

Clinton grand jury videotape to be made public

New "dirty tricks" in wake of Starr report

Martin McLaughlin
17 September 1998

The congressional Republican leadership has decided to make public the videotape of President Clinton's grand jury testimony on the Monica Lewinsky affair. The four-hour tape is to be released to the television networks on Friday, and excerpts of Clinton's testimony, in which he was subjected to humiliating cross-examination about the details his sex life, will likely be broadcast nationally by the weekend.

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Henry Hyde said the vote on releasing the videotape, as well as transcripts of all other witnesses before the Lewinsky grand jury and dozens of boxes of other raw materials referred to the committee by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr, would take place Thursday. This would mean a new deluge of pornographic materials, on top of the 445-page report written by Starr and released by the House of Representatives last week.

Hyde and House Speaker Newt Gingrich presented the release of the videotape as an effort to present the 'truth' to the American people. Other Republican congressmen and aides were less hypocritical, openly gloating that snippets of the Clinton videotape would quickly find their way into television commercials for the fall campaign.

The decision on release of the material was moved up by a full week. It had originally been set for September 28, to allow the Judiciary Committee staff time to review the documents filed by Starr and screen their contents with a view to respecting the privacy rights of witnesses. But such concerns have been quickly brushed aside both to pursue short-term electoral advantages and to add to the mountain of filth dumped on the White House by Starr's report.

The release of the videotape has considerable legal significance as well. The centerpiece of any impeachment proceeding would be the charge of perjury, which Starr based largely on Clinton's August 17 testimony to the grand jury. Congressional Republicans, concerned that opinion polls show overwhelming popular opposition to impeachment, hope that repeated broadcasts of the videotape will begin to shift public opinion in a way that Starr's report has clearly failed to do.

It is entirely possible, however, that the release will have the opposite effect, since it reportedly includes several moments

when Clinton displayed anger and indignation over the degrading cross-examination--a reaction shared by a large majority of the American people. Every national poll published since the release of Starr's report has shown that most people drew even more negative conclusions from it about Starr than about Clinton.

A conspiracy against democracy

As the political warfare in Washington continues to escalate in intensity and bitterness, it must become clear to all but the willfully blind that the investigation of Clinton is not about sex, perjury or obstruction of justice. The Monica Lewinsky affair is simply the pretext for a politically motivated and antidemocratic campaign to drive Clinton out of office and overturn the results of the 1996 election.

It is ridiculous to pretend that this is simply a bizarre episode or an aberration, produced by Clinton's unrestrained libido. Despite its degrading and peculiar form, what is involved are events of immense historical magnitude. The political conflicts within the United States have escalated to the point where a major faction of the ruling elite--right-wing elements with support in Congress, the courts, the Independent Counsel's office, the FBI and elsewhere in the executive and military--is no longer willing to limit itself to electoral methods.

These reactionary forces seek far more than the concessions which Clinton has made in his endless efforts to appease and conciliate them--measures ranging from the cutoff of welfare to the reduction in capital gains taxes to the missile strikes against Sudan and Afghanistan.

They seek to impose a political agenda for which they cannot hope to obtain genuine mass support: the virtual abolition of taxation on the rich, beginning with the \$80 billion tax cut proposed by congressional Republicans; the privatization of Social Security and the destruction of other social welfare programs; and an enormous expansion in the scale of American military operations throughout the world.

The hallmark of the right-wing campaign to oust Clinton is its

contempt for democracy and public opinion. Although every opinion survey shows that as many as two-thirds of those polled believe the Starr investigation should end, that impeachment hearings should not be held, and that Clinton should not resign, there has been a sudden outpouring of demands for Clinton's immediate resignation, from both Republican leaders and much of the media.

In his appearances on weekend television talk shows, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott suggested that Clinton step down, and dozens of Republican congressmen and senators expressed themselves in the same vein. Nearly 100 daily newspapers, including the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and *Seattle Times*, published editorials calling for Clinton to resign in order to avoid a long, drawn-out impeachment proceeding.

Were Clinton to do so it would be an enormous concession to his right-wing opponents. They fear precisely the public and protracted character of the impeachment process, culminating in a trial before the US Senate where Clinton's attorneys would have the right to cross-examine witnesses, with the risk that a significant exposure of the right-wing conspiracy could take place.

Cowardice from the Democrats

In this context the role of the Democratic politicians is especially cowardly. Prostrate before the ongoing right-wing coup d'etat, they have joined in the hypocritical moralizing over Clinton's relations with Monica Lewinsky and given tacit support to the campaign to force him from office.

Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle and House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt issued statements this week attacking Clinton's lawyers, who have publicly defended him against Starr's charges, and calling for Clinton to stop 'legal jousting' and admit that he lied under oath. Former White House chief of staff Leon Panetta, in nearly identical language, urged Clinton to 'stop the legal quibbling.'

While these statements were hailed by the media as an appeal to Clinton to tell the truth, the actual effect would be to set Clinton up for impeachment, since an admission of perjury would be conceding the validity of at least two of the eleven charges made in Starr's report. It is noteworthy that the Democratic leaders did not call on Starr to withdraw any of his charges. Gephardt did not even criticize the degrading character of the report's litany of sexual details.

Some Senate Democrats suggested that they would favor a Clinton resignation. Joseph Biden of Delaware said that many Democrats felt that a resignation would be better for the party's political fortunes, while Robert Kerrey of Nebraska said that the threat of impeachment 'will begin to diminish the president's ability to govern.'

Virtually every statement issued by a congressional Democrat includes a denunciation of Clinton's private sexual relations as

'disgusting behavior.' But what is truly disgusting is the acquiescence of the Democrats in the right-wing destabilization campaign against the White House. The policy of Daschle, Gephardt and the rest of the congressional Democrats is to make cowardly concessions to Starr and the right-wing conspiracy against democratic rights, in the hope of ensuring their own political fortunes.

The more evidence comes out in the Lewinsky affair, the more astonishing it is that serious questions are not being raised about how it began (including the role of Lewinsky herself), how it became the subject of the independent counsel's investigation, and how this investigation has been manipulated for political purposes to impose a change in government and policies, regardless of the will of the American people.

Congressional and media commentary on this affair invariably concludes with the soporific assurance that Clinton's fate will ultimately be determined by public opinion. The falsity of this assertion should be obvious--if it were up to public opinion, Kenneth Starr would have packed his bags long ago and shut down his sex-obsessed investigation.

Even now, despite the Starr report, despite the saturation media campaign, opinion polls show as much as two-thirds of those responding opposed to impeachment or forced resignation, and in favor of concluding the Starr investigation at once. But there are 100 newspapers demanding Clinton's resignation, none demanding Starr's!

As *Newsweek* columnist noted this week, 'The greatest surprise in this whole story is the ongoing gap between the elites--who now almost uniformly despise Clinton--and the people, who have stuck with him so far.' This reflects not so much enthusiasm for Clinton, as deep suspicion of both the aims and the political methods of his right-wing opponents.

What is required now is a careful examination of the origins, scope and methods of the right-wing 'dirty tricks' operation against the Clinton White House and a political campaign to mobilize working people to defend their democratic rights.

See Also:

Starr report increasingly discredited

[17 September 1998]

The political meaning of the Starr report

Spearhead of a right-wing coup

[13 September 1998]

Lieberman delivers 'the most unkindest cut of all'

[8 September 1998]



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact