
Book Reviews

D. Stockman and the triumph of subterfuge

by Carol White

The Triumph of Politics: How the Reagan Revolution Failed

by David A. Stockman
Harper & Row, Publishers
422 pages
\$21.95

Few Americans, suffering from the depression which David Stockman helped to create, should be willing to throw away \$21.95 on this dull, dull book. Were he merely dishonest and self-serving it would be one thing—but boring to boot.

On the surface of it, this is an apologia. Stockman admits to cooking the books in order to achieve his purpose—which was to chop the federal budget to bits. His method, as he tells it, was to deliberately increase the federal deficit, while assuring the President and the country that the opposite was the case: that the federal budget deficit was being eliminated.

Then, as the economic situation deteriorated, and the budget deficit skyrocketed, he would have further justification for forcing through still more cuts. His major targets, of course, were social security and defense spending.

Indeed, the only thing that could make the Gramm-Rudman computer look good—would be the alternative of having Stockman back in the Office of Management and the Budget.

This is a horrifying book, because it plainly shows how an honest and well-meaning President was deliberately, and repeatedly, hornswaggled by the advisers whom he trusted. Even despite Stockman's viciously cynical put-down of President Reagan, the picture comes across of a bemused but decent President, committed to a strong defense and economic growth, but being brainwashed into taking decisions which would inevitably accomplish the opposite.

One meeting is described, right before President Reagan's first inauguration, at which he tackled the high interest rates, and the role of Paul Volcker at the Federal Reserve Board, only to be given an economic "briefing" by economic adviser Alan Greenspan, designed to confuse the President, and convince him that the Federal Reserve Board had no

control over interest rates. Other times, the President would defend the need to match the defense budget line to the needs of national security, rather than the nostrums of David Stockman.

The premise offered by Stockman about how a national economy should be run, is that it functions in the same way as a household budget. Unfortunately, this corresponded to the President's own prejudices on the subject. Thus, while the President resisted cutting defense spending and was unwilling to force social security recipients and pensioners onto the welfare rolls, he was a sucker for deregulation.

The President's ignorance of American System economics, as laid out by Alexander Hamilton, and practised by Abraham Lincoln, created his tragic vulnerability to the likes of David Stockman. Thus, although the President supports the Moon-Mars initiative and understands the necessity that America maintain a frontier in space, he has yet to decide to replace the fourth Space Shuttle orbiter, because of the arguments of Don Regan that it costs too much.

There are many deliberate lies in this book, but the worst is the so-called economic lesson drawn by Stockman, that the budget deficit can only be eliminated by cutting social services or an across-the-board confiscatory tax increase.

Ruled out of discussion is the role that the Federal Reserve Board has played in distorting the U.S. and world economy, by its high-interest policy, which not only transformed the United States into a debtor nation, but made it a predator upon the developing sector. Ruled out is the alternative route, in which the government would substitute programs to encourage productivity growth while phasing out the bureaucratic distortions of the Johnson Great Society Welfare State.

The book opens with the incident in which *Washington Post* reporter Bill Grieder published an exposé of the Reagan administration in November of 1981, based upon leaks from Stockman. While Stockman pleads innocent, he himself admits that he had allowed Grieder to tape weekly "background" discussions with him. This level of subterfuge is characteristic of the book.

Thus, Stockman claims that he is opposed to the automatic budget-reduction features of the Gramm-Rudman amendment, but in fact, his entire book is nothing but a rationale for the amendment. His image of the Congress is a herd of swine with snouts in the feeding trough, and the White House is presented in the same light.

Stockman admits that he was a left-wing radical in his student days. He was then a protégé of Daniel Moynihan. From there, he was picked up by the Trilateral Commission's John Anderson, who groomed him for his cabinet position by placing him as executive director of the Republican Conference.

What was David Stockman's secret agenda? What is the purpose of this book? Whatever interests he was really serving, they certainly were not the national interests of the United States of America.