

by Samuel Francis

## The Un-Magnificent Obsession

Almost precisely a year after the name of Monica Lewinsky began to displace those of Princess Diana and Jackie Onassis from the headlines of supermarket tabloids, the one-time object of Miss Lewinsky's more tender affections emerged triumphant over his foes in what are still laughingly called the "conservative movement" and the "Republican Party." The conservative and Republican crusade to cleanse the land of the Clintonian plague finally whimpered to its pathetic conclusion when the Grand Old Party, after losing the 1996 presidential election to Mr. Clinton and losing the 1998 congressional elections to the Democrats, lost yet a third time in the Senate vote on Mr. Clinton's conviction. On the last occasion, the party was not only unable to cadge the two-thirds majority needed for conviction but also could not even bring along all of its own members. The sobriquet of "The Stupid Party" is entirely too kind; "The Loser Party" would perhaps be a more appropriate label for a political organization so incompetent that, in a series of contests against what is undoubtedly the most corrupt administration in American history, it not only loses but comes close to destroying itself.

Yet to serious observers on the political right, it was always clear that Bill Clinton was never in any danger of being driven from office by his conservative and Republican adversaries. Those on the right who were convinced he would be forced out made the mistakes of insulating themselves in the fortress of their own opinions and grotesquely exaggerating the influence their own propaganda exerts on the American public. The truth is that, whatever the merits of the charges against Bill Clinton and of the many other accusations made about him, as long as his power base in the Big Media and the Democratic Party remained secure, there was nothing the political right could do to him. And that power base did remain secure, not least because the political right never has the faintest idea of how to attack it effectively.

So far from discrediting and destroy-

ing Mr. Clinton, the crusade against him by the right has come perilously close to destroying its own sponsors, and it has done so in two ways. First, the failure of the impeachment campaign has backfired on the conservatives who pushed it from the beginning, leaving Mr. Clinton able to crow over the "partisanism" that motivated his adversaries, allowing him and his own party to plan and gloat over the forthcoming political extermination of their conservative Republican enemies in future elections, and enabling the left wing of the Republican Party to claim, somewhat plausibly as a matter of fact, that it has been the party's conservative leadership that has brought the GOP into public disgrace and endangered its majority in Congress.

Almost everything the American right has done in the last six or seven years has centered on discrediting, exposing, and denouncing Bill Clinton—as a KGB agent, an embezzler, a murderer, a drug smuggler, an adulterer, a sex maniac, and a perjurer. The scandals and crimes in which he is supposed to have been at least involved, if not the actual mastermind of, are too many to enumerate, and entire books have been devoted to unraveling and substantiating them. The *American Spectator*, the *Washington Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, and various talk-show hosts, publishers, and self-appointed sleuths, muckrakers, and conspiracy hunters have dedicated themselves to ferreting out the sinister "truth" about Mr. Clinton and his "secret life."

But what is now clear, and indeed has been clear for some months if not always, is that this entire crusade has been a total and complete failure. The President has not been discredited in the eyes of most citizens, his popularity is higher than ever, that of his political opponents is lower than ever, the attempt to force him from office has failed, and it is now his adversaries who face political oblivion. House Speaker Newt Gingrich has already vanished into the ample bosom of political oblivion, and it is not unlikely that Mr. Gingrich's colleagues in what once strutted and chirped as the great "Republican Revolution" and their ideological mentors in the "conservative movement" will

soon join him there.

The second way in which the obsession of the American right with Clinton scandal-mongering has helped destroy those who spawned it is by driving from conservative consciousness virtually every other serious idea, principle, and issue with which the right should have been concerned. I personally am convinced that this was the intended result of the obsession, that some of those politicians and publicists who pushed the scandal-mongering the most did not really want to mobilize conservative sentiment against Clinton on the basis of serious issues at all. They did not wish to do so because they knew and feared that the issues around which conservative sentiment could be mobilized would be ones they did not want to invoke—issues like immigration, trade policy, a national-interest-based foreign policy, affirmative action and hate crimes, and questions concerning moral and cultural restoration. Is it really an accident that the publications mentioned above as the most zealous in the Clinton hunt are also those most inclined to neoconservative influence? By encouraging rank-and-file conservatives to become preoccupied with Bill Clinton's alleged crimes and misdemeanors, those of his wife and associates, and every tawdry detail of his extramarital affairs even down to the anatomical peculiarities of his masculine equipment, those who pushed and hawked the scandal-mongering made certain that the American right would never concern itself with more important—indeed, nationally and civilizationally crucial—matters.

