern political warfare."

"Curiously, when a tax reform bill was finally agreed upon and appeared headed for victory, MacNelly and Oliphant switched positions on the issue. Oliphant draws a beatific Reagan christening the "tax reform" child born to congressional "parents" Rep. Dan Rostenkowski and Sen. Robert Packwood, while outside the church a seedy "special interests" figure cries, "is it too late to stop the weddin'?" MacNelly, however, is less congratulatory: "tax reform winners" Reagan, Packwood, and Rostenkowski, arms raised in triumph, are joined by a fourth victor, a hideous "deficit" monster. Oliphant, *Up To There In Alligators*, 18 August 1986, 34; MacNelly, *Chicago Tribune*, 20 August 1986."
In his approach to domestic issues such as poverty, civil rights, and the environment, President Reagan was guided by his belief that government could only make things worse. To this end, the Reagan administration pursued a program of deregulation and cuts in social programs. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Reagan's meagre gestures toward balancing the budget—cutbacks in programs such as food stamps, Medicaid, and child nutrition—took a toll on the poor. As well, the president's failed attempts to cut larger social programs, such as Social Security, did little to dissuade those who saw Reagan as insensitive and hard-hearted.

Reagan's hostility to government regulations, as it applied to the environment, was no less controversial than his cuts in social programs. Throughout his two terms, for instance, Reagan was criticized for his inaction on the problem of acid rain, which had killed fish and plant life in thousands of lakes and streams in the United States and Canada. The problem was virtually ignored by Reagan, because combating it would have required stricter government
standards for the smokestack and automobile emissions that cause acid rain. Even bigger environmental scandals stemmed from two Reagan appointees: Interior Secretary James Watt, and Anne Gorsuch Burford, head of the Environmental Protection Agency. Both Watt and Burford shared Reagan's animosity toward federal regulation, and their performance while in office reflected this animosity. Burford was compelled to resign in 1983, because of the EPA's failure to pursue the cleanup of toxic waste sites. And Watt's immoderate zeal in attempting to open up public lands for exploitation, coupled with his penchant for outrageous remarks, brought about his resignation in the same year."

The greatest gap between MacNelly's and Oliphant's portrayal of President Reagan occurs in cartoons about Reagan's response to these kinds of social and environmental issues. The nature of this gap is one of omission on MacNelly's part, in that Oliphant addresses these issues many times throughout the Reagan presidency, while MacNelly, with few exceptions, scarcely pays them lip-service.

Some of the exceptions, however, are noteworthy. MacNelly, for instance, touches on one subject that Oliphant neglects: the president's response to the AIDS epidemic in

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"Watt's most publicized gaff, and the one most instrumental in bringing about his demise as Interior secretary, had to do with a commission that was reviewing the Interior Department's coal-leasing program. Watt said, "We have every kind of mix you can have. I have a black, I have a woman, two Jews and a cripple." Cannon, 428."
America. On this issue, MacNelly is harshly critical of Reagan, depicting him as uninformed and out of touch with reality. In one cartoon, the president's ignorance is so great as to compel him to don rubber gloves before handling an AIDS speech." Similarly, in fig. 27, Reagan's proffered remedy for the epidemic is somewhat less than realistic:

(Fig. 27)**

The impression of a vapid and irresponsible president, suggested by his worthless "cure" for AIDS, is enhanced by the contrast between Reagan's goofy appearance and the


solemn and serious demeanor of the researcher and Surgeon General C. Everett Koop.\footnote{Koop, an evangelical Christian, surprised many observers by mounting a strong, practical education campaign against the AIDS epidemic. This campaign frankly warned of the necessity of condom use, a warning Reagan skirted in his belated AIDS speeches. See Cannon, 815-819.}

MacNelly also comments on a somewhat less solemn social issue facing President Reagan: the perceived lack of concern on the part of Reagan for the civil rights of women, or, the "gender gap." On this issue, MacNelly is in agreement with Oliphant: though the president possesses an unprogressive attitude toward women, he is neither malicious nor deliberately chauvinistic. For instance, Oliphant's Reagan defends himself from charges of discrimination with a variant of a regressive but well-meant cliché: "some of my best friends are women."\footnote{Oliphant, \textit{The Year of Living Perilously} (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1984), 23 August 1983, 37.} MacNelly's Reagan is also innocuously backward. Reagan, a box of candy under one arm, shouts "I LOVE YOU!" to a group of women on the other side of a "gender gap." Though the gap between Reagan and the women is narrow (only a few feet), the women seem not to understand the president's overtures. They respond: "Allah Few?" "Olive Yew?!" "Isle of View?!" "What the hell is that crazy old coot trying to say?!"\footnote{MacNelly, \textit{Chicago Tribune}, 5 August 1983.} Though the president's method of courtship is embarrassingly obsolete, the women's
apparent deafness, or refusal to listen, places with them at least equal blame for the "gender gap."

But the involvement of MacNelly's Reagan in social problems and suchlike ends here, and vast questions of Reagan's leadership on domestic issues go unacknowledged by the Tribune cartoonist. For instance, MacNelly completely avoids the issue of President Reagan's effect on the environment, while Oliphant draws a host of cartoons on the subject. Most of these Oliphant cartoons are very negative, portraying Reagan as ignorant, backward, and, as fig. 28 implicitly states, anti-environmental:

(Fig. 28)"" Here, Oliphant paints Reagan as the confederate of both a menacing Pentagon and of Interior Secretary James Watt, who elsewhere in Oliphant's cartoons is a dangerous and

"" Oliphant, Ban This Book, 1 April 1982, 134.
contemptible buffoon." By drawing Reagan and his compatriots as thick, stumpy missiles, Oliphant has made them frightening, and also implacably set in their dangerous ways. This trio of close-minded "warheads" spells doom for the concerned citizens holding the peace sign, whom Oliphant creates sympathy for by depicting them as vulnerably tiny and naked.

The intimidating appearance of "Dr. Goodbomb," however, pales in comparison to that of fig. 29's Reagan:

(Fig. 29)"

Significantly, MacNelly depicts Watt not as Reagan's partner in environmental crime, but merely as a political embarrassment to the president: a frazzled Reagan, with the fingers of one hand in an electric socket, holds in his other hand a lit "Watt" bulb. Chicago Tribune, 2 October 1983.

This cartoon, in which Oliphant gives a sinister twist to one of Reagan's off-the-cuff quips, is one of the cartoonist's more evil-looking depictions of the president.

Depictions of a malevolently anti-environment Reagan, however, are less frequent in Oliphant's work than those of a foolish, environmentally-uninformed Reagan. In these more prevalent cartoons, Reagan either ignores or applies witless solutions to environmental problems. On the issue of acid rain, for instance, Oliphant's Reagan tries to combat the problem with bleach,87 and in another cartoon he strolls along a garden trail, unaware of a gargantuan "acid rain" figure which vomits black slime in his path.88

As to President Reagan's relationship with the environment in general, one cartoon (fig. 30, following page) inspired by a meeting between the president and photographer Ansel Adams exemplifies Oliphant's continual portrayal of Reagan as an uncaring buffoon.

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88 Oliphant, *Between Rock and a Hard Place*, 20 March 1986, 144.
Oliphant post-scripts this cartoon: "President Reagan enjoys doing this to photographers... He also enjoys doing this to the environment... No wonder Ansel came away from their meeting shaking his head." "This Reagan is indeed indifferent to the environment. He is obviously more interested in making faces than in appreciating the beauty


""Ibid."
of Yosemite, which Oliphant has painstakingly reproduced from Adams' famous photograph."

In cartoons about President Reagan's approach to American poverty, Oliphant continues to paint Reagan as an uncaring fool, detached from economic and social reality. For instance, Oliphant did not let pass Reagan's remark that ketchup was a "vegetable," and that therefore the poor could frugally supplement their diets with it. In Oliphant's response to this curious assertion, Reagan, wearing a chef's hat and holding an enormous bottle of ketchup, instructs an impoverished family in a "nutrition cooking class." "Chef Reagan" commences his lesson: "OK, hungerees, today we're going to talk about vegetables--cup your hands." This is a president whose lack of compassion not only gives him unrealistic ideas about nourishment, but also compels him to use the frigidly bureaucratic term "hungerees" to refer to poor people. In a post-script to this cartoon, Oliphant sarcastically adds: "helping others to help themselves--who says he's heartless and uncaring?"

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'Nine months after the appearance of fig. 26, Oliphant marks Adams' death with a similar cartoon, in which he draws Adams as an awesome mountain peak, beneath which stands a puny Reagan. Oliphant titles the cartoon: "Two Westerners (Correct Scale)." The Year of Living Perilously, 24 April 1984, 157.

'Oliphant, The Year of Living Perilously, 4 August 1983, 34.

'Ibid.'
Oliphant's Reagan is just as insensitive toward the homeless:

![Cartoon Image]

"Golly, this is Thanksgiving! Don't stand out there in those old rags, starving and shivering with cold — go home!"

(Fig. 31)"

In this cartoon, the ignorance and insensitivity that render Reagan unable to distinguish ketchup from vegetables, here blind him to the reality of poverty in America. The notion that people could actually have no home to live in doesn't occur to the president.

The elderly fare no better under Reagan in Oliphant's cartoons. For instance, when the president in 1984 offered to take a ten percent cut in his presidential pay, Oliphant responded with a drawing of Reagan shouting

"Oliphant, Nothing Basically Wrong, 23 November 1987, 57."
"Solidarnosc!" at two senior citizens who trudge through deep snow outside the White House. Reagan's intended display of fellowship is ridiculously at odds with the obviously different circumstances that separate him from the elderly couple: the former is warm and well dressed; the latter are cold and ragged. Just as the president offers the poor and the homeless ketchup and unrealistic advice in lieu of actual assistance, he gives the elderly patronizing slogans."

Similarly, in dealing with the country's drug problem, Oliphant's Reagan is all cheap slogans and no action, as he is in fig. 32 (following page).

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95 Polish for "solidarity." Reagan alludes to the anti-communist Polish trade union. (Punk, however, identifies the word not as Polish but as "Republican," for "you're on your own, Jack." Oliphant, Make My Day!, 7 December 1984, 91.

96 Ibid.

97 In one cartoon, however, Oliphant's Reagan has a brief, jarring encounter with the grim living conditions of less well-off American senior citizens. A worried-looking Reagan stares into a mirror, in which a hunched, white-haired Reagan, clutching a cane and a social security check, stares angrily back at him. Oliphant, Make My Day!, 15 October 1984, 64.
President Reagan, whose proscribed "remedy" for the drug problem is made to seem ridiculously futile—the "drugs" grim reaper doesn't appear to give his victims much of a chance to "just say no"—is seldom more feeble and incompetent than he is in this cartoon.

"Oliphant, Nothing Basically Wrong, 4 March 1988, 97.

"MacNelly, in his sole comment on the "war on drugs," also denounces President Reagan as ineffectual: Reagan, standing beside a guillotine and a sign that says "drug pushers: right this way," explains, "it's part of our War on Drugs...strictly voluntary, of course..." But unlike Oliphant, the Tribune cartoonist declines to censure the president by dramatically juxtaposing him with the human cost of American drug abuse. MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 21 September 1986.
Excluding Reagan's approach to Soviet relations, (see Chapter Five), most of MacNelly's and Oliphant's cartoons about Reagan's foreign policy focus on Central America and the Middle East. On the president's policies in these areas, both cartoonists are in general agreement. With the exception of Central America, where MacNelly wavers between applause and ridicule, the picture of Reagan that emerges from these cartoons is one of a confused and misguided president.

Similarly, in cartoons that address lesser Reagan foreign policy issues, such as the president's controversial visit to Bitburg, 100 both MacNelly and Oliphant depict Reagan as uninformed and naive. For instance, when the

100 On May 8, 1985, Reagan laid a wreath at a German military cemetery in Bitburg, West Germany, as part of a ceremony marking the fortieth anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany. Four weeks before the ceremony, controversy had arisen from the disclosure that forty-nine SS soldiers were buried at the cemetery. Both cartoonists criticize Reagan's visit, depicting the president as extremely imprudent. MacNelly draws Reagan in league with neo-Nazis, and Oliphant derisively portrays Reagan as the star of a movie called "Ich Bin Ein Bitburger." See MacNelly, "Hi, Ron!!" Chicago Tribune, 24 April 1985, and Oliphant, Make My Day!, 29 April 1985, 156.
president visited China in April 1984 to sign a trade and technology agreement, both cartoonists portrayed him as oblivious to the political culture of Communist China. Oliphant depicts Reagan naively toasting Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang: "To peace, truth, justice, freedom, the pursuit of happiness, church, God, John Wayne, capitalism, victory over communism, prayer-in-the-schools, and the American way!" Zhao replies, "to your technology."\(^{101}\) MacNelly draws Reagan photographing the Great Wall with a camera clearly labeled "Made in Taiwan," a detail his Chinese hosts could hardly fail to notice.\(^{102}\)

Only on Reagan’s South Africa policy do the cartoonists differ substantially.\(^{103}\) On this issue, Oliphant

\(^{101}\) Oliphant, *The Year of Living Perilously*, 27 April 1984, 159.


\(^{103}\) There is one further difference, in that MacNelly addresses Reagan’s dealings with Japan, which Oliphant neglects. On this subject, MacNelly depicts Reagan as the gullible dupe of the cunning Japanese. For instance, MacNelly derides the president’s professed desire for freer Japanese-U.S. trade as unrealistic, in the face of Japanese craftiness. In one cartoon the president is squashed into a tiny "free trade" car, which he intends to buy from a likewise-tiny Yasuhiro Nakasone, the Japanese prime minister. Reagan tells Nakasone, "Then it’s a deal. But you promise it’ll grow more, right?" MacNelly, *Chicago Tribune*, 3 May 1987. (Reagan, however, is only MacNelly’s secondary target, the primary being the perceived deviousness of Nakasone. To this end the cartoonist employs an image of the Japanese frequently found in post-war political cartoons: that of what history professor John Dower calls "little men in little cars.") See Leslie Helm, "Reporting on U.S.-Japan Trade Termed Balanced," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 May 1991.
criticizes Reagan for his opposition to economic sanctions against South Africa, while MacNelly, deeming such sanctions useless, praises the president for his refusal to endorse them. For instance, when the Republican-controlled Senate in October 1986 overturned Reagan's veto of sanctions, MacNelly sympathetically drew Reagan as the victim of barbarians. In this cartoon, Reagan is tied to a catapult, which is aimed at a "South Africa" castle. One of the barbarians, holding a shield marked "Senate," tells the president, "Of course it won't work...but it sure will make us feel better." 104

Central America and Points South

The most prominent part of President Reagan's Central America policy was his opposition to the Marxist Sandinista government of Nicaragua. This opposition included an embargo on Nicaraguan exports, the mining of Nicaraguan harbors, and the funding, both legal and illegal, of the anti-Sandinista Contra guerrillas. 105 Another prominent component of Reagan's Central America policy was the support of the right-wing government of El Salvador, which was widely believed to be responsible for the torture and murder of political dissenters. Oliphant's cartoons are unanimously critical of the Reagan's Nicaragua and El Salvador policies, depicting the president as either cruel or oblivious to

104 MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 5 October 1986.

105 For an examination of Oliphant's and MacNelly's Iran-Contra cartoons, see Chapter Six.
reality. MacNelly, however, zigzags, applauding the president as a virtuous opponent of communism, but ridiculing him as a quixotic tilter against exaggerated communist windmills.

Some of Oliphant’s cartoons depict Reagan’s policies as the prelude to a Vietnam-style war. Early in Reagan’s first year as president, Oliphant had drawn a cartoon in which the new president peers curiously into a tunnel marked "Nicaragua," heedless of a partially-obscured sign suggesting that Vietnam lies just beyond. A year later, in 1982, Oliphant’s Reagan is well on his reckless way down a similar Central American tunnel, and his destination is now clearly labeled:

(Fig.33) Oliphant, Ban This Book!, 19 February 1982, 117.
Here, Reagan looks rather worried as to the direction his policy is heading. In most other Oliphant cartoons, however, the president is appallingly ignorant of the true consequences of his Central American policy. In one cartoon, for instance, Reagan peers into a pit filled with victims of Salvadoran death squads. The president remarks to secretary of state George Shultz, "ah, not too many at all! That shows a distinct improvement in human rights, Mr. Schultz."\(^{107}\)

As another means of criticizing Reagan's policies, Oliphant employs a movieland theme, which the cartoonist uses throughout the Reagan presidency to depict the president as out of touch with reality. In one Oliphant cartoon, for instance, the president's indifference to fact causes him to see his expansion of the U.S. military presence in Central America as merely a war movie. In a near-empty theater, Reagan watches the opening credits of "Gunboats South," in which sails a convoy of military vessels, accompanied by a spectacular array of warplanes. The president tells a worried member of the sparse audience, "Look! No way can I enjoy this movie if you keep asking me how it ends!"\(^{108}\) In another such cartoon, Oliphant draws Reagan as a B-movie style sheriff, who, in his pursuit of


Nicaraguan "communists," is oblivious to that country's true villains:

("NO, THAT'S NOT THE GANG I'M LOOKING FOR, MA'AM — I'M AFTER COMMUNISTS!")

(Fig. 34)\(^{10}\)

Oliphant also criticizes Reagan's policies by unfavorably comparing them to those of previous American commanders of foreign policy. For instance, when Reagan ordered the October 25, 1983 invasion of Grenada, Oliphant responded by drawing him as a second-rate Theodore Roosevelt (fig. 35, following page).

\(^{10}\) Oliphant, *Between Rock and a Hard Place*, 17 March 1986, 141.
Here, as Wendy Wick Reaves observes in her book on Oliphant, the cartoonist ridicules Reagan by putting the invasion in an obsolete, turn-of-the-century context:

The humor of the drawing comes from the fact that Roosevelt's imperialistic notions of might are several generations out of date, and, the public, like Reagan, had little idea of Grenada's place in the international arena or why American forces had landed there.\textsuperscript{110}

Similarly, a cartoon from March 1986 criticizes Reagan's Nicaragua policy, this time by depicting him as a substandard Douglas MacArthur. Reagan, dressed in MacArthurian costume (dark glasses, corncob pipe, etc.) and standing in a tiny boat labeled "MacReagan," faces a map of Nicaragua. "MacReagan" exclaims, "If you liked the way I

\textsuperscript{110} Oliphant, \textit{The Year of Living Perilously}, 26 October 1983, 71.

\textsuperscript{111} Reaves, 54.
handled the Philippines, you'll love me in this one!" The cartoon criticizes both Reagan's increasingly militaristic Nicaragua policy, and his support of Ferdinand Marcos, the recently-overthrown Philippine dictator.

In Oliphant's cartoons about Reagan's Central America policy, the dominant characterization, as represented by the above cartoons, is that of a president indifferent to reality, or glaringly out of touch with the modern world. Around 1987, however, Oliphant begins to portray Reagan as a deliberate fomenter of Central American violence. In one cartoon, for instance, the president maliciously tries to kill the possibility of peace in Central America (fig. 36, following page).

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113 Also, like Oliphant's drawing of Reagan as Teddy Roosevelt, the cartoon lampoons the president's failed Philippines policy by comparing it to Gen. MacArthur's successful recapture of the Philippines during World War II.
In a similar cartoon, Oliphant facetiously depicts Reagan as the recipient of the 1987 Nobel Peace "Pie," which has been thrown full in the president's face as a reward for his "noble efforts in Central America." 114

MacNelly's cartoons about Reagan's Central America policy are less single-minded than are Oliphant's. While he frequently ridicules the president as having an exaggerated concept of the area's actual importance, he also often draws Reagan as a praiseworthy opponent of Marxism in the region.

114 Oliphant, Nothing Basically Wrong, 8 October 1987, 50.

115 Oliphant, Nothing Basically Wrong, 14 October 1987, 54.
A number of cartoons, for instance, applaud the president for taking a tough stand against Cuban dictator Fidel Castro. In one of them, a frightened Castro, in a bathing suit, stands at the edge of a boat labeled "Cuba." Cutting through the water towards the boat is the source of Castro's apprehension: a shark's fin that MacNelly has drawn to resemble Reagan's pompadour.116

Other cartoons praise Reagan's Central America policies by contrasting the president with a weak, Democrat-controlled Congress. In one such cartoon, MacNelly depicts Reagan as a down-to-earth, pragmatic leader, willing to compromise on his Nicaragua policy. This fictional compromise, however, is more an excuse for MacNelly to attack perceived liberal feebleness (fig. 37, following page).

116 MacNelly, "Just When You Thought it was Safe to Go Back in the Water," Chicago Tribune, 6 November 1983.
The "Liberal Attack Flotilla" represents MacNelly's opinion of what American foreign policy would become if Reagan's critics had their way: as soft as quiche and marshmallows, as spineless as jellyfish. The names of the ships are a jab at prominent Democratic politicians, including Senator Paul Tsongas, an opponent of Reagan's Central America policy. Though Reagan frets that he has compromised his conservative principles (he worries about what "the Duke"—the late conservative actor John Wayne—would think), any weakness on  

11 MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 17 August 1983.
his part pales in comparison with that of his liberal critics.

As well as defend Reagan from liberal naysayers, MacNelly defends the president from charges of weakness over his Panama policy. These charges stemmed from the defiance of Reagan by Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, who, after seizing power in 1985, thumbed his nose at Reagan's attempts to oust him.\textsuperscript{118} Noriega was an embarrassment for Reagan, not a little because he had previously been a strong U.S. ally and CIA contact.\textsuperscript{119} Many speculated that Reagan was hesitant to forcibly remove Noriega from power, for fear that the dictator would reveal damaging secrets about Reagan's policies in the region.\textsuperscript{120} MacNelly, however, ignores such speculation, depicting the Panama situation as merely an insect problem:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{118} Noriega, who had been the effective ruler of Panama for years, affected to be merely the commander of the Panamanian military. He dropped this pretense when he ousted President Nicolas Ardito Barletta (whose election Noriega had aided through fraud) on September 28, 1985.


\textsuperscript{120} Oliphant, for instance, depicts Reagan losing his clothes to Noriega in a poker game. Noriega's winning secret is his possession of a card labeled "what I have on Reagan." See "Gosh, General Noriega, How Do You Do It?" Nothing Basically Wrong, 2 May 1988, 134.
\end{flushright}
Here, Reagan's only sin is unpreparedness. By reducing the complex problems of Panama to such a simple scenario, MacNelly eliminates the history of Reagan's ties to the insects (Noriega and his confederates). Drawn this way, the idea that Reagan could somehow have previously been in league with the "insects" is ludicrous.

MacNelly's Reagan, however, is not immune to criticism in his handling of Central American foreign policy. In some cartoons the president is inept and misguided, and in others he is overly concerned, to the point of obsession, with the area's supposed communist threat. In one cartoon, for instance, a paranoid-looking Reagan leads a group of policemen who, having surrounded a

run-down shack labeled "Central America," are looking out to sea, searching for communists. Reagan shouts through a megaphone, "Awright, Yuri! We know you're out there!"\textsuperscript{122}

Another cartoon ridicules President Reagan's proposed trade embargo on Nicaragua. MacNelly predicts that it will have the opposite of its intended effect:

(Fig. 39)\textsuperscript{123}

Here, the president's proposed embargo will, instead of forcing Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega to acquiesce to Reagan's demands, move Nicaragua further into the Soviet


\textsuperscript{123} MacNelly, \textit{Chicago Tribune}, 8 May 1985.
camp. As a means of enhancing the president's perceived misguidedness on this issue, MacNelly gives Reagan a goofier-than-usual face, by shrinking the forehead, increasing the distance between nose and mouth, pulling the earlobes, and moving the eyes closer together.  

The Middle East

Oliphant’s and MacNelly’s cartoons about Reagan’s Middle East policy fall roughly into two groups. The first of these groups, which is dominated by Oliphant’s cartoons, has to do with Reagan’s ill-fated deployment of U.S. Marines to Lebanon. The second group, in which both cartoonists are represented almost equally, comments on Reagan’s deployment of U.S. warships into the Persian Gulf.

Oliphant’s rendering of the president’s proposed embargo is similar: Reagan, with an "Embargo on Nicaragua" sign around his neck, is a scarecrow, ignored by innumerable happily-feasting crows. Make My Day!, 8 May 1985, 160.

A third, smaller group, in which MacNelly’s cartoons predominate, addresses Reagan’s strong stand against Libyan strongman Moammar Qaddafi. MacNelly is ambivalent about the president’s militant stance. In one cartoon, for instance, Reagan recklessly invites passersby to try their luck at a "Khadaffy Duck" shooting gallery. (The "ducks" are perched on barrels marked "highly flammable," "danger," and "Libyan crude.") Another cartoon praises Reagan’s position on Libya, depicting the president about to exterminate a belligerent, ridiculously-uniformed Qaddafi with insect spray. MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 10 January 1986, and 12 January 1986.
Lebanon

In his cartoons about Reagan's Lebanon policy, Oliphant portrays the president as weak and misguided. This policy entailed the deployment of U.S. Marines to Lebanon, as part of a multinational force seeking to evacuate the PLO from that country.¹²⁶

Reagan's plan to send troops had become public on July 6, 1982. Reacting to the plan, Oliphant derisively portrays Reagan as the parrot of "pirate" Menachem Begin, the Israeli prime minister:

(Fig. 40)¹²⁷

Between the announcement of Reagan's deployment plan, and the actual landing of Marines on August 25, Israel stepped

¹²⁶ The larger purpose of the plan was to prevent a full-scale war between Israel, which was attacking Palestinians within Lebanon, and Syria, whose troops were fighting alongside the PLO. See Cannon, 389-457.

¹²⁷ Oliphant, But Seriously, Folks!, 7 July 1982.
up its military intervention in Lebanon. On August 1, Israeli forces commenced an artillery bombardment of Beirut, which killed many civilians. This bombardment elicited little public condemnation from the White House, and Oliphant responded with a cartoon criticizing Reagan for appearing soft on Israeli belligerence. In this cartoon, Reagan meekly attempts to censure Begin, who stands behind an enormous, smoking gun:

Er...Excuse me, Mr. Begin, sir...May I speak impatiently with you for a moment concerning this shelling of Beirut and the...er...senseless slaughter of thousands of...er...innocent civilians in the area..."**128**

Begin ignores this timid remonstration, and orders his gun crew to "fire." To augment his portrayal of a weak and timid president, Oliphant once again compares Reagan to former President Carter. Punk observes that Reagan appears to be "a graduate of the Jimmy Carter school of tough speak!"

When Reagan's Lebanon policy proved disastrous, Oliphant stopped portraying him as merely weak, and instead depicted him as both heartless and foolish. In the aftermath of the October 23, 1983 bombing that killed 241 Marines, Oliphant drew Reagan as callously shirking responsibility for their deaths. In one cartoon, Reagan piously places a wreath on the grave of one of the victims. In the background, three fat officers attempt, unsuccessfully, to look remorseful. Smugly, Reagan speaks to the grave: "I've

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decided not to punish your superior officers--they've suffered so much already!" Punk suggests that Reagan might himself take some blame for the Marine debacle: "perhaps you could punish their superior officer."

Similarly, when the U.S. Embassy annex in Beirut was bombed in September 1984, Oliphant drew a callous president, indifferent to the destruction engendered by his policies:

(Fig. 41)


130 Though the Marines had been "redeployed" (withdrawn) from Lebanon in February 1984, their presence had so galvanized anti-American sentiment as to make targets out of any remaining symbols of the United States. See Jane Mayer and Doyle McManus, Landslide: The Unmaking of the President 1984-1988 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 92.

The Persian Gulf

In their cartoons from 1987 and 1988, Oliphant and MacNelly are united in criticizing Reagan's deployment of U.S. warships into the Persian Gulf. The president's policy was meant to protect commercial oil shipping in the gulf, which had been threatened by the expansion of the Iran-Iraq war.

Both cartoonists question Reagan's wisdom on this policy, especially after May 27, 1987, when an Iraqi missile killed 27 sailors on the frigate U.S.S. Stark. Reacting to the incident, MacNelly draws a flabby and foolishly belligerent Reagan:

(Fig. 42)

This is a president who refuses to learn from his past mistakes. Perhaps his too-low cowboy hat has blinded him to the fact that his Middle East policies have incapacitated his hands.

An Oliphant cartoon, published the same day as fig. 42, uses imagery nearly identical to MacNelly's, in order to ridicule what the cartoonist sees as Reagan's misplaced machismo:

(Fig. 43)\textsuperscript{133}

Oliphant and MacNelly continue to criticize Reagan's Persian Gulf policy for the remainder of the president's final term. Another MacNelly cartoon, for instance, depicts Reagan with hook-hands, trying to defuse a "Persian Gulf"

\textsuperscript{133} Oliphant, \textit{Up to There in Alligators}, 29 May 1987, 165.
bomb. And after an American ship in the gulf accidentally downed an Iranian airliner, Oliphant drew a cartoon blaming Reagan. This cartoon, which addresses the president's offer of monetary compensation to Iran, portrays Reagan and Vice-President George Bush rowing in a mine-infested Persian Gulf. Reagan, tossing handfuls of money on the waters, advises Bush, "There's no policy so flawed, George, that can't be fixed by throwing more money at it!"\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{114} Oliphant, \textit{Nothing Basically Wrong}, 11 July 1988, 164.
Reagan’s Soviet policy, throughout most of his presidency, rested on his belief that the Soviet Union was "an implacable foe" and an "evil empire." Accordingly, Reagan abandoned the policy of détente, which he believed the Soviets had by deceit and subterfuge used to their advantage. In place of negotiations aimed at limiting the propagation of American and Soviet nuclear weapons, Reagan favored a massive American military buildup, which was supposed to force the Soviets, whose backward economy would not allow them to compete, to negotiate for reductions in nuclear arsenals.

Reagan’s tough anti-Soviet stand remained constant throughout his entire first term, and during part of his second. During this period, Reagan eschewed negotiating arms control with Soviet leaders Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantine Chernenko, in favor of continuing an unchecked arms race. Not until Mikhail Gorbachev, who came to power in 1985, offered unilateral cuts in nuclear

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133 Cannon, 296.
weapons, did Reagan adopt a more cooperative attitude toward the Soviet leadership. This new attitude led to the signing, on December 8, 1987, of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, which mandated the destruction of all intermediate and short-range U.S. and Soviet nuclear missiles from Europe.

Oliphant's and MacNelly's cartoons are very much alike when they depict President Reagan's dealings with the Soviet Union. Initially, both cartoonists laud the president when he appears to take a tough stand against the Soviets, and deride him when he appears soft. Eventually, their cartoons become more critical of Reagan, portraying him as dangerously intractable. Finally, with the arrival of Gorbachev, the cartoonists' depiction of the president becomes very favorable.

In Oliphant's and MacNelly's initial cartoons of U.S.-Soviet relations under Reagan, the depiction of the president hinges on the cartoonists' common abhorrence of the Soviet government. This shared distaste meant praise for what they saw as a tough Reagan and scorn for a perceived capitulatory Reagan. For instance, when the Reagan administration in 1982 lifted a ban on sales of American grain to the Soviet Union, both cartoonists ridiculed the president for executing what they saw as an about-face from his usual harsh anti-Soviet rhetoric. In fig. 44, MacNelly
depicts a Reagan whose Soviet policy is foolishly unrealistic and contradictory:

(Fig. 44)

The image of an unrealistic president is enhanced by the vintage aircraft he is flying. The plane, connoting war movies of the sort that Reagan appeared in during his pre-political career, suggests that the president may not have altogether left this world of artifice.

Oliphant takes a similar approach to the subject, though his cartoon is a more direct accusation of hypocrisy: a depiction of Reagan as a zookeeper, throwing sacks of grain to an immense "Ursus Sovietus," surrounded by numerous "Do Not Feed the Bear" signs. The zookeeper-president tells the

bear that "this, however, should not, in any way, be construed as a change of zoo policy." An earlier Oliphant cartoon on this subject derides the president even more strongly, by making him appear weak and ridiculous in the face of Soviet malevolence:

(Fig. 45)

As in fig. 44, the president's usually fierce anti-Soviet rhetoric is an unseen partner in the satire: the man with the keys falling out of his pocket, behaving like a trained seal—or, in this case, bear—in front of the Soviet Union

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is the same man well-known for talk of "evil empires" and "limited" nuclear wars.

Oliphant's and MacNelly's depiction of President Reagan is also similar in their cartoons about American-European relations with the Soviet Union. Here, both cartoonists portray the president more favorably, criticizing instead the irresolution of European leaders. In one such cartoon, Oliphant, prompted by the Soviet-backed Polish government's crackdown on the Solidarity movement, presents the scenario of a stalwart Reagan betrayed by a timid Europe:

(Fig. 46)

Reagan here comes off as an unwitting David to the Soviet Goliath: if the president appears at all weak, the fault lies not with him but with European fecklessness.

13 Oliphant, Ban This Book. 26 December 1981, 92.
In a similar MacNelly cartoon, Reagan takes on the Soviet Union, with European leaders having safely removed themselves into the background:

(Fig. 47)\textsuperscript{140}

Though the Reagan-Soviet confrontation has gone one step further than in Fig. 46, in that the president is armed and actively jousting with the enemy, his situation is no more promising. His supposed NATO allies are no more willing to actively support him, his weapon is ruinously impractical, and his opponent is not the usual Soviet bear, but instead a heavily-armored rhinoceros. As in Fig. 46, Reagan emerges as

\textsuperscript{140} MacNelly, \textit{Chicago Tribune}, 6 April 1983.
a valiant opponent of Soviet aggression, though an opponent who will perhaps be martyred to European spinelessness.

MacNelly's and Oliphant's cartoons are also similar in their depictions of President Reagan's role in the arms race between the superpowers, and not very far apart when it comes to the concept of nuclear annihilation. Oliphant's ultimate-stakes game of chess, with its atomic sword of Damocles (Fig. 48) is not a far cry from MacNelly's no-win showdown (Fig. 49):

(Fig. 48)\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{141} Oliphant, Ban This Book. 19 April 1982, 144.
Oliphant, however, frequently depicts a side of the Reagan-Soviet relationship that is absent in MacNelly's work, that of the citizens of America and Europe standing to lose the most from a souring of that relationship. Fig. 50 (following page), like fig. 48, depicts the Reagan-Brezhnev nuclear brinkmanship, but this time adds a human element.

Here, as opposed to previous Oliphant cartoons, Reagan is almost indistinguishable from his Soviet counterpart, thanks to the common denominator of weapons of total destruction. The "commie nuisance" of holding the stop signs marks one of the first appearances of anti-nuclear protestors in Oliphant's Reagan cartoons. The cartoon gives the impression of a president so entrenched in cold-war dogma and militant posturing that he fails, even when warned, to recognize the danger of the situation. Of course, Oliphant's Brezhnev is depicted as being no better, but Reagan, as the speaker, is the subject. The cartoonist further developed this theme when Reagan claimed that advocates of a "nuclear freeze"

were under the subversive influence of foreign governments. Oliphant responded to this claim with a cartoon depicting the president as blatantly McCarthyistic. In this cartoon, Reagan interrogates a young couple, one of whom holds a sign that says "freeze the nukes." Prompting the president is the enormous, ghostly figure of the late Senator Joseph McCarthy, who tells him, "now ask them if they have ever been, and why are they now, communist, pinko, subversives." 

Things changed little with Brezhnev's death and succession by Andropov in February 1982. The new Soviet leader, however, seems to offer at least the possibility of communication:

(Fig. 51)

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144 Oliphant, But Seriously, Folks!, 6 October 1982, 53.
Though both leaders are depicted as firmly rooted in their uncooperative ways, it is Andropov who brings up the possibility of dialogue, and Reagan who rejects it.

MacNelly presents a slightly different version of the diplomatic stalemate between Reagan and Andropov:

(Fig. 52)

Here, though it is Reagan who offers to bargain with the Soviet leader, the gulf between the two leaders remains as great as that between Oliphant's trees. The picture that emerges is one of two leaders who eschew sensible discussion in favor of urging each another to jump off cliffs.

Andropov's death and succession by Chernenko in February 1984 thawed U.S.-Soviet relations little, and arms-control negotiations continued to go nowhere. At this time, both Oliphant's and MacNelly's cartoons reveal even more impatience with President Reagan's obstinacy with regard to the Soviets. Though one of MacNelly's first drawings of Chernenko refers to him as a "dummy warhead" in the sense of foolish militarism, MacNelly's Reagan soon equals the new Soviet leader in hopeless inflexibility. In one cartoon, Reagan and Chernenko silently face each other across a table. On the table, the leaders' false teeth face each other. An aide optimistically comments: "at least they're smiling." The cartoon, with its allusion to the leaders' similar ages (Chernenko was 72, Reagan 73), portrays Chernenko and Reagan as equally unbending. In another MacNelly cartoon, (fig. 53, following page), the two leaders are even more similar.

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147 Ironically, this term was not infrequently used by other American cartoonists to describe Reagan himself.

Quiet Diplomacy

(Fig. 53)\(^{149}\)

Here, MacNelly has drawn the two leaders so as to make Reagan and Chernenko even look alike: their similar postures, black suits and neck wrinkles serve as a kind of graphic glue, symbolically binding them together. The only difference between the two leaders, aside from Chernenko's medals, are their girth and hair color. As in fig. 52, the prospect of constructive discourse between Reagan and his Soviet counterpart seems hopeless.

Oliphant goes even further than MacNelly, portraying the two leaders as not only uncooperative, but dangerously belligerent as well:

Again, Oliphant introduces the element of peace protesters as a reminder of the potential human cost of the leaders' immutable antagonism.

_Well, good! They're talking again..._ (Fig. 54)

Because Oliphant almost never ignores President Reagan's notorious verbal missteps (i.e. the ketchup-as-vegetable gaff mentioned in Chapter Three), it is surprising that Oliphant passes up the golden opportunity of the president's infamous "we begin bombing in five minutes" joke, in favor of using the occasion to assail Soviet wickedness:

130 Oliphant, _The Year of Living Perilously_, 2 July 1984, 11.
Oliphant here gives Reagan an unusually "fair shake" by presenting his joke verbatim, and within its true context of a microphone test. Compared to Chernenko's humorless threats of retaliation, the president's joke seems merely harmless clowning.

MacNelly, in keeping with his policy of not harping on Reagan's verbal blunders, also downplays the incident. His version of the president's hapless remark amounts to a mild spoofing:

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Sure, it was scary, but it was a joke. No harm done. Oliphant, however, does not always go easy on President Reagan's seemingly casual attitude toward the prospect of nuclear war. When Thomas K. Jones, deputy under-secretary of defense for strategic and nuclear forces, revealed to a Los Angeles Times reporter a wildly impractical administration plan for civil defense, Oliphant jumped at the opportunity. According to Jones, surviving a nuclear war was simply a matter of sheltering yourself adequately: "Dig a hole. Cover it with a couple of doors and then throw three feet of dirt on top." Jones added optimistically, "Everybody's going to make it if there are enough shovels to go around."\(^{133}\)

\(^{152}\) MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 15 August 1984.

\(^{133}\) Quoted in Herbert Block, Herblock Through the Looking-Glass: The Reagan Years in Words and Pictures (New York: Norton, 1984), 143.
Oliphant responded to Jones’ remarks with a cartoon in which Reagan gives the shelter a try-out:

(Fig. 57)  

Again, Oliphant’s Reagan is not isolated from his own administration: he obviously shares T.K. Jones’ naivete about the probable effects of nuclear war. (George Shultz, however, looks a little less convinced of the shelter’s adequacy.)

"The Ron and Gorby Show"

In March 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev was elected general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, not only

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" Oliphant, The Year of Living Perilously, 22 November 1983, 85. See also fig. 54."
Western leaders were caught off guard, but MacNelly and Oliphant as well. The problem was that Gorbachev just didn't fit the ancient, craggy-faced, malevolent stereotype that had marked cartoon portrayals of Soviet leaders since the Stalin era. During roughly a year after Gorbachev's ascention to power, both MacNelly's and Oliphant's cartoons of Reagan's dealings with Gorbachev reflect an uncertainty as to how to deal with the new Soviet leader. The result, in these cartoons, is that the portrayal of Gorbachev—and consequently Reagan's characterization—varies somewhat erratically, as the cartoonists try to hit upon his "true" character.

In one of these ever-changing portrayals, (fig. 58, following page), MacNelly tries to put Gorbachev into the same menacing, missile-slinging role often played by the Soviet leader's cartoon predecessors, so as to make President Reagan look noble and righteous by comparison. To make Gorbachev appear more dangerous, MacNelly has inflated his size to the point where he dwarfs Reagan. The intention is to turn Reagan versus Gorbachev into David versus Goliath, putting Reagan's proposed "Star Wars" weaponry in place of David's slingshot.

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135 See fig. 46 above.
This cartoon puts Gorbachev in the traditional role of fearsome Soviet antagonist, to which President Reagan plays the admirable and unassuming American protagonist. Like MacNelly, Oliphant initially portrays Reagan favorably in the face of a stereotypically belligerent Gorbachev. Oliphant's Reagan emerges as an amiable comedian,

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Fig. 58}
\end{figure}

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\textsuperscript{137} This depiction of Gorbachev is curious, because the Soviet leader seems miscast. The Soviet leader's missiles and enlarged size, instead of making him more threatening, merely serve to make him almost unrecognizable. Though making the tall and well-built Reagan appear formidable is a fairly simple task for a cartoonist (see, for instance, fig. 3 above); doing the same with the somewhat diminutive and rotund Gorbachev is nearly impossible, and MacNelly never tried to do so again.
\end{flushright}
as in fig. 59, where Gorbachev reverts to heavy-handed cold-war bullying:

(Fig. 59)\textsuperscript{158}

Under Reagan's light-hearted teasing, Gorbachev reveals his "true" nature, that of a Kennedy-era Soviet dictator, going so far as to echo Khrushchev's promise to "bury" the United States.\textsuperscript{159} But Oliphant's initially hostile version of the Soviet leader was quickly replaced by a more ambivalent

\textsuperscript{158} Oliphant, Between a Rock and a Hard Place, 23 October 1985, 68.

\textsuperscript{159} Though Gorbachev obviously means something more menacing, Khrushchev's promise could be accurately paraphrased as "we will overtake you." Khrushchev vowed "in 1961 that by 1980 the Soviet Union would 'overtake America' in everything--food, wealth, comfort, industrial strength." Dusko Doder, Shadows and Whispers: Power Politics Inside the Kremlin from Brezhnev to Gorbachev (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 121.
Gorbachev, who, by virtue of his bland characterization, served as a device by which to offset the portrayal of President Reagan. In fig 60, Gorbachev serves as the confused recipient of a schizophrenic Reagan’s conflicting arms-control messages:

(Fig. 60)\(^{186}\)

This kind of "dual" Reagan, flitting unsteadily from hawk to dove, marked Oliphant’s Reagan at the start of Gorbachev’s leadership. Similarly, MacNelly, having failed to stuff Gorbachev into the old clothes of Soviet Communism, settles for portraying him as something of enigma. In trying to solve the Gorbachev mystery, MacNelly’s Reagan vacillates

\(^{186}\) Oliphant, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, 20 June 1986, 12.
between venomous hard-liner and willing negotiator. The Geneva summit of November 1985, which MacNelly "covered" on location for the Tribune, provided the cartoonist with a conveniently confined framework in which to draw the president’s zigzag approach to Soviet relations. One cartoon shows a brazen, tough-guy Reagan dumping his drink on Gorbachev’s head as a TV correspondent reports: "the intensive White House campaign to lower summit expectations" took a nasty turn this evening... "* Three days later, MacNelly drew a meek and confused Reagan preparing to meet his Soviet "opponent" (fig. 61, following page).

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141 Reagan’s declared summit objectives were: "1. to establish a personal relationship with Gorbachev; 2. to obtain a commitment from the Soviet leader that their talks on arms reductions would continue; and 3. to agree on the place and approximate time of their next summit." Regan, 304.

The cartoon however, exhibits some of MacNelly's tendency to deflect blame from the president. If "Reasonable-Nuke 'Em-Darth-Sugar Ron" seems not entirely in control of the tone of his policy toward the Soviets, his "trainers," having changed his nickname so often, are partially to blame.

Oliphant's depiction of a "dual Reagan" (see fig. 60) is the first stage in the cartoon president's metamorphosis from the hard-line Cold Warrior of his first years in office, to the peaceful statesman of his last. This

transition, however, was gradual, and Reagan emerges not as a forceful and decisive player on the world stage, but rather as a leader swept forward, somewhat unwillingly, in the wake of Gorbachev's political momentum. One cartoon depicts Reagan shouting "why does everything happen at once? MOMMYYYYY!," as he is carried off by an enormous dove labeled "Gorbachev Missile Initiative."\(^{144}\)

Another cartoon (fig.-62, following page) ridicules the president's insistence on using American research into SDI as a bargaining chip in arms-control negotiations. Oliphant depicts the president's confidence in improbable "Star Wars" technology as mere whimsy:\(^{145}\) Reagan here lives a fantasy-life, unwilling to grasp the new realities of Soviet-American relations.

\(^{144}\) Oliphant, *Nothing Basically Wrong*, 3 March 1987, 118.

In the face of the down-to-earth, Western-looking Gorbachev (cartoon Soviet leaders seldom say "gonna"), "Rex" Reagan, in his science fiction B-movie costume, comes off as a man still mired in outdated Cold War clichés.

The militaristic posturing of fig. 62's Reagan, however, disappeared almost entirely from Oliphant's cartoons after the failed Reykjavik summit of October 1986. During the course of 1987, as U.S.-Soviet relations warmed and Reagan considered the Gorbachev proposal to remove all medium-range nuclear missiles from Europe, Oliphant's most frequent characterization of the president became that of

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166 Oliphant, Nothing Basically Wrong, 15 January 1987, 93.
sideshow performer. With Oliphant, Reagan's dealings with the Soviet Union metamorphosed from a superpower deathmatch into a kind of vaudevillian public-relations contest:

(Fig. 63)\(^{147}\)

The upstaged president has finally met his match at political show-biz. But the cartoon's portrayal of Gorbachev's public-relations success doesn't necessarily demean or belittle Reagan. Had Oliphant wanted to do so he could easily have given him the Jimmy Carter treatment: that is, shrink him into oblivion.\(^{148}\) But Reagan remains roughly

\(^{147}\) Oliphant, "The Ron and Gorby Show," Nothing Basically Wrong, 1 December 1987, 59.

the same size as his Soviet rival, and the overall effect of the cartoon is favorable to both leaders, the nature of whose competition is far more praiseworthy than that of the race toward Armageddon of pre-Gorbachev days. Even Punk's oblique reference to the continuing Soviet presence in Afghanistan can't spoil the show.

MacNelly's version of the "Ron and Gorby show" is more subdued, but the idea is the same: President Reagan has found his equal, if not his better, at public relations:

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(Fig. 64)¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 4 April 1986.
This is a much more positive Reagan than MacNelly’s dangerously bullheaded president of the dark Andropov-Chernenko years. Here, though television superficially reduces still-formidable ideological disagreements to a matter of differing flags, the medium at least provides a level playing field, in which the leaders engage in honest and up-front diplomacy. Reagan and Gorbachev are facing each other without scowling, and they are talking.

Ultimately, Reagan emerges in both cartoonists’ characterizations as Gorbachev’s equal in taking the world to a safer plateau. The signing of the INF treaty, for instance, occasioned an unprecedentedly laudatory Oliphant cartoon:

(Fig. 65)170

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170 Oliphant, Nothing Basically Wrong, 18 March 1987, 42.
This is one of Oliphant's very few "serious" portrayals of Reagan, in that the president is depicted without the slightest hint of burlesque or ridicule. This extremely positive depiction is among the smallest and least-detailed in the body of Oliphant's Reagan cartoons. The reason is that the most effective praise, in the inherently fault-finding medium of cartoons, often comes from the humbling balm of reduction, which removes the cartoon's subject from close scrutinization. Fig. 66 uses the same technique to praise Reagan and Gorbachev for another important accomplishment: their narrowing of the vast and dangerous propagandistic gap between the Soviet Union and the United States:

(Fig. 66) 171

171 Oliphant, Nothing Basically Wrong, 3 June 1988, 152.
The cartoon praises Reagan for abandoning his previous inflammatory "evil empire" rhetoric in favor of pursuing peaceful cooperation with his Soviet counterpart. These small silhouettes must be great men indeed to have slain such an enormous foe.

Similarly, MacNelly's cartoons of Reagan's handling of Soviet-American relations during 1987 and 1988 depict the president very favorably. Though he shies away from the kind of sober and "serious" depictions of Reagan's arms-control accomplishments employed by Oliphant, MacNelly nevertheless portrays an earnest and capable president, as in fig. 67, (following page), where Reagan and Gorbachev toast their agreement on the INF treaty.

There are exceptions to the favorable portrayal. One cartoon expresses doubts as to the adequacy of American military strength under Reagan, and another, in which a blind Reagan is led by a blind dog given him by Gorbachev, dismisses the idea that the Soviets will honestly cooperate in verification of arms reduction.
Though MacNelly uses the Raisa-Nancy punchline to avoid seeming pompous, the cartoon still constitutes the highest praise for President Reagan. The president is here a variation of Oliphant's small silhouette: a leader who, despite having just made the world a much safer place, can still crack jokes about his wife. At this point, MacNelly's Reagan is also a statesman above the reactionary forces of his own party:

Recalling MacNelly's earlier depictions of the president's insularity from the Republican far-Right, fig. 69 again portrays, this time in an even more positive sense, the Ronald Reagan who, despite the shackles, is absolutely his own man. On this score, Oliphant is in complete agreement:


175 Oliphant, Nothing Basically Wrong, 27 August 1987, 27.
Punk's astonished "I thought that was YOUR group" emphasizes the change of this Reagan from his previous incarnations in Oliphant's cartoons. Oliphant's Reagan, so long in league with the hawks and loons of his administration and party, finally emerges as a moderate.
Though MacNelly’s and Oliphant’s Reagan emerged late in his second term as a superior statesman in his handling of Soviet-American relations, this characterization appeared less frequently than the far more negative depiction engendered by the advent of the Iran-Contra scandal.

The scandal dawned on November 3, 1986, when a Lebanese magazine published a story alleging that the Reagan administration was making arms deals with Iran. As the scandal unfolded, it was revealed that administration officials such as National Security Adviser John Poindexter, Colonel Oliver North, as well as CIA director William Casey, despite an arms embargo on Iran and a proclaimed policy of withholding arms from countries that sponsored terrorism, had sold to Iran thousands of antitank and antiaircraft missiles and spare parts. In return the Reagan administration had received money and the release of hostages held by pro-Iranian terrorists. The Iranians were overcharged for the arms, and some of the surplus money was secretly diverted to
the Nicaraguan Contras, despite a congressional ban on Contra aid.

The scandal, which was by far the biggest of the Reagan presidency, faced the president with a choice of admitting that he had ordered the illegal arms sales and diversion of funds, or acknowledging that he was blind to the activities of his own staff.

During the period the Iran-Contra affair was unfolding, both MacNelly's and Oliphants' depictions of Reagan, with few exceptions, are uniformly disparaging. The severity of their criticism, however, often differs significantly. Though both cartoonists frequently portray the president as oafishly out of touch with his administration, Oliphant's Reagan often appears as a Nixon-style autocrat, and MacNelly sometimes painted the president as merely the gullible victim of his treacherous staff.

Not that MacNelly habitually deflected all blame for problems from the president to his aides. The nature of the Iran-Contra scandal prohibited the cartoonist from such a diversion of culpability: MacNelly's Reagan (fig. 70, following page), even if he didn't know about the illegal arms sales and diversions of money, should have known.
MacNelly has given the "didn't know but should have"
Reagan back his old checked cowboy outfit, but this time in
a somewhat more ironic light. Here, unlike MacNelly's
previous depictions of the cowboy-president, the only "bad
guy" to pit Reagan against is Reagan himself.

However, at the dawn of the scandal in November
1986, both cartoonists criticize President Reagan with the
most unflattering blow of all: likening him to Jimmy Carter.
One MacNelly cartoon, for instance, shows Carter's and
Reagan's severed heads as hunting trophies of the Ayatollah
Khomenei, who comfortably reads an edition of "Iranian Field and Stream," whose cover promises advice on "TRAPPING THE GREAT SATAN WITH LIVE BAIT.""177

Oliphant also unflatteringly associates Reagan with Carter. Sometimes the association is direct, as when Reagan climbs a mountain to ask a Carter-guru for advice; and sometimes it is indirect, as when Reagan is depicted—as Carter had been during the Iranian hostage crisis—as a "White House hostage.""178 In one cartoon, the president, hiding from the scandal, peers out from a tiny window in the bricked-up door to the "Oval Office." He says, "when the complete Iran story is told, you'll all understand." Punk replies, "do tell.""179

Stylistically, some of Oliphant's Iran-Contra cartoons also harken back to his cartoons from the waning days of the Carter administration. Fig. 71, for instance, (following page) is a subtle example of Oliphant's "Carterization" of Reagan.

177 MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 19 November 1986.
178 For an example of MacNelly's treatment of this theme, see fig 76.
179 Oliphant, Up to There in Alligators, 13 November 1986, 63.
The un-statesmanlike cardigan sweater and open-necked shirt refer directly to Oliphant’s cartoons of the Carter era, when the cartoonist put that president in such clothing as cartoon shorthand for ineptitude and weakness.

Some of Oliphant’s and MacNelly’s cartoons go beyond spoofing President Reagan as a Carter-style bumbler to denounce him as a sham, a phony, even a liar. Some of these cartoons convey a sense of enormous disappointment, as in fig. 72, where, given MacNelly’s until-now often moderate treatment of Reagan, one can without great difficulty put the Tribune cartoonist in place of the young autograph seeker:

180 Oliphant, Up to There in Alligators, 9 January 1987, 88.
This cartoon departs from MacNelly's previous depictions of Ronald Reagan, in that Reagan is here not merely an actor impersonating a president, but instead a full-fledged, corseted, hair-dyed phony. An article in the National Review underlines just how drastic a departure is the cartoon:

In MacNelly's emotional farewell to Ronald Reagan, a wordless picture, Reagan stands in his dressing room, on elevator shoes, in a corset, taking off his makeup. A fan, a little boy in a cowboy suit he clearly wears in emulation, has come for an autograph. Their eyes meet, and an illusion shatters. Maybe a liberal, who had no illusions in the first place, can't appreciate this one. For a conservative, it packs a primal punch.182

However, despite the article's claim, disappointment at President Reagan's Iran-Contra dealings is not exclusively

182 Brookhiser, 33.
the territory of accredited conservatives. Oliphant, though his pre-Iran-Contra cartoons might indicate that he had "no illusions in the first place," depicted Reagan at the beginning of the scandal in a tone not devoid of disappointment. One cartoon portrays the president as a self-destructing robot. As gears and springs and eyeballs pop out, Reagan is revealed as being essentially artificial; more a political automaton than a president. Another cartoon evidences an even stronger sense of disillusionment:

(Fig. 73)

Like MacNelly's elevator-booted Reagan discovered by the young autograph seeker, Oliphant's disarmed Reagan is

\[\text{Consistency}\]

\[\text{Standing Small}\]

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\[183\] Oliphant, Up to There in Alligators, 21 November 1986, 65.

\[184\] Oliphant, Up to There in Alligators, 20 November 1986, 65.
revealed as a phony, a shoddy imitation of a strong and capable leader.

Depictions of President Reagan as a charlatan, however, in time gave way to the more familiar portrayal of Reagan as an uninformed buffoon. This image of the president was reinforced by the release of the Tower Commission report, which characterized Reagan as a confused and unaware president who allowed "amateurish" staff members to turn United States foreign policy into "chaos." MacNelly's and Oliphant's reactions to the report are similar, echoing the depiction of Reagan as a man of questionable memory and competence. Oliphant depicts Reagan (who still claimed not to remember much about the arms-for-hostages deal) as a judge, pushing aside the Tower report and bopping himself on the head with his gavel while declaring himself "not guilty by reason of amnesia--case dismissed!" Likewise, MacNelly's response to the report was a drawing of an absurdly-forgetful president (fig. 74, following page).

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In addition to depicting the president's mind as a knowledge-shredder, the cartoonist has here employed the device of the unflattering close-up. At this proximity, Reagan seems much older than he is in other MacNelly cartoons, because of the proliferation of wrinkles.

MacNelly, however, despite his harsh criticism of the president as the scandal unfolded, sometimes leaps to Reagan's defense. One such cartoon was occasioned by a nationally televised speech President Reagan made on March 4, 1987, in which he responded to the Tower Commission report, which had been issued a week earlier. In his speech,

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Reagan admitted for the first time that there had been an arms-for-hostages deal, and conceded that the deal had been "a mistake." MacNelly's reaction to the speech (fig. 75) echoes the tone of an editorial in his pre-Tribune employer, the Richmond News Leader:

Last night President Reagan faced the nation. He looked solemn and sounded contrite, but he spoke with undiminished authority. While admitting his administration made mistakes, he said he intends to move ahead with his agenda during the two final years of his presidency. His speech ranks among his finest hours."187

While not as frankly worshipful as the Richmond News Leader editorial, MacNelly's reply to the president's speech is nonetheless highly complimentary:

(Fig 75)188

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188 MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 6 March 1987.
Here, President Reagan emerges unscathed from the scandal. The teflon, though perhaps scratched and dented, is still there. But the resurrection of MacNelly's Reagan to his pre-scandal stature was only temporary. In fig. 76, which appeared a few days after fig. 75, the president is once again ensnared by the Iran-Contra affair. Unlike "The Incredible Gipper," this Reagan has no shackles-breaking magic:

(Fig. 76)

That MacNelly uses the Watergate-inspired "Irangate" without derisiveness or irony is surprising, in that the cartoonist

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MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 8 March 1987.
had until now strenuously avoided linking Reagan even indirectly with the infamous 37th president.

But MacNelly, in portraying the president's relationship to the scandal, generally continued to draw a "didn't know but should have" Reagan. The televised Iran-Contra inquiry of the summer of 1987 compelled MacNelly to draw a cartoon ridiculing the notion that Reagan could have played a decisive role in the affair. Under a caption reading,

From the ELECTRIFYING testimony now coming out of the IRAN-Contra HEARING we can finally PIECE TOGETHER this CRUCIAL conversation between President Reagan and Director Casey..."

the president "converses" with a simian-looking Casey:

(Reagan): Well...
(Casey): Huh?
(Reagan): What?
(Casey): Nah, nothin'...
(Reagan): Pardon me?
(Casey): Forget it.
(Reagan): If you say so, Bill.""

This exchange, for all its banality, implies that Reagan is blamelessly unaware of any illegal arms sales or diversions of money. MacNelly instead paints Casey as the cartoon's villain. With his evasive responses to Reagan's questions ("nah, nothin'...forget it"), the CIA director obviously knows a great deal about the affair, and is purposefully, even treacherously, keeping the president in the dark.

Again, MacNelly's Reagan is more naive and out of touch than conniving and wicked.

Oliphant portrays president's depth of involvement in the affair slightly differently. In one cartoon, Reagan enthusiastically watches the televised congressional Iran-Contra inquiry, which Oliphant has drawn to resemble the "Wheel of Fortune" game show. The president, exclaiming that he is having fun, eagerly shouts out letters he thinks might complete the show's game-board, which reads: "WH*T D*D H* KN*W *ND WH*N D*D H* KN*W *T?" The cartoon gives the impression of a frivolous president, who is alarmingly ignorant of the serious questions the inquiry is spelling out before him.

Oliphant, however, frequently depicts a more sinister version of the president than his comically out-of-touch Reagan. In July, 1987, Rear Adm. John Poindexter, who had been Reagan's national security adviser during the Iran-Contra dealings, testified to the congressional inquiry that he did not inform the president of the diversion of funds to the Contras in order to maintain "deniability" for Reagan. Oliphant responded to this testimony with a cartoon in which the kind of trivial disregard for political reality found in fig. 74 becomes a kind Machiavellian (Nixonian?) contempt for ethics:

112 Oliphant, Up To There In Alligators, 5 May 1987, 152.
This is one of Oliphant's more accusatory Reagan cartoons to come out of the scandal, in that this Reagan obviously knows a great deal more about the Iran-Contra affair than he cares to admit. Punk's friend even goes so far as to name the president as a possible "unindictable co-conspirator." In drawing this formidable Reagan, Oliphant has stripped him of his usually goofy appearance. The tousled pompadour has been slicked down and stiffened; the absurdly long face has been compacted; the thin neck has been thickened. Another Oliphant cartoon is even more accusatory, in that it

""" Oliphant, Nothing Basically Wrong, 21 July 1987, 8.
directly associates President Reagan with the ignoble former President Nixon:

(Fig. 78)\(^{174}\)

Here, the cartoon's intended guilt-by-association is reinforced by Nixon's and Reagan's similar clothing and posture. And, as in fig. 77, Oliphant obviously suggests the president's guilt, here by having Punk ironically call him a "non-indictee."\(^{175}\)

\(^{174}\) Oliphant, Nothing Basically Wrong, 17 March 1988, 105.

\(^{175}\) President Reagan had in fact consulted former President Nixon about how to handle the unfolding scandal. Nixon reportedly told Reagan to make available all information pertaining to the arms trade and funds diversion. "This is not going to be another Watergate as long as you keep ahead of the curve," he recalled saying to Reagan. Trager, 38.
In contrast to Oliphant’s portrayal of a Nixonian Reagan, MacNelly reacts to Poindexter's testimony by drawing the president as a kind of failed George Washington:

(Fig. 79)\textsuperscript{194}

Though obviously guilty, this Reagan is much less intimidating than Oliphant’s malevolent president of figs. 77 and 78. Though his childishly diminutive stature makes him look weak and inept (yet another "Carterization" of Reagan), he is hardly a Nixon. The unsavory concept of President Reagan’s "plausible deniability," as opposed to the "deniable culpability" of Oliphant’s Reagan, is used

\textsuperscript{194} MacNelly, \textit{Chicago Tribune}. 29 July 1987.
ironically, in that the notion of such a simple-looking child understanding such a complicated idea is ridiculous.
During Reagan's first term, Oliphant and MacNelly differ greatly in their portrayal of the president's political image and administrative leadership. While MacNelly praises Reagan as a strong, independent political force, Oliphant consistently derides the president as an out-of-touch, politically feeble administrator. After Reagan's 1984 reelection, however, (and especially after the Iran-Contra scandal), MacNelly moves closer to Oliphant's appraisal of the president, depicting Reagan as weak and foolish.

Reagan's First Term

The gap between the cartoonists' first-term portrayals arises from their differing interpretations of Reagan's political style. This style was one of detachment from the conflicts and squabbles of day-to-day governance.

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197 See Chapter Six.
Reagan remained largely aloof from the executive decision-making process, preferring let his subordinates hash out policy questions. As Reagan himself put it, "I believe that you surround yourself with the best people you can find, delegate authority, and don’t interfere." Whereas Oliphant perceives this detachment as a weakness, MacNelly views it as a kind of noble individualism, and portrays Reagan as above petty politics.

MacNelly’s portrayal of Reagan as a heroic loner transcends party lines, in that the president not only stands aloof from the Democrats, but also from the government as a whole, including his own cabinet and party. For instance, MacNelly ridicules the Republican party’s attempts to use Reagan’s popularity for political gain. As the 1982 congressional elections drew near, MacNelly drew a cartoon in which a frumpy-looking, overweight GOP elephant—if it is possible to draw an overweight elephant—unsuccessfully tries to fit into a slim pair of jeans labeled "RON." The elephant wonders, "Geez, I wonder if I can get another season outta these..."

MacNelly drew a similar cartoon after the Republicans failed to repeat their 1980 House and Senate gains in the 1982 elections (instead, the Democrats had

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198 Mayer and McManus, 24.

gained 26 House seats). Reacting to the disappointing Republican performance, MacNelly portrays Reagan as isolated from the party's political battles, and ridicules the Republicans' failure to translate Reagan's personal popularity into Congressional victories. In this cartoon, Republican elephants fight to save an embattled "Reaganism" ship from the Democrats. One of the elephants says, "Go below and tell the skipper not to worry... We're fighting on with him to the end!!" But the "skipper" (Reagan) is far away from the conflict, paddling happily away in the ship's lifeboat.\textsuperscript{200}

The individualism of MacNelly's Reagan is no less evident at the executive level, in that the cartoonist draws the president as entirely separate from his own administration. Sometimes MacNelly takes this separation to extremes, as when he draws Reagan as a sheriff, who actually leads a posse against his own cabinet, whom he calls "The Reagan gang."\textsuperscript{201}

Oliphant, unlike MacNelly, depicts Reagan's detachment from political squabbling not as individuality, but instead as imbecility. In fig. 80 (following page), the political "battle for the president's mind" seems a futile conflict:

\textsuperscript{200} MacNelly, \textit{Chicago Tribune}. 26 December 1982.

\textsuperscript{201} MacNelly, \textit{Chicago Tribune}. 19 August 1982.
Here, Reagan's apparent lack of interest in the battle, plus the debris flying from Reagan's head (the tin can, dead cat, and copy of Reader's Digest) strongly suggests that the president's apparent detachment is mere brainlessness.

Other Oliphant cartoons depict Reagan's detachment as foolish indifference to the perilous course his administration is taking. One such cartoon shows Reagan, in shorts and sandals, lounging on the deck of a ship. The president asks, "How'm I doin'?" Reagan receives no reply, however, because a fierce storm is ripping sails from their...
masts and blowing crew members overboard. A similar cartoon depicts Reagan asleep at the wheel:

(Fig. 81)

Here, the president's detachment is not individualism, but "narcolepsy," hardly a reassuring attribute. Oliphant's Reagan, however, is not always oblivious to political reality. Sometimes, as a means of criticizing

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204 Oliphant, Make My Day!, 16 August 1984, 35.

205 The cartoon alludes to Reagan's habit of falling asleep at cabinet meetings and public events, as when he nodded off during a 1982 audience with the Pope. This habit was widely reported, though the president's handlers tried vigorously to downplay or cover it up. "White House image-makers...kept Reagan as isolated as possible and resolutely (and untruthfully) denied that he napped or fell asleep in meetings." See Cannon, 501.
Reagan for his choice of staff, Oliphant awakens Reagan from his blissful sleep, and pushes him into the mud with his subordinates. One cartoon, for instance, depicts Reagan mired in toxic waste, which is leaking from barrels named for scandal-plagued members of Reagan's administration. Among the visible names are "Meese," "Watt," and "Burford." Oliphant's point is that Reagan, after all, chose these unfortunate administrators in the first place. This kind of criticism is also evident in Oliphant's "Debategate" cartoons.

Debategate

In 1983, Laurence Barrett in Gambling with History revealed that the 1980 Reagan campaign had obtained some papers from a briefing book meant to prepare President Carter for his October 28 debate with Reagan. While MacNelly distances Reagan from the resulting scandal, Oliphant puts the president in the thick of it, as a means of emphasizing Reagan's perceived lapses in administrative judgment.

These barrels refer to: presidential adviser (later Attorney General) Edwin Meese III, who was the subject of ongoing conflict-of-interest inquiries; controversial former Interior Secretary James Watt; and Anne Gorsuch Burford, who was forced to resign as head of the EPA in 1983, because of toxic waste dumping scandals. Oliphant, The Year of Living Perilously, 29 March 1984. (See Chapter Three.)
For MacNelly, the theft of the papers is hardly a serious matter. In one cartoon, for instance, the Tribune cartoonist uses the scandal as merely a nostalgic opportunity to again skewer Jimmy Carter. Carter, back in Plains, answers a question about the matter: "The briefing book? Last time I saw it, I was asking Amy about nookier weapons." In the next room, we uncover the source of the theft. Amy Carter, in bed beneath a poster of Reagan, grins wickedly and hugs toy GOP elephants.\textsuperscript{207} The cartoon isolates Reagan from the briefing book scandal, in that it focuses attention entirely on the shortcomings of the previous president. (Who, as MacNelly derisively notes, once announced that he had sought his young daughter's opinion of the importance of arms control.)

MacNelly also, unlike Oliphant, avoids using "Debategate," the most common name for the scandal, with its unflattering connotations of Nixon. (Though that president does obliquely enter the picture in one cartoon, as the author of a book on "How Not to Handle It," which a worried-looking Reagan studies intently.)\textsuperscript{208}

For Oliphant, the scandal serves as a means of drawing attention to Reagan's perceived shortcomings as an administrator. In May 1984, a Congressional Debategate

\textsuperscript{207} MacNelly, \textit{Chicago Tribune}, July 1 1983.

\textsuperscript{208} MacNelly, "Speaking of briefing books," \textit{Chicago Tribune}, July 8, 1983.
inquiry revealed that CIA Director William Casey, a Reagan appointee, had played a role in the theft of the briefing book papers. Oliphant responded with a cartoon in which Reagan, worrying about the upcoming presidential election, unsuccessfully tries to hide Casey by sweeping him under a rug along with tin cans and dead cats. Edwin Meese (himself a liability to Reagan) comments doubtfully on Reagan's efforts: "Everything looks nice and neat for November, boss—except for Casey, of course..." While not blaming Reagan for the theft of the briefing papers, the cartoon nonetheless reinforces Oliphant's portrayal of a president with a highly questionable taste in staff.

The '84 Election

During Reagan's 1984 reelection campaign, Oliphant's negative depiction of the president moves closer to MacNelly's more favorable assessment. This is because Oliphant shares MacNelly's apparent disdain for the Democratic candidate, Walter "Fritz" Mondale, and other would-be Democratic opponents. Oliphant's Reagan, by virtue

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20 The degree of Casey's involvement in the theft was never precisely determined. See Woodward, 277-280.

210 See footnote 206, above.

211 Pat Oliphant, The Year of Living Perilously, 23 May 1984, 171.
of the Democrats' perceived weakness and ineptitude, emerges from these cartoons as a strong and forceful leader.

In fig. 82, for instance, the three leading contenders for the Democratic nomination, Mondale, Jesse Jackson, and Gary Hart, are mere insects, whom the powerful Reagan watches with amusement:

(Fig. 82)\textsuperscript{212}

Another Oliphant cartoon repeats this theme of a strong Reagan versus weak Democrats. Under a poster offering a reward for "Big Ron," a tall, powerfully built Reagan drinks in a saloon, ignoring the squabbling of nearby Democratic nomination contestants. An effeminate Mondale, hitting the others with a purse, says, "Oh, stand back, you bunch of

\textsuperscript{212} Oliphant, The Year of Living Perilously, 21 March 1984, 148.
sillies--/'// go claim the reward, and we'll all go to the
White House!" Not likely.

In a similar cartoon, MacNelly depicts Mondale and
Gary Hart as gunslingers, having a showdown in the middle of
a dusty street. Watching them with amusement is "R. Reagan,
Undertaker." MacNelly's Reagan is likewise amused in fig.
83, where he prepares to answer one of Mondale's rhetorical
campaign questions:

(Fig. 83)²¹⁵

²¹³ Oliphant, The Year of Living Perilously, 22 February
1984, 127.


²¹⁵ MacNelly refers to Mondale's use of "where's the
beef?" the popular slogan of a hamburger chain's advertising
campaign. Mondale had borrowed the slogan to denounce Reagan
as shallow and superficial. MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 21
Here, as in Oliphant's depiction of "Big Ron" versus the purse-wielding Mondale, the president's Democratic opponent is simply no match for the powerful Reagan.

Even when MacNelly depicts Reagan as less strong than the mighty bull of fig. 83, the president still emerges as the better of the two candidates. In one cartoon, for instance, MacNelly compares a "Reagan cabinet meeting" to a hypothetical "Mondale cabinet meeting." In the former, Reagan nods off while his staff attends to business. In the latter, Mondale is wide awake, but his mere presence has put his staff to sleep.\textsuperscript{216} Similarly, Oliphant's Reagan is the quintessence of vitality compared to the boring Mondale:

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{The Dutch in Wally Show} \label{fig:84}
\end{figure}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{MacNelly} MacNelly, \textit{Chicago Tribune}, 7 September 1984.
\bibitem{Oliphant} Oliphant, \textit{Make My Day!} 18 October 1984, 67.
\end{thebibliography}

March 1984.
Mondale, with his wheelbarrow of facts and figures, doesn't stand a chance against the showmanship of this Bible-toting, stilt-wearing, flag-waving Reagan.

Reagan's Second Term

MacNelly's and Oliphant's parallel assessment of the Reagan-Mondale race proved correct, in that Reagan won a landslide reelection victory, carrying every state except Mondale's home state of Minnesota, and the District of Columbia. After the election, however, Reagan's political stature lessens in the eyes of both cartoonists.

For Oliphant, this diminishment of Reagan is just a return to his pre-election norm. For MacNelly, though, it represents a more serious change. As opposed to his first-term depiction of the president, MacNelly now portrays Reagan as politically feeble. Though, as shown in Chapter Six, the dawn of the Iran-Contra scandal in November 1986 intensified this depiction, MacNelly had already started to darken his portrayal of the president at the beginning of that year. At this time, MacNelly abandoned his portrayal of an individualistic, detached Reagan, in favor of depicting him at the mercy of the political bickering of his staff.

One such cartoon (fig. 85, following page) is reminiscent of Oliphant's "Battle for the President's Mind":
The cartoon refers to the prolonged infighting of Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and Secretary of State George Shultz. According to Lou Cannon, this squabbling was seriously interfering with Reagan's political decisiveness:

[Reagan] was unwilling to...side openly with one highly valued staff member against another, especially Shultz and Weinberger, old foes who ruffled easily at real or imagined slights...His unwillingness to give offense cost him dearly.218

In early November 1986, the political potency of MacNelly's Reagan slips even further. The first story of what was to become the Iran-Contra scandal appeared on November 3. And in the next day's Congressional elections,

219 Cannon, 340.
Republicans lost their six-year Senate majority. In MacNelly's response to the Senate upset, a GOP elephant slips from a "Senate" tree, while a frightened Reagan just barely hangs on to one of the limbs.\textsuperscript{220}

During Reagan's last year as president, MacNelly's dominant portrayal of the president is that of a politically feeble, deluded man. Though he appears favorably in his dealings with Gorbachev (see Chapter Five), MacNelly's Reagan never completely recovers from the Iran-Contra scandal. A year after the scandal emerged, for instance, and with more than a year of the Reagan presidency remaining, MacNelly depicts Reagan as having outlived his usefulness:

(Fig. 86)\textsuperscript{221}

\textsuperscript{220} MacNelly, "@*#!? Teflon..." Chicago Tribune, 6 November 1986.

\textsuperscript{221} MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 6 November 1987.
Similarly, Oliphant dismisses Reagan as a leader well before the end of the president's final term. One such cartoon has Reagan on his deathbed, weakly pleading with uninterested senators and congressmen for more Contra aid. Reagan murmurs, "One last request... I want you guys in Congress to get out there and kill one more commie for the Gipper." In another cartoon, Reagan's perceived political inadequacy is so great that Oliphant has turned him into a legless statue:

(Fig. 87)\(^{223}\)

The missing legs and the child's question are a pun on "Where's the Rest of Me?", the title of Reagan's 1965


\(^{223}\) Oliphant, *Nothing Basically Wrong*, 19 August 1987, 22.
autobiography. (The book's name derives from a line in Reagan's 1942 film, *King's Row.* Reagan's character, awakening after a sadistic doctor has cut off his legs, cries "where's the rest of me?")

The 1988 revelation, by White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan, that the president's schedule had for years been influenced by astrology, hardly served to improve Reagan's cartoon image. For both Oliphant and MacNelly, this revelation was merely a footnote in their mutual depiction of a befuddled, out-of-touch president. In their portrayals of Reagan's May 1988 Moscow summit meeting with Gorbachev, both cartoonists ridicule the president's newly-disclosed astrological proclivities. Oliphant draws Reagan having a pre-summit "final briefing" in a tent with a fortune-telling "Madame Zara," and MacNelly pairs the president with an "interpreter" of dubious ability (fig. 88, following page).

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225 Regan revealed that Nancy Reagan was in constant contact with an astrologer about the president's agenda. "Virtually every major move and decision the Reagans made during my time as White House Chief of Staff was cleared in advance with a woman in San Francisco who drew up horoscopes to make certain that the planets were in a favorable alignment for the enterprise." Regan, 3.

In the last half of 1988, while George Bush and Michael Dukakis vied to succeed Reagan, the president appeared infrequently in both cartoonists' work. When he appears at all, he is usually depicted as a kind of political obstacle to Bush, as when MacNelly draws Bush happily campaigning from a platform at the back of a "Rontrack" train. What Bush can't see, though, is that the front of the train has derailed, and has started to take the rest of the train with it over a cliff.²²

Both cartoonists' Reagans remain goofy and out of touch until the very end. MacNelly's farewell cartoon has

²²² MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 30 May 1988.
Reagan and the First Lady on horses, trotting off into the sunset. The president, however, is sitting the wrong way, so that his horse must walk backwards in order to take him sunsetward. Oliphant echoes this movie-style ending, drawing Reagan waving goodbye to his own screen image:

(Fig 89)

After eight years, right up to this Hollywood ending, Oliphant’s Reagan remains unable to distinguish fantasy from reality. This is a fitting end for a president who, in Oliphant’s view, "drew his every movement and utterance from old B-movie scripts." 

227 MacNelly, Chicago Tribune, 4 December 1988.


231 Reaves, 11.
CONCLUSION

MacNelly and Oliphant together drew roughly twelve hundred cartoons about Reagan during the eight years of his presidency. The cartoons used as examples in this thesis were selected from this larger group as best representing each cartoonist’s characterization of the president. From a comparison of these characterizations emerges the answer to the question, "what impression of Reagan would two people have, one seeing only MacNelly’s cartoons and the other only Oliphant’s?"

The answer is that their impressions would not differ very much, because MacNelly, despite his reputation as a conservative, draws a Reagan not unlike that of the politically unaffiliated Oliphant. In Chapter One, which covers his "honeymoon" phase, we see how both cartoonists, in depicting a "neutral" Reagan, reserve judgment of the new president. Then, in Chapter Two, we see both cartoonists' portrayals of Reagan become more unfavorable, questioning the president's economic policies. Subsequently, in Chapter Four, we see MacNelly and Oliphant both depicting Reagan as confused and misguided in his foreign policy. In Chapter Five, we see that both cartoonists first criticize the
president's Soviet policy as obstinate and dangerous, then mutually praise Reagan as a magnanimous statesman. In Chapter Six, we see both cartoonists denounce Reagan as a liar and a phony for his role in the Iran-Contra scandal. And in the final chapter, we see how MacNelly's appraisal of Reagan's political potency, though initially favorable, parallels Oliphant's disparaging assessment during the president's final term. Only in Chapter Three, "The Home Front," do Oliphant and MacNelly differ significantly in their appraisal of the president, in that Oliphant devotes many more cartoons to Reagan's domestic policy than does MacNelly. Yet, as pointed out, MacNelly's few cartoons on the subject depict a Reagan similar to Oliphant's in folly and ignorance.

Among all the various cartoon images of Reagan described above, the most frequent by both cartoonists is that of an amiable incompetent, a well-meaning but politically ineffective leader. That two cartoonists of dissimilar political leanings should both draw Reagan this way is at first surprising, but an obvious reason for this mutually unfavorable depiction of Reagan is the nature of political cartooning itself. "Cartoons are ridicule and satire by definition," says Paul Conrad, political cartoonist for the Los Angeles Times. "A negative attitude
is the nature of the art." MacNelly himself, as mentioned in the Introduction, states that a good cartoonist should be an "assassin."

Not that there is no room in political cartoons for praise. As mentioned above, there are a number of instances where both cartoonists praise Reagan, usually by focusing their ridicule on the president's opponents, such as Congress and Democratic presidential candidates. Yet because of the overall negative nature of political cartooning, it is only natural that these kinds of favorable cartoons should be infrequent, and that Oliphant's and MacNelly's depictions of Reagan should be, on the whole, unfavorable.

As quoted in the Introduction, MacNelly states that political cartoonists have a special aptitude for getting at the truth about their subjects. How accurate is this assertion? How much truth about Reagan do MacNelly's and Oliphant's cartoons contain? Though this thesis has been written at a time (less than three years after Reagan left office) when few scholarly appraisals of the Reagan presidency have been written, most of the books that have so far emerged about the president echo at least part of the cartoonists' portrayal. For instance, many of Reagan's former staff have similarly portrayed the president as somewhat feeble-minded and out of touch with reality. As

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232 Adler, et al., 83.
mentioned above, Donald Regan, former treasury secretary and White House chief of staff, revealed the influence of astrology on the president. Larry Speakes, former White House spokesman, and former budget director David Stockman have likewise written unflattering accounts of Reagan. Yet even these books present more favorable impressions of Reagan than do MacNelly and Oliphant, giving the president credit for integrity and effective political leadership. As well, former speechwriter Peggy Noonan, in her book What I Saw at the Revolution, presents a glowing account the president, portraying him as a decent, capable statesman. The most balanced and fair-minded book about Reagan so far has been reporter Lou Cannon's President Reagan (cited above). Though Cannon's portrait reveals Reagan as superficial, and as a poor administrator, he also paints the president as an affable, committed, and masterful leader. And, though his thinking was often wishful and disorganized, Cannon's Reagan is more intelligent than either of the cartoonists'. At present, then, it seems as if MacNelly and Oliphant presented part of the truth about President Reagan, accurately conveying his weaknesses, but largely neglecting his strengths.

The reason for this omission of the positive aspects of President Reagan can again be found in the negative nature of political cartooning. Part of this nature is that complex ideas are alien to political cartoons, which are
limited to presenting simple, direct concepts, one at a time. British cartoonist Nicholas Garland has articulated this aspect of cartooning:

In its directness and simplicity, caricature does not allow for fine degrees of criticism. It has an awful bluntness. Writers can elaborate clear distinctions between various aspects of a man's life: so-and-so is an absolute swine to his colleagues but a devoted father and husband. Caricaturists cannot go in for such fine degrees of criticism even if they wish to. They pursue a different kind of truth.\(^\text{133}\)

The "different kind of truth" that Garland describes, then, is a one-sided, fragmentary truth. Political cartoonists, bound by the negativity and simplicity of their medium, cannot temper their work, as can writers, with "yets," "buts," and "on the other hands," and therefore must necessarily create lopsided impressions of their subjects. This is why, for instance, Oliphant focuses on the victims of the Reagan economic program (see Chapter Three), while the brighter side of that program is all but absent in his cartoons. This is also why the word "cartoon" is often used in a pejorative sense, as in "Smith's biography of Jones is so one-sided and superficial as to be a mere cartoon of the man."

This does not, however, mean that political cartoons can or should attempt to emulate the manner of written editorials. The virtue of political cartoons lies in their

\(^{133}\) Nicholas Garland, "Cartoonist's-Eye View," National Review, 1 September 1989, 32.
very directness and simplicity, which give them a unique ability to elicit strong emotional responses. According to Newsweek, "A good cartoon is as powerful as a thousand-watt spotlight; it evokes a visceral reaction that not even the most stirring editorial can duplicate." This kind of emotional power makes political cartoons arguably the best means of calling attention to the faults of government. Mike Peters, editorial cartoonist for the Dayton Daily News, says that "when [politicians are] telling a lie, a journalist reporting the quote cannot say: 'Hey, that guy's a liar.' But the cartoonist can say: 'Wait a minute. That guy's not wearing a stitch on his body'." And this is what Oliphant and MacNelly have done in their cartoons about President Reagan. When Reagan performed well in office, they largely left it to editorial writers and columnists to point out, and when Reagan performed badly, they took it upon themselves to simply, clearly, and very loudly make certain it did not go unnoticed.

234 Adler, et al., 75.

235 Ibid., 85.
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