

The right-wing agenda after Clinton

A look at the measures which might follow impeachment

Martin McLaughlin
19 September 1998

Amid the millions of words and countless hours of broadcast time devoted to the sex life of Bill Clinton, there is relatively little being said of the political agenda of those who seek to drive him from office. Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr and the congressional Republican leadership clearly expect that the beginning of an impeachment inquiry, or even better, a forced resignation by the president, will lead to a Republican landslide in the November 3 election.

Currently the Republican Party holds only a narrow majority in the House of Representatives, although it can usually count on substantial Democratic Party support for all but the most reactionary measures. While the Republicans hold a 55-45 majority in the Senate, the rules of the Senate make this margin much shakier, since 60 votes are required to shut off debate on most legislation.

Republican Party campaign advisers have already expressed the hope that the November 3 vote will produce at least a 60-seat filibuster-proof majority in the Senate. In the event the Clinton administration collapses and the Republicans win a landslide, a two-thirds, veto-proof majority in both houses is within reach.

What is the likely program of such a congressional majority? Some indications can be obtained by examining the legislation put forward by the Republican Party in recent months, as well as the positions adopted by the Republican National Committee and the National Republican Congressional Campaign Committee for the fall election.

Tax cuts for the rich

First and foremost is the \$80 billion tax cut adopted by the House Ways and Means Committee September 17, in a nearly party-line vote. The bill is expected to pass both the House and Senate easily, but Clinton has

pledged to veto it. While billed as a 'middle class' tax cut, the legislation would reduce taxes on inheritances, interest and dividends, and extend an important tax credit for big business which is scheduled to expire. Moreover, the tax cut is funded by the surplus in Social Security payroll taxes, meaning that lower-paid workers are paying taxes on their wages to finance a cut in taxes for higher-income families who itemize their deductions.

This bonanza for the wealthy is only a down payment on what the congressional Republicans would push through with a veto-proof majority. The original cut in taxes proposed by Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer was nearly \$1 trillion, and included an effective end to inheritance taxes, the capital gains tax and other taxes on private wealth.

Privatizing Social Security

While talk of investing the Social Security Trust Fund in the stock market has been downplayed in recent weeks, in the wake of the sickening plunge on Wall Street since mid-July, the plans for privatizing Social Security are very much alive. Just last month the Republican Party organized a speaking appearance in Washington for the head of Chile's pension system, which has been privatized and turned into a stock-based personal investment program.

The proposed tax cut itself plays a major role, just as Reagan's tax cuts in the early 1980s were instrumental in forcing the dismantling of much of the welfare state, in the name of 'deficit reduction.' By diverting Social Security tax revenues into tax cuts for upper income families, the financial base of the government-run old age pension system will be further undermined.

Attack on public education

A report issued September 18 by the Republican Education Task Force, chaired by RNC Chairman Jim

Nicholson, outlined a comprehensive policy for education which would sharply cut back the federal role in financing public education and setting national standards, weaken teacher seniority protection and other job security provisions in union contracts, and permit school boards to teach creationism or ban books from libraries in the name of 'local control of schools.'

Earlier this year the Republican Congress passed an education bill, vetoed by Clinton, which would have undermined public education by providing tax credits to parents who pulled their children out of public schools and sent them to private schools, including religious schools. The bill would also have undercut or ended federal mandates for bilingual education, special education and other services.

Attack on abortion rights

Senate opponents of abortion rights fell three votes short of a veto-proof majority September 18, passing a proposed ban on so-called partial birth abortion by a margin of 64-36. The House has passed similar legislation, but Clinton vetoed the same bill two years ago, before the 1996 election.

The ban on the late-term abortion procedure is the thin end of the wedge. The Republican Party platform calls for overturning *Roe v. Wade* by legislation or constitutional amendment and returning women to the days of back-alley abortions.

Henry Hyde, now presented in the media as the 'even-handed' and respected chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, is the author of the notorious Hyde Amendment banning federal funding of any abortion procedure, which was adopted in 1978.

Star Wars missile program

All 55 Senate Republicans voted for legislation September 9 which would have accelerated Pentagon development of a national missile defense system, but the bill was killed by a Democratic filibuster. A press release issued by the Republican National Committee pointed to Chinese missile launches (most of them for US commercial satellites!), a missile test by North Korea and the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, and suggested hysterically that the US West Coast and Hawaii were in danger.

This attempt to revive Reagan's 'Star Wars' fantasies has long been a staple of the right wing of the Republican Party and the *Wall Street Journal*. It would be an enormous boondoggle for aerospace companies

that have been hard hit by the end of the Cold War, and it would also feed the political climate that justifies repressive measures at home in the name of fighting 'terrorism.'

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