# Senate impeachment trial opens: political coup enters climactic stage

**The WSWS Editorial Board**
**8 January 1999**

The opening of the Senate impeachment trial will be remembered in history as a critical milestone in the political degeneration and breakdown of the institutions of American democracy. Despite overwhelming popular opposition, a political coup d'etat—organized by a cabal of neo-fascist conspirators and the far-right groups that control the Republican Party—is on the verge of victory.

The profoundly reactionary implications of what is taking place in Washington found expression in the ceremony with which the impeachment spectacle began. Senator Strom Thurmond, who more than a half-century ago ran for president as the candidate of the racist States' Rights Party, swore in William Rehnquist, the extreme right-wing Supreme Court justice who has played a critical role in facilitating the conspiracy to overturn the Clinton administration.

The proceedings expose the extent to which the basic foundations of bourgeois democracy have been eroded in the United States. A determined group of conspirators has been able to leverage what was, at least on the surface, a purely personal episode in Clinton's life into an unprecedented political campaign to overturn the results of two elections. Such a development is only possible in a country where the overwhelming majority of the population—that is, the working people—is, for all intents and purposes, excluded from the political process.

Despite the mid-term elections, which showed mass opposition to the Republican impeachment drive, and the opinion polls which have since registered even greater popular anger, neither the Democratic Party leaders nor Clinton have appealed to the American people for support against the political conspiracy. Instead, all of the efforts of the White House and the Congressional Democrats have been concentrated on finding some resolution to the crisis that would leave in the dark the machinations of neo-fascist forces that underlie the impeachment campaign.

On this basis, every calculation made by the White House has proven to be wrong. First Clinton decided to approach the Paula Jones provocation and its offspring, the Lewinsky scandal, as purely legal matters. This enabled his enemies to maneuver him into a series of legal traps. Then he adopted a sickening posture of contrition, which only emboldened Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr and the Congressional Republicans.

Now that impeachment has reached the stage of a Senate trial, the Democrats are desperately seeking to head off the calling of witnesses. To millions of people observing these events, this position must seem utterly baffling. It is obvious that calling their own witnesses and cross-examining those called by the House prosecutors would provide an ideal opportunity for the Democrats to expose the conspiracy against the White House. There are a host of individuals who could be grilled under oath to uncover the connections between Starr and the Paula Jones lawyers, and the ties of both to right-wing millionaires and racist elements in Arkansas and elsewhere.

This option, however, has been rejected out of hand. Instead the floor of the Senate on Thursday was a florid display of bipartisan solemnity, as though some noble democratic process was under way. Less than three weeks ago, when the House voted articles of impeachment, a number of Democrats took the floor to denounce the Republicans for carrying out a political coup and issue warnings about the wrath of the people. Now all such talk has been dropped, just as Hillary Clinton's one-time reference to a "vast right-wing conspiracy" nearly a year ago was quickly forgotten.

This attempt to maintain the pretence that the impeachment trial is a legitimate constitutional process constitutes a criminal fraud against the American people. The Democrats know very well that the trial is the product of a right-wing conspiracy involving fascistic elements, and that such elements exercise enormous influence within the Republican Party.

Some of the plotters are well known: Linda Tripp, Lucianne Goldberg, Paula Jones, Kenneth Starr. But behind them stand a network of organizations and individuals that comprise the most degraded and reactionary political elements in American society: racists, anti-Semites and the most hardened enemies of the working class.

It is a fact of political life in the US that people like Pat Robertson of the Christian Coalition, Gary Bauer of the Family Research Council and James Dobson of Focus on the Family call the shots in the Republican Party. It has recently emerged, though it has been largely buried by the mass media, that Republican House Judiciary Committee member Bob Barr and Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott spoke at meetings of the

© World Socialist Web Site

Council of Conservative Citizens, a white supremacist organization that preaches hatred against blacks and Jews.

This, however, is only the tip of the iceberg. The Council for National Policy, set up in 1981 by fundamentalist politicians and right-wing millionaires, largely sets the agenda for the Republicans. Its members include Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Paul Weyrich, Oliver North, Edwin Meese (attorney general under Reagan), John Whitehead of the Rutherford Institute (which financed the Paula Jones suit) and the leaders of several anti-abortion groups. Political office holders who are members of the CNP comprise much of the Republican leadership of Congress: House Whip Tom DeLay, House Majority Leader Dick Armey, Rep. Dan Burton, Rep. Bob Barr, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, Sen. Jesse Helms, Sen. Don Nickles.

The political action arm of the CNP met in June of 1997 and decided to promote a bill, subsequently introduced by Barr, to initiate impeachment proceedings against Clinton. This swamp of political reaction was the breeding ground for Starr's exploitation of the Monica Lewinsky scandal and the ensuing impeachment proceedings.

Their goal is not simply the destabilization and removal of Clinton; the impeachment drive is a means of extending their grip over the Republican Party and laying the groundwork for a government far more ruthless in its assault on the social conditions and democratic rights of the working class.

Having invested enormous resources, both political and financial, in their drive to overturn a presidential election, they have no intention of being deterred by their lack of support among the American people. At the very least, they intend to force a vote on the Senate floor, so that every Republican who votes the wrong way can be targeted by their allies in the Christian Coalition and similar organizations to be ousted in the next round of primaries.

They calculate, moreover, that the longer the trial goes on, the more Clinton and the Democrats demonstrate their weakness and disorientation, the more the American people will turn way from the entire spectacle in disgust.

Why doesn't Clinton go on national television and make a direct appeal to the people, calling on their support to defeat a conspiracy to remove an administration in defiance of two national elections? Why are he and the entire Democratic Party prostrate before this political coup d'etat?

There are profound political reasons for their behavior. To expose the conspiracy would mean exposing the enormous power of right-wing and fascistic forces within the Republican Party. But the authority of these forces is not confined to the Republicans. They exercise enormous influence within the political establishment as a whole, including broad layers of the Democratic Party. Any notion of confronting them is dismissed as politically unthinkable.

To do so, moreover, would require making an appeal to the mass of working people. But this raises what the Democrats consider to be an even greater danger. Whatever qualms they might have about their right-wing opponents, they sense that a movement of popular opposition could quickly bring to the fore social and political questions that go far beyond the issue of impeachment: the whittling away of basic democratic rights, the erosion of living standards, the destruction of any elements of industrial democracy, the dismantling of social programs, the colossal economic chasm between the wealthy elite and the working class. All of these issues would come to the surface as masses of people began to connect their own interests with the events in Washington. Such a movement would represent a threat to the capitalist system, which the Democratic Party defends.

The prostration of the Democrats, mirrored in the outright complicity of the liberal press, such as the *New York Times*, in the right-wing conspiracy, raises fundamental political questions. The impeachment crisis has shown that the Democratic Party is neither able nor willing to carry out the defense of democratic rights.

The history of the twentieth century—above all the experiences of the 1930s in Europe—has demonstrated all too clearly that the defense of democratic rights against political reaction cannot be entrusted to the rotting corpse of liberalism. At the conclusion of this century, contemporary events are presenting American workers with another demonstration of this basic truth.

*See Also:*

The impeachment of President Clinton:
Is America drifting towards civil war?
[21 December 1998]

Political coup gathers strength:
Clinton's groveling emboldens right-wing push for impeachment
[12 December 1998]

The US impeachment hearings: Testimony exposes elements of a political conspiracy
[24 November 1998]

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**wsws.org/contact**


© World Socialist Web Site