

Editorial

The chickens come home to roost

Should anyone be surprised that the results of President Ronald Reagan's fantasy-ridden policies on relations with the Soviet Union have begun to bring him a blast of scorn from precisely those circles who use to adulate him? Surely, it would be more appropriate to say that the President has reaped what he sowed.

It is no secret to anyone who is actually informed about military-strategic matters that the President's embrace of the Intermediate Nuclear Force Treaty was built on a tissue of lies. The public line was that the Russians had been beaten into finally coming around to the position put forward by the Reagan administration years ago, a victory for the impressive military buildup of the Reagan years. The Europeans were the first to have a chance to destroy this illusion—but the Reagan administration beat them into submission instead. For a period of time, the tissue of lies survived.

But, as the arrival of Gorbachov came closer, it became harder and harder to sell this fairy tale. Day after day, the administration was forced to admit that it was delivering new concessions to the Soviet position. The administration bought the Soviet definition of cruise missiles, to include even non-nuclear missiles. It decided to ignore the fact that the Soviets could revamp their long-range missiles to allow them to replace the SS-20s. The smell of surrender was getting stronger and stronger.

Then came the clincher. While forcing the Europeans to swallow the INF treaty, new Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci simultaneously announced that the United States was prepared to take massive cuts in defense spending, most probably affecting the U.S. deployment of troops in Europe.

Nor was that all. Claiming that the INF was all settled, the Reagan administration was visibly slaving after what concessions it could make in order to secure the next round of arms reduction agreements. Put together with Carlucci's announcement of cuts, the whole edifice of "peace through strength" collapsed.

It was at this point that the ranks of the Republican Party began to find it "politic" to separate themselves from the discredited administration, and Ronald Reagan himself. This was not a matter of courage or conviction. It was just no longer possible to pretend that a yellow-painted piece of rock was gold ore, or that a document of surrender of Europe was a victory for NATO. The chickens had come home to roost.

But don't expect the process to stop there. If the Reagan administration has sown disaster on the strategic front, it has sown the equivalent of Frankenstein monsters in other crucial areas, namely, the economy and our most important public health crisis, AIDS.

There seems to be no limit to the ability of the Reagan administration to ignore the financial earthquake which has already begun. Statistics of optimism keep being churned out every day—from decreases in unemployment to increases in plant utilization.

But this fantasyland is also about to end. The reality that began to strike on "Black Monday," Oct. 19, cannot be put off forever. Reagan has already begun to find that his friends among the Europeans are less than happy with his tactic of trying to beggar them by dollar devaluations. They have not yet pulled the rug out from the U.S. economy in anger, but if the Reagan administration keeps up its current policy, that day, too, will not be long in coming. The chickens will inevitably come home to roost.

The administration's AIDS policy will also backfire against the President in short order. No matter how consistently the administration tries to pretend that the AIDS crisis can be contained in homosexual social groups, and juggles the statistics to cohere with this pretense, the tissue of lies cannot survive. Reality will assert itself.

As violent as the split in the Republican Party on the INF treaty appears, it is just the beginning of the institutional upheavals that will occur when the rest of the chickens come home to roost.