

On the eve of the State of the Union address

Clinton silent on the impeachment conspiracy

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On the eve of the State of the Union address, White House spokesmen have made it clear that Bill Clinton intends to make no mention of the Senate impeachment trial. In what could be his last opportunity to publicly counter his accusers before a mass television audience, Clinton will do what he has done consistently since the present crisis erupted nearly a year ago--sidestep a confrontation with the right-wing forces pressing for his removal.

The official justification for Clinton's silence is the mantra that the president is focused on "the people's business." This is an extraordinary claim. Clinton is the first elected president in American history to be impeached. Only hours before he gives his speech his lawyers will begin laying out his defense in the Senate, the next step in a process that could rapidly lead to his downfall.

The pretense that such an unprecedented political crisis does not reflect the "state of the union" is a combination of fantasy and self-delusion. It is as threadbare as it is preposterous.

If the fate of the administration is not the "business of the people," then whose business is it? The corporate donors and political power brokers? The media conglomerates? The right-wing conspirators and their spokesmen in the Republican Party who have organized the impeachment campaign?

Clinton's silence on the impeachment proceedings will, in reality, say more about the real state of the union than any idealized description of American society or listing of policy initiatives. It will express the complicity of the White House and the Democratic Party in a political conspiracy whose fundamental target is not Bill Clinton, but rather the democratic rights of the American people.

The American media will do its best to downplay Clinton's silence, in order to maintain the illusion that what is transpiring in Washington is a legitimate constitutional process. But all over the world it is

commonly understood that what is taking place in America is a right-wing coup d'etat.

The French daily newspaper *Le Monde* carried an article on Sunday headlined "Extremist minority attempts to assert itself in the heart of the Republican Party." It noted the ties between leading Republicans and the racist Council of Conservative Citizens and spoke of a "vast nebula of political organizations...of the right and the extreme right linked in one way or another to the Republican Party."

Clinton's silence is to be mirrored in the presentation of his lawyers before the Senate. They have made it clear that they will argue their case entirely within the framework of the allegations set forth by the Republicans. They will cite the grand jury evidence that contradicts the charges of perjury and obstruction of justice, but mostly they will argue that even if true, the allegations do not warrant Clinton's conviction and removal from office.

They have no intention of putting forward a positive case of their own, i.e., turning the tables on their accusers and exposing the Monica Lewinsky investigation and impeachment campaign as a political witch hunt.

It is legitimate and necessary for the White House defense to refute the specific allegations of the prosecution, but to studiously avoid the essence of the case--its anti-democratic content and the neo-fascist forces that are behind it--is to aid and abet the conspiracy.

Not a single Democratic politician has challenged the legitimacy of the Senate proceedings. Nor have the Democrats made any appeal to the mass sentiment among the American people in opposition to the impeachment drive.

Instead, from Clinton on down, they have sought to maneuver and conciliate with Republican opponents whom they know to be allied with extreme right-wing forces. Indeed, one Senate Democrat after another over the weekend commended the House Republican prosecutors for their "powerful and compelling" case

against Clinton.

To the extent that the Democrats have any strategy, it is to make vague threats that should the Republicans call witnesses, they will counter by calling for the testimony of key participants in the plot. Democratic Senator Robert Torricelli, for example, said in a Sunday appearance on the CBS "Face the Nation" program, "Front and center is going to be Kenneth Starr." He hastened to add that "nobody"--i.e., nobody in the Democratic Party leadership--wants that to happen.

Such statements demonstrate that the Democrats are well aware of the political forces that are behind the impeachment drive, but are intent on concealing them from the public. This is underscored by an article on Clinton that appeared in Sunday's *New York Times Magazine*. The author, Jacob Weisberg, describes a private meeting Clinton held a year ago, on the eve of his deposition in the Paula Jones case, with a group of historians:

"Clinton held forth to a smaller group clustered around him. The right, he inveighed, controlled most of American politics. They had both houses of Congress, the think tanks and the big money. He was all that stood in the way of conservative control over the whole apparatus of government. Republicans would never accept him as legitimate, one of the participants remembers the President thundering at nearly midnight, because he was blocking their ascent to power."

In private, Clinton declares that he is the victim of a campaign of political destabilization by extreme right-wing forces seeking to take over "the whole apparatus of government." He knows that their supra-parliamentary methods reveal the type of authoritarian regime they aim to establish. But he says nothing to the American people.

Millions of Americans who oppose the impeachment drive are baffled by the tactics of the Democrats. They have only weakened the position of Clinton and increased the chances for his removal, either through conviction by the Senate or resignation under fire.

The inability and unwillingness of the Clinton administration and the Democratic Party to resist the right wing has profound objective causes. Their prostration is not fundamentally the result of mistaken tactics or personal weakness. It is bound up with basic class questions. However bitter the conflict may be between the two parties, in the end they defend the same social interests.

The Democratic Party is a bourgeois party. It will never take measures in opposition to the right wing that in any

way challenge the basic economic and political interests of the capitalist class. Within this class of corporate owners, big shareholders and Wall Street speculators, support for policies of liberal reform has drastically eroded over the past two decades. The more it has pursued its assault on the social conditions of the working class, the more the American ruling class has encouraged the growth of extreme right-wing forces within the political establishment.

The inevitable response of the Democratic Party has been to abandon its former policies of bourgeois reform and accommodate itself to the political demands of big business. The present prostration of the Democrats reflects the erosion of democratic institutions in America, and the political and moral exhaustion of bourgeois liberalism. The impeachment crisis has revealed that the traditional pillars of liberalism--within the media, academia, the political establishment--have grown largely indifferent to the defense of democratic rights.

The liberal rump of American politics fears far more than the attacks of the far right the prospect of an insurgent movement from below. Clinton and the Democrats have rejected any appeal to the mass of American workers because they fear it could bring forward a movement of social and political protest that would threaten the capitalist status quo.

The one social force that retains a deep commitment to democratic rights is the working class, which comprises the vast majority of the American people. This is the force that must be organized, in its own political party, to defeat the threat from the right wing.



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