British newspaper warns of "grave threat" to democratic rights in US

Observer details right-wing conspiracy behind Starr investigation

Editorial Board
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The August 2 *Observer*, the Sunday paper published by the daily *Guardian*, one of the most prestigious newspapers in Britain, carries a detailed exposé of the ultra-right elements who have conspired to destabilize the Clinton administration, documenting the connections of these forces to Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr.

The *Observer* highlights the role of arch segregationists and white supremacists in Arkansas in the network of politicians, TV evangelists, publishers, ex-Reagan administration officials and far-right multi-millionaires who have provided the backbone for Starr's four-year offensive against the White House. A front-page article headlined 'Exposed: Plot to Smash Clinton, *Observer* Reveals Right-Wing Conspiracy' refers the reader to an extensive report on the inside pages. An accompanying editorial is entitled 'Grave Threat of the Fanatical Right.'

Much of the information brought together by the author of the articles, Ed Vulliamy, has appeared over the past several years in scattered reports in various newspapers and internet publications, but has generally been ignored by the major newspapers, news magazines and broadcast media in the US.

Among the most significant revelations is the central role played by 'Justice Jim' Johnson in the anti-Clinton cabal. Johnson, a veteran of Arkansas politics, was a state senator and director of the White Citizens Council in the 1950s. In 1957 he helped organize the racist mob that gathered outside of Central High School in Little Rock to defy federal court orders and terrorize nine black students seeking to enter the previously all-white facility.

Appointed to the state supreme court two years later, he associated with two men implicated by the FBI in the bombing of a black college in the Arkansas capital. In his second unsuccessful bid to become governor of the state, in 1966, he was publicly backed by the Ku Klux Klan.

In an interview with the *Observer*, Johnson makes clear that his hatred of Clinton for the latter's opposition to segregation is compounded by the US President's youthful dissent against the Vietnam War. He tells the newspaper that he is 'in touch with Starr.'

Of particular importance is the connection established by the *Observer* between ultra-right and fascistic elements with ties to Johnson, such as the billionaire publisher Richard Mellon Scaife, and 'reputable' figures in the Republican Party associated with Starr. Vulliamy writes: 'Once Clinton took office, veterans of the Nixon, Reagan and Bush administrations gathered around Scaife. They worked like a government-in-exile, dispersed throughout law firms, lobbying groups, think-tanks and opinion columns. Scaife reciprocated their interest, paying millions to a plethora of right-wing groups--most of whom are stitched into the Lewinsky scandal, filing lawsuits, coaching the main players.'

One such figure is Theodore Olson, assistant attorney general under Reagan. Olson is a friend and former law partner of Starr. Earlier this decade he became board chairman of *American Spectator*, the right-wing publication financed by Scaife that launched the Paula Jones' sexual harassment case with an article in which Arkansas state troopers claimed to have procured women for then-Governor Clinton. Olson also, according to the *Observer*, presided in 1994 over the first meeting of the Arkansas Project, another anti-Clinton venture financed by Scaife.

When in 1995 and 1996 David Hale, Starr's chief witness against the Clintons in the Whitewater real estate deal, testified before the House committee investigating the matter, Olson was Hale's lawyer. Hale made a plea bargain with Starr, admitting to one count of

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embezzlement in return for testimony that helped convict the Clintons' former Whitewater partners James and Susan McDougal, as well as former Arkansas Governor Guy Tucker. The Independent Counsel's star witness was on the payroll of the Arkansas Project at the time.

The cast of conspirators cited by the *Observer* includes Sheffield Nelson, the Republican gubernatorial candidate defeated by Clinton in 1990; his ally Cliff Jackson, who later became a major promoter of Paula Jones; Larry Nichols, a publicity consultant for the Arkansas Finance Development Agency who was fired for funneling state funds to the Nicaraguan contras; Larry Case, a private detective who teamed up with Nichols to produce a videotape called 'Clinton Chronicles' accusing Clinton of cocaine addiction, drug-smuggling and murder (the tape, narrated in part by 'Justice Jim' Johnson, was distributed by the televangelists Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson); Floyd Brown, the author of the racist Willie Horton TV ad in the 1988 presidential election and current head of an anti-Clinton clearing house called Citizens United; and David Bossie, an associate of Johnson who worked with Larry Nichols to spread allegations of Clinton's sexual affairs. Bossie later became chief investigator for the House committee investigating the Whitewater affair. Indiana Republican Dan Burton, who heads the committee, reluctantly fired Bossie earlier this year after Bossie released doctored transripts of tapes between ex-Clinton aide Webster Hubbell and Hubbell's wife.

Underscoring the deeply reactionary politics than bind these forces together, the *Observer* examines the political pedigree of the editor of the *Washington Times*, Wesley Pruden Jr. This newspaper, owned by the South Korean cult leader and multi-millionaire rightist Rev. Sun Myung Moon, has been among the most frenzied in its attacks on Clinton, publishing articles by 'Justice Jim' Johnson and *American Spectator* editorial board members.

The *Observer* reveals that Pruden's father, the Rev. Wesley Pruden, was cofounder with Johnson of the Arkansas White Citizen's Council and the organization's chaplain. Pruden Sr. addressed the mob assembled by the council on September 27, 1957 at Central High School in Little Rock, declaring: 'That's what we've got to fight, niggers, communists and cops!'

The editorial accompanying Vulliamy's exposé expresses both astonishment and deep concern over the ability of a cabal of ultra-right fanatics to bring 'an elected President of the richest and most powerful country on earth' to the point of collapse. It states, 'To any friend of the US and believer in US democracy the issue is both serious and farcical.'

The editorial makes no bones about the existence of a conspiracy to topple the White House. 'As we report today, Mr. Clinton really has been the victim, as his wife Hillary claimed, of a right-wing conspiracy. Mr. Clinton has certainly been free with his sexual favours and possibly economical with the truth; but without a fanatical bunch of racists, segregationists, a self-confessed fraudster and right-wing millionaires, the supply lines of rumour and innuendo, along with a key witness, that have sustained the Starr inquiry for so long would never have existed.'

The *Observer* goes on to the warn of the vast and ominous implications of the attack on democratic processes represented by the Starr inquiry. 'Nor is this any conspiracy. Its objective has been the bringing low and possible impeachment of an elected American President. It if succeeds democratic politics in the US will have been brought to a new low ebb with incalculable implications for the US and the world.'

The most remarkable thing about the *Observer* articles is the fact that nothing approaching their objective and serious approach to the Starr investigation and its implications has appeared in the US media. On the contrary, the major establishment publications such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines have chosen to lend the political conspiracy headed up by the Starr inquisition credibility and withhold from the public the wealth of information which they possess about the reactionary forces backing it.

Not surprisingly, neither the print nor broadcast media in the US took note on Monday of the pieces published by the *Observer* the previous day.

See Also:
Kenneth Starr, the American media and the pursuit of 'truth'
[31 July 1998]
Clinton crisis reveals decay of American democracy
[30 July 1998]
The Starr investigation: a creeping coup d'etat
[6 June 1998]

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