

How not to fight the right-wing coup in Washington

The case of Salon magazine

Martin McLaughlin
19 September 1998

The web magazine *Salon* published a report this week on a 30-year-old extramarital affair by House Judiciary Committee Chairman Henry Hyde, claiming that this exposure of a prominent congressional Republican was necessary in order to reveal the hypocrisy of the right-wing attack on Clinton's sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky.

The publication of this report touched off paroxysms of outrage among Republican leaders, who accused the White House of planting the story, as well as similar reports about Congressman Dan Burton and Congresswoman Helen Chenoweth. House Majority Whip Tom DeLay called the report on Hyde an 'attack on American democracy' and, characteristically, called for an FBI investigation.

The *World Socialist Web Site* strongly opposes any attempt at Internet censorship and defends the right of *Salon* to publish what it sees fit without the threat of police or FBI harassment. However, this episode illustrates the difference between the outlook of a liberal publication, oriented to a middle class and bohemian milieu, and the outlook of the *WSWS*, which is based on socialist principles and oriented to the political education of the working class.

While *Salon* has been aggressive in defending Clinton against the Starr investigation and exposing the right-wing groups behind this attack on democratic rights, its articles are quite superficial and do not examine the more fundamental historical issues involved in this attempted coup d'etat. On broader world issues, it lines up with the imperialist politicians of both the Democratic and Republican parties--endorsing, for instance, Clinton's missile strikes against Sudan and Afghanistan, and joining in

the press witch-hunt of April Oliver and Jack Smith, the producers fired by CNN after their report on the use of nerve gas by the US military during the Vietnam war.

Salon published an editorial defending its decision to make public what it admitted was a private matter, unrelated to Hyde's current political activities. The key argument was as follows:

'Aren't we fighting fire with fire, descending to the gutter tactics of those we deplore? Frankly, yes. But ugly times call for ugly tactics. When a pack of sanctimonious thugs beats you and your country upside the head with a tire-iron, you can withdraw to the sideline and meditate, or you can grab it out of their hands and fight back.... We hope by publishing today's article to bring this entire sordid conflict to a head and expose its utter absurdity.'

These are not simply 'ugly times,' however. These are times of great political and economic crises, on a world scale, which have profound objective causes. These times call for sober political analysis which requires, not the exposure of sex lives, but the exposure of political agendas and social interests. By descending into the gutter, *Salon* reveals an incapacity to analyze and to inform its audience.

The information on Hyde's private life is of no value whatsoever in conducting a serious struggle against the reactionary forces behind the Starr investigation. To conceive otherwise, as the editors of *Salon* apparently do, is to share the belief of the right-wing groups themselves that the exposure of sexual activity can shift public opinion.

On the contrary, in the present crisis the American public has expressed disdain for this type of exposure, a

factor which is entirely positive. It demonstrates a healthy distrust of the unstated political agenda of the right-wing campaign against the Clinton White House, a concern that fundamental democratic principles are threatened by the coup-like ouster of a twice-elected president, and an instinctive revulsion towards the sex-obsessed moralizing of Starr & Co. The editors of *Salon* do not base themselves on the emergence of this more critical popular mood, revealing, however unintentional, a certain contempt for public opinion.

There is a definite relationship in political life between means and ends. The means employed by reactionaries are very different from those required to politically educate and mobilize working people. Reactionaries necessarily employ filthy methods because their aim is to debase public opinion, appealing to the lowest instincts and most backward prejudices. A struggle to arouse the people to fight for democratic principles and social progress necessarily appeals to the intellect, the sense of justice and fairness, the spirit of self-sacrifice and collective solidarity.

See Also:

The right-wing agenda after Clinton

A look at the measures which might follow impeachment

[19 September 1998]

Elite opinion and public opinion

Reflections on the class divide in America

[8 September 1998]

The American media and the Clinton scandal

Ringmasters of political pornography

[25 August 1998]



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact