

Kenneth Starr, the American media and the pursuit of "truth"

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Now that both Monica Lewinsky and President Clinton are set to provide testimony to Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's grand jury, a perceivable shift has emerged in the media-backed campaign against the White House. According to those centrally involved in creating the sex scandal, as well as the mass media, the real issue in the torrent of allegations and extraordinary legal actions of the past seven months is neither sex, nor obstruction of justice, but rather an offense against the "truth."

With a remarkable degree of uniformity that suggests something more than mere coincidence, the past two days have seen a stream of statements and editorial comments repeating one and the same theme. Linda Tripp held a press conference Wednesday in which she declared, "This investigation has never been, quote, 'just about sex.' It has been about telling the truth: the truth matters. I have been vilified for taking the path of truth."

This is the same woman who secretly (and illegally) tape recorded hours of telephone conversations with her supposed friend Monica, turned the tapes over to Starr, allowed herself to be wired so as to entrap Lewinsky and then briefed the lawyers for Paula Jones so they could in turn lay a trap for Clinton.

On Thursday Lucianne Goldberg, Tripp's would-be book agent and former dirty trickster for Nixon's 1972 election campaign, told a friendly interviewer on NBC's Today program that she, Tripp and Starr were engaged in a crusade against Clinton's "philosophy of lying."

The *New York Times* that same day, in an editorial entitled "An Appointment With Truth?" demanded that Clinton's August 17 testimony before Starr become the prelude to "telling the truth and explaining his conduct to the American people."

The *Wall Street Journal* published an editorial rehashing its list of Clinton scandals and advertising a "poster-size" chart of their history (\$12 plus shipping). It echoed the remarks of Tripp and Goldberg: "The point here is not sex, but lying and abuse of office." The *Journal* hinted broadly at Starr's strategy in his upcoming sessions with Lewinsky and

the president. "He [Clinton] is already on record that he had no sexual relationship with 'that woman' and asked no one to lie, points she is now ready to contradict, presumably supported by corroborating testimony from Secret Service agents and others."

A few weeks ago, when Lewinsky was still resisting Starr's demands for what he called "full and truthful" testimony, the *Journal* advised the independent counsel to "indict the little tart." Yesterday, the same newspaper vouched for her honor and her willingness to "speak the truth."

It is difficult to resist the impulse to retch, confronted with this cabal of right-wing adventurers and the American media--undoubtedly the most corrupt in the world--hiding behind the banner of truth, in a country, moreover, where politics has become synonymous with bribery, slander and deceit. There is, however, a certain logic in the adoption of this new mantra.

The right-wing forces behind Starr have found that the American public does not, by and large, share their obsession with the private sexual activities of the president. It appears, moreover, that the concocted allegations of obstruction of justice in relation to the Paula Jones case will not hold water. Therefore the campaign to politically cripple and, if possible, remove Clinton hinges on the charge that he lied about his relations with Lewinsky. No doubt, as the *Wall Street Journal* indicated, Starr hopes to capitalize on any discrepancies between Clinton's testimony on August 17, his deposition last January in the Paula Jones case, and the grand jury testimony of Lewinsky.

Notwithstanding the protestations to the contrary, the supposed crusade for truth headed up by Starr is about nothing other than Clinton's private sexual affairs, a matter of no legitimate concern to anyone other than the individuals involved and their families. But there is a compelling need for a genuine search for truth concerning the Starr investigation. Such a pursuit would begin with a full and detailed examination of the way in which this politically motivated, quasi-judicial campaign against the White House

has been organized, the various individuals, institutions, corporate and political interests who have financed and backed it, and the unstated political agenda and goals that have motivated it.

Major elements of this conspiracy have already been exposed. There is more than ample evidence to demonstrate that the Starr investigation is the spearhead of an immense subversion of democratic processes. It is financed by extreme right-wing elements with enormous wealth at their disposal, organized with the active collaboration of the mass media, and implicating the highest levels of the judiciary, up to and including the Supreme Court. It is, in essence, the first systematic attempt to effect a political coup d'etat in US history.

The media are well aware of the right-wing connections of the protagonists in the campaign against Clinton, including Starr, but they remain silent. The enormous threat to democratic rights embodied in the actions of the independent counsel is a truth they choose not to reveal.

Just last month the journalist Steven Brill published a detailed account of how Tripp and Goldberg, with the connivance of *Newsweek* reporter Michael Isikoff, plotted to ensnare Clinton in a sex scandal based on Lewinsky's confidential accounts to Tripp of an affair with the President. He detailed the collaboration of Starr and the Paula Jones lawyers, and the role of such establishment newspapers as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, together with the TV networks, in turning leaks from Starr's office of grand jury material into sensational reports aimed at damaging the White House and stampeding public opinion behind demands for Clinton's resignation. Brill's exposé was roundly denounced by the media pundits, including writers and news anchors whose misdeeds he documented, and the report was quickly buried.

As a result, key questions have yet to be answered. Starr's relations, for example, with the multi-millionaire Richard Mellon Scaife, who has spent millions financing anti-Clinton provocations, have never been satisfactorily explained. Nor has light been shed on the connections between Scaife-funded organizations and the Paula Jones lawsuit, or the coordination of Starr's probe with that spurious civil action, which was thrown out of court earlier this year.

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What of Goldberg's ties to the extreme right? And those of the federal judges who fired the first Whitewater independent counsel, Robert Fiske, and appointed Starr to replace him? A serious search for the truth would investigate as well the political connections of other key judges who have issued extraordinary rulings weakening the Constitutional protection of lawyer-client privilege, and

members of the Supreme Court who ruled that the Paula Jones case could not be delayed until after Clinton had left office.

What of the extraordinary degree of orchestration of articles, editorials and news broadcasts in tandem with the requirements of Starr's investigation?

These matters will not be explored, or even raised, by the media or the political establishment, least of all by the Clinton administration itself. The success of the political conspiracy against the White House has been facilitated tremendously by the paralysis of Clinton, who embodies the collapse of the Democratic Party and American liberalism. Having abandoned any program of social reform and adapted themselves to the reactionary politics of the Republicans, Clinton and the Democrats are ultimately answerable to the same corporate interests which are backing the assault on the administration.

The collapse of the liberals, the widespread alienation of masses of Americans from the capitalist two-party system and the absence of an alternative political perspective which they adhere to have combined to create a peculiar political environment in which, to this point, the strength of a very small circle of right-wing forces is vastly exaggerated.

The intensification of the economic and political crisis of capitalism, not only in the US but internationally, will create the conditions for a sharp shift in the relationship of social forces, bringing forward the power of the working class. But the dangers to democratic rights embodied in the political conspiracy under way in the US poses sharply the need for the working class to take the road of independent political struggle.

Socialists have long maintained that the defense of democratic rights cannot be entrusted to the liberal representatives of the profit system. Ultimately, this task falls to the working class, organized in its own mass party and fighting for a program of full political and social equality. Rarely has this truth been more evident than in the political crisis unfolding in Washington today.



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