

Seven days in January--A chronology of Kenneth Starr's coup

Editorial Board
30 September 1998

In the tens of thousands of pages of raw material produced by the Office of Independent Counsel and released by the House Judiciary Committee, new details can be found on the behind-the-scenes collaboration between Kenneth Starr, Linda Tripp and the attorneys for Paula Jones which laid the basis for the present campaign to destabilize the White House and drive Clinton out of office.

More critical commentaries have begun to appear in the media, especially in relation to the role played by Linda Tripp, whose actions appear increasingly to be those of a right-wing *agent provocateur*. Monica Lewinsky's testimony confirms that Tripp urged her to resume her sexual relationship with Clinton after he had broken it off, pressed her to keep the semen-stained dress that later became Exhibit A in Starr's report, and suggested that she contact Vernon Jordan for a job and make an explicit job-for-testimony deal after she was subpoenaed by attorneys for Paula Jones.

Time magazine, in an article headlined, 'There's Something about Linda,' listed these and other actions of Tripp's and suggested, only slightly tongue in cheek, that these were 'Notes for a book proposal: How to Bring Down Bill Clinton, by Linda R. Tripp.' The *New York Times*, noting that Tripp first brought Starr into the Paula Jones case and then supplied Paula Jones's attorneys with information to use in questioning Clinton, said, 'the President's camp is trying to learn whether Mrs. Tripp was trying to set a perjury trap for Mr. Clinton, with Mr. Starr's blessing.'

The Lewinsky affair has all the earmarks of a 'dirty tricks' operation, developed and prepared over a long period of time by right-wing political forces hostile to the Clinton White House, using a sex scandal to effect far-reaching changes in policy and in the American political system. Starr, the Jones attorneys and Tripp herself all have close associations with extreme right-wing elements, including Christian fundamentalist groups and organizations financed by billionaire Richard Mellon Scaife.

Particularly striking is the way that Starr, Tripp, the Jones attorneys and *Newsweek* magazine came together during the week the scandal was finally detonated, in mid-January 1998. A time-line of the events of the week which began with Linda Tripp's approach to Starr's office raises important questions about the deliberate orchestration of the impeachment drive against Clinton.

Monday, January 12--Tripp contacts the Office of Independent Counsel, identifying herself as a former White House staffer and potential witness in the Paula Jones lawsuit. She tells the OIC she has been asked to conceal Clinton's sexual conduct from Jones's attorneys and that Clinton and Monica Lewinsky plan to lie under oath when questioned about their relationship. She gives attorneys for Starr's office more than a dozen tape recordings of phone conversations with Lewinsky made illegally during the previous five months.

In conference with attorneys for Clinton, in front of Judge Susan Webber Wright, the attorneys for Paula Jones list Monica Lewinsky as a witness in the upcoming trial. They were supplied with Lewinsky's name by an anonymous female caller, who also told them to subpoena Linda

Tripp.

Tuesday, January 13--Acting on the instructions of Starr's office, Linda Tripp meets Monica Lewinsky for lunch at the bar of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Pentagon City, Virginia. Tripp engages Lewinsky in a lengthy conversation about her relations with Clinton, while wearing a tape-recording device supplied by the FBI. The conversation is monitored by Starr's attorneys.

In the course of the discussion, Tripp seeks to set up Clinton and Vernon Jordan on charges of obstruction of justice. She urges Lewinsky to refuse to sign an affidavit denying a sexual relationship with Clinton until Jordan provides her with a job in New York City. Lewinsky tells Tripp she will do this, concealing the fact that she had already signed the affidavit on January 8. Lewinsky later says that she was trying to humor Tripp, for fear that Tripp would expose her affair with Clinton.

Wednesday, January 14--Lewinsky picks Tripp up after work, drives her home to Columbia, Maryland, and engages in further tape-recorded discussions about her relationship with Clinton and the Paula Jones lawsuit. Lewinsky gives Tripp the so-called 'talking points' memorandum, which coaches Tripp on how to alter her account of the Kathleen Willey incident. Later that evening, Tripp turns the memo over to an FBI agent working for Starr's office.

The drafting of the memo now appears to have been an entirely spontaneous action on Lewinsky's part, although Starr spokesmen and the media for months portrayed the three-page typewritten document as the 'smoking gun' for charges of obstruction of justice. Lewinsky firmly denied that either Jordan or Clinton had helped prepare the memo, and Clinton was not asked a single question about it when finally interrogated before the grand jury.

Starr's chief deputy Jackie Bennett telephones Deputy Attorney General Eric Holder in the evening to tell him that Starr will request an extension of the investigation in a new and as yet unspecified direction. An appointment is made for the following day.

Newsweek reporter Michael Isikoff learns of Starr's sting operation involving Monica Lewinsky and Linda Tripp. This information can only have come from someone in Starr's office or from Tripp herself, either directly or through Lucianne Goldberg, her literary agent, a right-wing Republican operative who first urged Tripp to tape-record her conversations with Lewinsky.

Thursday, January 15--Isikoff calls Starr's office to tell them *Newsweek* will publish a story about the sting operation against Lewinsky, and that he will call both Lewinsky and Vernon Jordan for comment. Starr's deputies ask him to delay the phone calls and he agrees to wait until 4 p.m. Friday.

Bennett and Holder meet at the Justice Department, and Bennett formally requests that Attorney General Janet Reno extend Starr's jurisdiction to include charges of obstruction of justice, subornation of perjury and intimidating a witness in relation to Clinton's actions in the Paula Jones lawsuit. The conduct of Vernon Jordan is cited as the link to

Whitewater, with the claim that he offered jobs to both Webster Hubbell and Monica Lewinsky in return for favorable testimony.