But even if my suspicions about the intentions of the obsession are unfounded, the results are much the same—the virtual disappearance of any body of thought that mounts a serious critique of what the Clinton administration has stood for. How indeed could the "right" of today, the "conservative movement," have mounted such a critique? When Bob Dole and Jack Kemp debated Bill Clinton and Al Gore in the 1996 presidential campaign, it was anyone's guess as to what they would be able to debate about. Neither Republican candidate had ever made much of an issue over the

bloated scale and power of the federal government, and both candidates agreed with the Clinton-Gore policies on NAFTA, the World Trade Organization, trade policy generally, immigration, a globalist foreign policy, and civil rights and affirmative action. There was, as I recall, some muffled verbal swordplay over abortion and budgetary matters, but at no point in the debates did either Republican candidate reveal any fundamental disagreement with the worldview, values, and political ideals endorsed by Mr. Clinton and his running mate. Such remains the case today, and the two most damning accusations the Republicans can think of to launch against Mr. Clinton's policies are that he has stolen Republican ideas and language and that he has allowed some Iraqis to remain alive. If the distraction of serious conservatism by scandal-mongering was not a deliberate plan to subvert a serious right, then surely scandal-mongering has flourished because it remains the only means that the Republicans and what today pass for "conservatives" have to show that they disagree with Bill Clinton at all.

But whatever the cause of the obsession with scandal, conspiracy, and crime, the result is that both the GOP and the conservative movement are close to being smashed. Only a few days after the failure of the vote against the President in the Senate, liberal Republicans were congregating in Florida to plan how to take over the party from the incompetents of the right. Leading the complaints about the conservatives, Connecticut Governor John Rowland lamented that conservative dominance had "alienated women, union members, immigrants, minorities, the elderly, teachers, homosexuals and environmentalists," as the *New York Times* reported. The good news, the governor reported sarcastically, was that "the rich people and the business people still like us. . . . [But] unless they can vote four or five times each, we've got some problems in the next couple of campaigns."

Well, Governor Rowland is probably correct about his last point, but it may be noted that the constituencies that he is so worried about alienating are the core constituencies of political liberalism. There probably are no policies and positions that any party could adopt that would attract "women, union members, immigrants, minorities, the elderly, teachers, homosexuals and environmentalists" that would not be liberal to left-

wing. Every one of these constituencies consist, in practice, not of the actual citizens and voters but of powerful organized lobbying blocs that define the interests and agendas of their members in terms of the left. There is simply no way for the Republican Party to win those constituencies (or at least the organized blocs that claim to represent them) without becoming entirely indistinguishable from the Democrats, which is more or less exactly what the Republican left has always wanted. It should be noted also that, throughout the discussion of their coming takeover of the GOP, at no point did any of the liberal Republicans mention the actual merits of the positions that would appeal to these constituencies. Their discussion was confined simply to the question of how to gain their votes and the naked mechanics of grasping political power by doing so.

Nevertheless, the liberal Republicans had a point, which is that the "conservative" wing has proved itself a dismal failure, an embarrassment, and a danger to the party. Perhaps more to the point, it has proved itself to be a danger to serious conservatism, in part by insisting on Mr. Clinton's removal despite the obvious obstacles to accomplishing it and then abysmally failing to remove him at all and allowing him to emerge from their attack with more power than ever, and in part by talking and thinking about virtually no other issue except Mr. Clinton and his immoralities for the last several years and thereby distracting conservatives from elaborating serious political ideas and mobilizing a coalition around them. It is precisely for that reason that the current crop of "conservative" leaders in the Republican Party should be dispatched to the nearest brick wall and follow their discredited "leader" Mr. Gingrich to political nirvana.

And those who succeed them should not be the governor of Connecticut and his cronies but real leaders able to articulate an authentically conservative critique of Bill Clinton and the New Age globalism that has oozed out of him and his administration, a critique that attracts and speaks to the concerns and interests of Americans, regardless of which power bloc purports to represent them. Of course, what should be done is not necessarily what will be done. By now, it is probably impossible for anyone in the Republican Party to achieve leadership who is neither the flaccid sort of conservative that has led the party to its current

contretemps or the sort of liberal that Gov. Rowland and the *New York Times* would admire. During the years when conservatives were jabbering about who killed Vince Foster and how much loot Bill and Hillary scraped out of Whitewater and what the President told Vernon Jordan to tell Sidney Blumenthal, no one bothered to talk about real ideas, real issues, or real leadership, so that today, even if those real things showed up on the doorstep, very few Republicans would recognize them. I, for one, do not regret the ignominious finale of the great impeachment caper of the last few years. Bill Clinton is indeed some of the evil things his adversaries claim he is, but the evil he has done to this nation is dwarfed by that wreaked by Franklin Roosevelt or Lyndon Johnson, to name only two of the most dangerous and harmful political figures in our history, and we can survive Mr. Clinton and his silly little girlfriends as easily as we can survive frauds like Newt Gingrich and Jack Kemp, whose main contribution to conservatism was to cripple and corrupt it. If the defeat, humiliation, and disasters that the pseudoconservatives of the GOP have brought upon their own party and movement result in their disappearance from American political life, that is an outcome every serious conservative can only welcome. If it accomplishes nothing else, it would at least clear the way for the emergence of a movement that at last could confront the left, in both parties, on the real evil it has inflicted on the nation and its people instead of sniping at and snickering over the insipid crimes and misdemeanors in which we have been forced to wallow. <C>

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## Letter From London

by Derek Turner

### The Strange Death of Her Majesty's Opposition



The Conservative Party still has not recovered from the disastrous general election of May 1997, when many Britons switched their allegiances to Labour and an even larger number of Conservatives stayed at home, unwilling to vote for either the Tweedledum that was John Major or the Tweedledee of Tony Blair. Two years after the debacle, Her Majesty still has no effective opposition to Labour's progressive disuniting of the United Kingdom.

Labour has been extremely busy, to Britain's disadvantage, despite the complacent predictions of certain Conservatives that Blair was really "one of us" because he is no longer a socialist. Blair and his wreckers have begun the process of Welsh and Scottish devolution by setting up Welsh and Scottish devolved assemblies. This may even lead to full independence for Scotland (although it would be an "independence" under the close supervision of Brussels).

They have campaigned to ban fox hunting, although a Private Member's Bill designed for this purpose was quietly dropped after the massive Countryside Marches in London demonstrated the strength of rural feeling in favor of hunting.

They have tried once, and will keep trying, to legalize homosexual sex at 16; this legislation may even be in place by the time this is printed.

They have indicated that they would like to join the European single currency as soon as the opinion polls tell them they can, pre-election claims of being "British patriots" notwithstanding.

They have exacerbated ethnic-minority resentments, most obviously in the Stephen Lawrence case (Lawrence was a black teenager savagely murdered by unknown thugs, whose sad death has become a *cause célèbre* among the politically correct), and by doing nothing

about either multiculturalism or the tide of "asylum seekers" pouring into our islands to get better washing machines (although the Conservatives did even less about asylum seekers, and talked more hypocritically than Labour's Home Secretary, Jack Straw).

Not satisfied with all of this mayhem, they are trying to replace the House of Lords with an elected second chamber. This will have the quadruple effect of destroying one of the world's oldest legislatures, further weakening British national identity, ensuring that Labour legislation is unimpeded, and gratifying the residual class hatred found among Labour MPs and supporters—all in the names of "relevance" and modernity.

With the possible exceptions of devolution and fox hunting, the above "reforms" were not specifically requested by voters. Some of them, especially the action on Europe and the inaction on asylum seekers, are deeply unpopular, if opinion polls are anything to go by. What has kept Labour's public-approval rating surprisingly high (even after recent well-publicized instances of Labour "sleaze" at least as bad as the perceived corruption that contributed to the Tory defeat two years ago) is, first, its undoubted success in education (Labour has reintroduced some of the traditional teaching methods its supporters discarded three decades ago); second, its seeming success in Northern Ireland (where the number of terrorism-related deaths has declined sharply); and, finally, Conservative obscurity.

The Conservative Party has partially disappeared from television. Although the scale of the 1997 defeat coupled with TV's traditional hostility to the right would have helped to bring that about anyway, the party is now often regarded as not newsworthy. Many political stories simply do not feature a Conservative at all. It is not as if there are no targets for Conservatives to aim at—on the contrary. Apart from the radical upheavals mentioned above, on which the Conservatives could easily make some headway, there have been many Labour scandals: the homosexual Welsh Secretary who resigned after his penchant for cruising for black boys got into the press; the Lord Chancellor who has squirreled his millions away in offshore accounts (of which his party ostensibly disapproves);

and the Glasgow MP who bribed his opponent to stand down to the influential New Labour Minister Peter Mandelson, whose half-a-million-pound mortgage was so dodgy that he had to resign from the Cabinet.

The reason for Conservative obscurity is twofold—the party says nothing interesting and suffers from a chronic lack of self-confidence. The hierarchy's chief aim now seems to be to avoid controversy at all costs. A symptom of this is the central office's immersion in relatively unimportant administrative reforms to the party machinery, which have occupied them for most of the last two years. When demoralized Conservatives would have liked morale-boosting speeches, they were told about procedures; instead of organicism, they were given organigrams. Even the party's impressive figures, like John Redwood and Iain Duncan-Smith, are quiescent or go largely unreported.

On the rare occasions when William Hague does make comments which are widely reported, they seem to be aimed at the "center ground," if such a thing actually exists, and they always reflect the most numbingly conventional thinking. He engages in gestures which are media-friendly but disquieting to the party's right wing—sending a message of support for homosexual sex at 16 to the "Gay Pride" festival, wearing a baseball cap and dancing as if in enjoyment at the Notting Hill Carnival, and pointedly refusing to support either the House of Lords as presently constituted or the hereditary principle itself (implying a lack of interest in what happens to the monarchy).

Even his chief sop to the right, his pledge to campaign against the European single currency at the next election and to resist the single currency at least "for the lifetime of the next Parliament," is widely regarded as insufficient, with many wishing that he had ruled out joining the euro permanently and on principle and that he would expel the minority of Conservatives, like ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer Kenneth Clarke, who want to join the single currency. So even his most "controversial" policy is only controversial within certain parameters. One cannot help thinking that modern-day Conservatives are solely interested in one Conservative tradition, a tradition