

The Anthony Weiner affair

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There are mounting calls from both Democratic and Republican leaders for the resignation of Congressman Anthony Weiner, a New York City Democrat, following a televised press conference Monday at which he admitted to engaging in “explicit” telephone and online exchanges with numerous women, and then lying about it for the previous week.

The saturation coverage of the Weiner affair caters to the combination of Puritanism and prurience—inseparably connected—that has long been a hallmark of American society.

The scandal follows a pattern so familiar that it has become stereotyped: lurid revelations, indignant denials, a media frenzy, self-abasing confessions, breathless speculation about the wronged spouse, whether in hiding or standing by her man, until the spotlight shifts to the next tawdry and equally insignificant scandal.

There is the cast of characters that has become familiar over the past two decades: ultra-right dirty tricks operatives, the corporate-controlled media, and an increasingly right-wing Democratic Party that cowers before both.

Perhaps the only thing new in the Weiner scandal is that the integration of ultra-right provocateur and “mainstream” media has taken another quantum leap. Deeply involved in the affair is Andrew Breitbart, who was discredited last year by the exposure of his use of a doctored videotape to smear Department of Agriculture official Shirley Sherrod (See “The Sherrod affair and American social reality”).

So Breitbart teamed up with ABC News to do the dirty work, brokering the network’s contact with two

of the women linked to Weiner. The network was more than happy to devote its resources to this “investigation”, and three of the four television networks led their evening news broadcasts Monday with the press conference of a congressional backbencher known previously only for his abrasive appearances on cable talk shows.

The Democratic Party establishment dropped Weiner abruptly. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi called for a formal investigation by the ethics committee to determine whether Weiner had violated House rules or misused official resources. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said if Weiner asked for his support he would tell him, “Call someone else.”

Former Democratic National Committee chairman Timothy Kaine, now a candidate for US Senate in Virginia, was the first Democrat to call for Weiner’s resignation, followed by eight of Weiner’s Democratic colleagues in the House of Representatives.

The New York City congressman has so far refused to resign, telling the press conference, “I don’t see anything I did that violated any rules of the House. I don’t see anything that violated my oath of office to uphold the Constitution.”

In the past three years, five congressmen in New York state alone—two Democrats and three Republicans—have seen their political careers destroyed in this fashion. For that very reason, the principal public reaction to such revelations is indifference. People shrug their shoulders, because they expect little else.

Scandal-mongering allows the ruling elite to conduct its internecine battles without any interference from the

masses. This or that politician can be eliminated without acknowledging the issues involved.

In this case, it appears the Murdoch-owned media targeted Weiner at least in part because he was the presumed frontrunner for the Democratic nomination for mayor of New York City in 2013, when the current mayor, billionaire Michael Bloomberg, leaves office because of term limits.

More generally, both capitalist parties use such scandals to position themselves against each other while avoiding any discussion of political substance.

But the overriding effect of such scandals is to distract and debase public consciousness. As the *Washington Post's* television critic noted, CNN afternoon anchor Brooke Baldwin told viewers Monday that the network had “intended to cover the breaking news of those five American men killed” in Iraq, only to be continually focused throughout the day on the Weiner revelations. Why speak about war or the economic crisis of capitalism when there is a sex scandal to titillate the viewing audience?



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