Holder, Reno and other Justice Department officials discuss the issue throughout the day, at one point inclining to reject the proposal and instead put the issue in the hands of a career Justice Department prosecutor or seek the appointment of a new independent counsel. Eventually they agree to seek an extension of Starr's jurisdiction.

Isikoff phones Betty Currie to ask her about courier receipts for items received from Lewinsky. The courier company is owned by the nephew of Lucianne Goldberg.

Lewinsky visits the White House in the evening, but does not see Clinton.

Friday, January 16--Attorney Francis Carter files Lewinsky's affidavit denying a sexual relationship with Clinton, in support of a motion asking Judge Susan Webber Wright to quash the subpoena for her testimony in the Paula Jones suit. The affidavit is also delivered to attorneys for Jones and Clinton.

Tripp meets Lewinsky again for lunch at the bar of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Pentagon City, wearing an FBI-supplied tape recorder. Attorneys for Starr's office and FBI agents move in and detain Lewinsky at the hotel for 10 hours. They threaten to prosecute her and send her to prison for up to 27 years if she fails to cooperate, or even if she calls a lawyer. The investigators threaten to prosecute her mother as well, and, according to Lewinsky, ask her to secretly record conversations with Jordan, Currie and 'maybe the president.'

Attorney General Janet Reno submits Starr's request for an extension of his jurisdiction to include the Lewinsky affair to a three-judge panel of the US Appeals Court for Washington, DC, appointed by Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist and headed by the ultra-conservative North Carolina Republican David Sentelle, a former aide to Senator Jesse Helms. The judicial panel approves the extension.

Isikoff's 4 p.m. deadline passes, but he does not contact either Lewinsky or Vernon Jordan, for reasons not explained. Lewinsky is, of course, unreachable, being interrogated by Starr's attorneys. The call to Jordan would have tipped off Clinton the day before his deposition that Starr's office was looking into his relations with Lewinsky. It is not made.

After Monica Lewinsky is taken away by Starr's prosecutors and the FBI, Linda Tripp meets late into the night with attorneys for Paula Jones, giving them an extensive briefing on her discussions with Lewinsky. This briefing is the basis for detailed questioning of Clinton at his deposition the following day. According to one account, Tripp was driven to the offices of Jones's attorneys by someone from Starr's office.

Lewinsky's mother Marcia Lewis arrives by train from New York City and joins her daughter at the Ritz-Carlton. She calls her ex-husband Bernard Lewinsky, who contacts the family attorney William Ginsburg. Ginsburg speaks with Starr's deputies and vetoes any cooperation by Lewinsky until he can consult with her face-to-face.

Saturday, January 17--Clinton gives six hours of deposition testimony to Paula Jones's attorneys, in which he is questioned repeatedly and in detail about his relations with Monica Lewinsky. He denies having a sexual relationship with Lewinsky, although admitting a past encounter with Gennifer Flowers.

Newsweek reporter Daniel Klaidman learns in the morning that the Justice Department has approved extending Starr's jurisdiction to the Jones lawsuit, to include charges of possible obstruction of justice against Clinton and Jordan. Tapes of some of the Tripp-Lewinsky conversations are played for *Newsweek* editors, who decide to allow their Saturday night deadline to pass without reporting on the Lewinsky affair.

William Ginsburg flies to Washington and begins talks with Starr's attorneys on possible cooperation by Monica Lewinsky in return for immunity from prosecution.

Sunday, January 18--Clinton meets with Betty Currie at the White

House for an unusual Sunday discussion on Monica Lewinsky. He is clearly concerned about the degree of knowledge of the affair shown by the attorneys for Paula Jones.

Newsweek publishes its issue dated January 26, with a major article by Isikoff on 'The Paula Problem,' noting Clinton's deposition on January 17. The article does not report on Clinton's relations with Lewinsky or Starr's efforts to use Lewinsky as part of a sting operation against the president.

Right-wing gossipmonger Matt Drudge posts an Internet report on *Newsweek's* decision to withhold publication of an article on Clinton's affair with an intern. Republican commentator William Kristol refers to Drudge's report during the ABC program 'This Morning with Sam Donaldson and Cokie Roberts.' Two days later the *Washington Post* publishes its first article on the subject, touching off the media frenzy.

If one considers Starr's impeachment report in the context of this chronology, the orchestrated character of the charges against Clinton becomes clear. All 11 of Starr's alleged grounds for impeachment relate directly or indirectly to Clinton's testimony of January 17, 1998 in the Paula Jones lawsuit. Unlike most criminal investigations, however, Starr's probe did not begin **after** the alleged offense took place, but **before**. After nearly three and a half years of effort had failed to find evidence of an impeachable offense in any Whitewater-related matter, Starr seized on the Lewinsky affair as an opportunity to create the political basis for impeachment.

In everyday parlance, what took place on January 17, 1998 was a setup. After months of legal appeals seeking to block the deposition, Clinton was compelled to testify under oath about his sexual conduct. The attorneys for Paula Jones were provided with information about Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky so that they could ask a series of highly embarrassing questions. Starr's office lay in wait, already armed with Tripp's tape-recordings and the possible testimony of Lewinsky, readying charges of perjury and obstruction of justice.

Starr did everything in his power to insure that Clinton would give his deposition testimony without being aware that the Office of Independent Counsel was monitoring his every word. In this effort, Starr had the full cooperation of *Newsweek* magazine, which knew of the sting in advance and agreed not to contact Jordan or Lewinsky so that the word would not get back to Clinton.

There is a striking contrast between the magazine's restraint during that week and the subsequent sensationalist coverage in which every unverified rumor and smear became front-page news. *Newsweek*, too, wanted to make sure that Clinton would be given the maximum opportunity to commit what could later be portrayed as an impeachable offense. The media thus played a key role in setting the trap for Clinton's impeachment.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact