

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Reagan recalls a 1976 conversation

This past month during his vacation in Santa Barbara, President Reagan confirmed to me his recollection of an extraordinary conversation we had aboard a commercial flight days before the 1976 election.

I was acting as a volunteer for Lyndon LaRouche's first presidential campaign at the time, and Reagan, having barely lost the Republican nomination, was campaigning for Gerry Ford.

The LaRouche campaign was scrambling at the last minute to buy an election-eve half-hour TV spot on NBC. It was suggested to propose to Reagan that the time be shared with him, to give both him and LaRouche an opportunity to warn the American population against the grave consequences of electing Jimmy Carter.

A friend called me early one morning about four days before the election and told me he had learned Reagan was going to be on a flight stopping in San Francisco, where I lived at the time, in about an hour. I raced to the airport, and bought a ticket for the commuter flight. There was open seating.

Boarding the plane, I spotted Reagan sitting beside Michael Deaver. I wasted no time slipping into the seat directly in front of Reagan, strapped myself in, and waited until the plane was aloft and the seat-belt sign was turned off.

Then I rose up and leaned back over my seat, staring right into the face of a surprised Reagan. "I am Nick Benton, and I represent Lyndon LaRouche," I announced.

Deaver grumbled, "You guys never give up, do you?"

Reagan looked amazed, but curious. I proceeded to explain LaRouche's plans and to offer him the opportunity to share the half-hour spot on national TV the night before the election, should we succeed in securing it. I explained to him why LaRouche considered buying that time so important, and the great issues at stake for the nation and the world in the election.

Reagan was about to engage in the conversation, but Deaver nudged him and he stopped. But he continued to listen. I made my point as strongly as I could, and then concluded. Reagan said he would take the offer under serious consideration, and I thanked him, turned back around and sat down as the plane landed in Los Angeles.

As Reagan left the plane, he again assured me he would let the LaRouche campaign know his answer, and would consider it seriously.

Reagan did not accept the offer, but the LaRouche campaign succeeded, anyway, in raising the funds to buy the TV spot. LaRouche went on national TV and delivered a historic, half-hour election eve address that was his introduction to millions of Americans. It probably succeeded in preventing Carter from winning the election, but Ford was unwilling to act on massive evidence of vote fraud, and conceded the election the next day.

Two years later, I met Reagan again, introduced by a common friend. The friend showed Reagan a copy of *EIR* and asked Reagan if he read it. Reagan leafed through it and said, "Yes, I get this." Then the friend introduced me as a representative of *EIR*. I asked Reagan if he remembered our conversation on the plane in 1976.

Reagan stared at me a moment, and then said, "By golly, I remember that!"

I added, "And you remember that we succeeded in getting that TV spot on election eve?"

He responded, "Yes, I remember that, too."

I said, "And that Carter won just as we were afraid he would, and has been a disaster, just as I said?"

"Yes," he said.

Reagan directly encountered the seemingly impossible battle and success of the LaRouche campaign in 1976 to put its candidate on national TV for a full half hour the night before the election.

Then, he read the *EIR*, and had a personal exchange with LaRouche, himself, in front of a room full of people at a candidate's night during the New Hampshire primary campaign in early 1980.

Whether Reagan was directly aware of it or not, LaRouche shaped the political atmosphere in Washington, D.C. for the adoption of the Strategic Defense Initiative policy, with a major address there on that subject over a year before the President's historic March 23, 1983 speech embracing the policy.

Then, a year ago, during a press conference in Chicago, a reporter confronted Reagan with the stunning upset victories of two Democrats associated with LaRouche in the Illinois state primary that Spring. Reagan's comment was, "I am not here to do battle with LaRouche."

Now, as the storm-clouds of strategic and economic crises gather, the question is whether or not Reagan will learn from the past 11 years of experience with LaRouche's credibility in time to adopt LaRouche's proposals to save the country, or whether he will repeat the mistake he made in 1976 when he mistakenly believed then that LaRouche's idea of trying to get on national TV on election eve was "just too extreme."