

“Warmly Ruthless”

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Interviewee: Martin Anderson

Project: Ronald Reagan Oral History Project

Martin Anderson, assistant to the president for policy development, reflected on the two sides of President Ronald Reagan's persona. While Reagan seemed to be “soft and fuzzy” on the outside, there was a “steel bar” at his core.

Martin Anderson: I once described him as “warmly ruthless.” He had this appearance of being friendly and jovial and nice, never argued with anyone, never complained. But if you shook your head and thought about it a little bit, he always did it his way. It was like there was a steel bar right down the middle of him and everything you touched was soft and fuzzy except the steel bar in the middle. He always did it his way. No matter how many people talked to him, no matter what happened, he always did it his way. If you were in the way, you were gone, you were fired. He never took any pleasure out of it, just gone.

End of excerpt 1.

Anderson: And basically I think Reagan had enormous—he liked people, he had a respect for people, and he talked to them and he worked with them. He could also be very, very tough if you didn't do it his way. What he did as Governor, he said, Fine, went out and talked to all the people and said, Send in your letters, and put enormous pressure on politicians who disagreed with him. He tells the story that the leader of the opposition came into his office, hands in the air, said, We give up. So I think it's a combination of being nice and ruthless.

End of excerpt 2.

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