

As Senate trial winds down, efforts intensify to cover up conspiracy against democratic rights

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As the Senate impeachment trial limps toward a conclusion, the efforts of the White House and both the Republicans and Democrats are focused on finding a formula for bestowing constitutional legitimacy on what all sides know to be an attempted political coup d'etat.

The overriding concern is to conceal from the American people the far-reaching and ominous implications of the campaign to destabilize the Clinton administration that has culminated in the Senate proceedings. This is the basic motive behind the negotiations for a censure resolution, which have taken on increased urgency following the apparent collapse of proposals for a "finding of fact."

Far from ennobling the proceedings in the House of Representatives that ended with the first-ever impeachment of an elected President, the Senate trial has further discredited all of the political institutions of capitalist rule--Congress, the presidency, the judiciary and both political parties. From the minute the White House legal team began its examination of the articles of impeachment and the web of half-truths and innuendoes on which they are based--which occurred in the first week of the trial--it was patently clear that the case for Clinton's conviction and removal was a politically-motivated sham.

Since then the possibility of obtaining a two-thirds vote to convict has grown increasingly remote, and the emphasis has shifted to coming up with what the media calls an "exit strategy." A more accurate term would be "coverup."

No one is more intent on this goal than Clinton himself. His lawyers have quietly shelved their intermittent threats to demand the testimony of key

players in the conspiracy, such as Linda Tripp, Lucianne Goldberg and Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr, and renounced their right to call their own witnesses.

Clinton used the occasion of a congressional prayer breakfast on Thursday to curry favor with his right-wing opponents and make it clear they have nothing to fear from the White House. Sharing the dais with the moderator, Republican congressman Steve Largent, Clinton stressed the need for reconciliation. Largent is a mouthpiece for the Christian Right and one of the most relentless advocates of impeachment.

The *New York Times*, in an editorial headlined "Countdown to Censure," expressed the cynicism and duplicity that underlie the efforts to cover up the political conspiracy. Ignoring the exposure by Clinton's lawyers of the House prosecutors' legal case, the *Times* declared that a censure resolution must contain language "reflecting the reality that Mr. Clinton did knowingly lie under oath and that he did tamper with evidence and witnesses and attempt to impede the lawful progress of a civil rights suit."

Come hell or high water, the *Times* is determined to uphold the farcical claim that the political crisis which has paralyzed the US government for more than a year is the result of Clinton's libido. It ignores its own reports detailing the collusion between Starr's office and the Paula Jones lawyers, and their plot to scandalize and undermine the White House. The newspaper goes so far as to borrow the rhetoric of the House prosecutors, casting the Paula Jones sexual harassment suit--financed and managed from the outset by extreme right-wing groups and individuals--as a "civil rights" suit.

Such sophistry would be laughable, were not the purposes it serves so inimical to basic democratic rights.

Whatever the form assumed by the final act of the impeachment saga, the fundamental causes of this pivotal episode in American political history will remain. Even in the short run, there is no reason to believe that the political assault on the Clinton administration will end with the conclusion of the Senate trial.

Independent Counsel Starr has already let it be known he is considering indicting and prosecuting Clinton before the end of his presidential term. On Thursday one current member and two former members of Starr's prosecutorial team appeared as panelists at a public forum sponsored by the Los Angeles County Bar. When asked by the moderator whether Starr has already issued a sealed indictment against Clinton, all three refused to answer.

More fundamentally, the impeachment crisis is a symptom of a deeper malaise. The entire body politic is diseased, and democratic institutions have undergone a profound decay. In the end, the traditional forms of bourgeois democracy are incompatible with the staggering levels of social inequality that prevail in the US. No censure resolution can avert the growth of political instability and the inevitability of social upheavals.



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