

The Senate impeachment trial: White House lawyers expose legal frame-up

Barry Grey
23 January 1999

In three days of pointed arguments, White House lawyers presented a devastating rebuttal of the articles of impeachment against President Clinton. One after another, the attorneys dismantled the entire edifice of the Republican case. They demonstrated that the charges of perjury and obstruction of justice were based on the falsification of evidence, misrepresentation of testimony and groundless speculation.

On the constitutional issues of due process and impeachment law, as well as questions of fact, the job performed by the White House attorneys was so thorough that the Republican prosecutors were left without a legal leg to stand on.

The defense presentation made it overwhelmingly clear that Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr and his congressional allies had not only mounted a weak case, but were guilty of prosecutorial abuse. In any standard legal case, prosecutors who behaved in such a manner would be subject to judicial sanction.

Clinton's lawyers did not directly address the fundamental issue--the politically motivated conspiracy that underlies the impeachment proceedings. But in the course of showing the contradiction between the testimony of witnesses before Starr's grand jury and the conclusions asserted by the prosecutors, they implied the existence of unstated and sinister motives.

White House special counsel Gregory Craig, for example, said in the course of his dissection of the perjury charges: "Think just for a moment, and ask yourself whether these allegations about this testimony is really an effort to vindicate the rule of law, or is it something else?"

The legal blows delivered by Clinton's counsel set the stage for the summation given by Dale Bumpers of Arkansas. It fell to a septuagenarian retired senator to spell out not only to the Republicans, but also to his

fellow Democrats, the enormous peril, from the standpoint of bourgeois rule, of the course on which they were embarked.

He used scathing words to describe the investigation of the White House, characterizing it as an abuse of the judicial system: "We are here because of a five-year, relentless, unending investigation of the President... . But that investigation has also shown that the judicial system in this country can and does get out of kilter unless it's controlled, because there are innocent people, innocent people, who have been financially and mentally bankrupted."

Calling the welter of accusations and massive deployment of FBI snoops "bizarre," he warned that the removal of an elected president, in defiance of the vast majority of the population, could destabilize the entire political system. "But if you vote to convict, you can't be sure what's going to happen... . So don't, for God's sakes, heighten the people's alienation that is at an all-time high toward their Government."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact