

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

Vichy Democrats



When I recently saw Senator Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) defending President Bill Clinton, I thought back to last September when his lechering and lying were so luridly

exposed to the American people. Back then Senator Boxer called the President's behavior "wrong" and "indefensible." And when on one of the Sunday morning talk shows I saw Senator Fritz Hollings (D-S.C.) blustering in his nearly unintelligible compo-
pone drawl that the Boy President's behavior was not impeachable, I thought of his earlier bluster. Last September he confessed, "We're fed up. The behavior, the dishonesty of the president is unacceptable."

Ah, those were the good old days when a president who bemanured the White House, lied about it, and conspired to get others to lie and obstruct justice, could still be adjudged "indefensible," "unacceptable," and impeachable. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) pronounced that "Congress has a duty to move swiftly towards impeachment proceedings, and a conviction by two-thirds of the Senate is a possibility. The seven months of deception, and perhaps even perjury, by the president are impeachable offenses." Several Democratic congressmen suggested that the head of their party resign. Senator Carl Levin (D-Mich.) declared that "the President's behavior was clearly reckless and immoral." Other Democrats called the behavior deplorable and disgusting. Congressman Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), now Senator Schumer, added, "To me it is clear that the president lied when he testified

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before the grand jury." Boy was President Clinton ever in trouble!

His legal team went right to work even as he publicly admitted his "sins" and begged forgiveness. The lawyers were not so apologetic. They insisted that technically the boss had not lied or obstructed justice, and the sex was not really sexual sex but the other kind. That did not go down well on Capitol Hill, especially with the Democrats. House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) said the American people would not be impressed by "the fine distinction of a legal argument but [by] straight talk and the truth."

Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) was even more emphatic. "I certainly agree with those who have grown impatient with hair-splitting over legal technicalities," he fumed. "There is a basic understanding of the standard of truthfulness that the president has failed to meet. He [the president] had, as he concedes, a sexual relationship that was undeniably wrong, and he didn't tell the truth about it." Senator Patrick Leahy chimed in on Senator Daschle's behalf, as did Senator Richard Bryan (D-Nev.), saying, "I think it's a very self-destructive point for the president to argue the legalisms. Absolutely nobody buys that—not the president's defenders nor his most virulent critics."

But as with the "wrong" and "indefensible" behavior by the president that the Democrats are now defending, so with the "legalisms." At the Senate trial the president's legal team has continued to argue that the lies were not lies, the obstructions were not obstructions, and the sex was... oh, no more talk about sex. The protests of the Democratic leaders have evaporated. All agree that the president's actions were not impeachable.

It is rare to have so many politicians so blatantly contradicting themselves in so short a time. It is even rarer for a political

figure to be defended by people who have so recently condemned him. Even in former Senator Dale Bumpers's (D-Ark.) culminating argument at the Senate trial, the president heard himself being denounced for behavior that was "indefensible, outrageous, unforgivable, shameless." Yet such contradictions are not unheard of. The French center-left politicians emerging from World War II did the same thing, and almost as blatantly.

After World War II they all confected lovely stories about how they had opposed the Nazis and the Vichy fascists, though now we know that they were for the most part collaborators. Historians are digging up more evidence all the time that the French left got along swimmingly with the Nazi invaders and with the French right. Some like François Mitterrand even maintained friendships with Vichyites throughout the postwar period. Certainly there are other instances of such bold hypocrisy in other countries. In all instances, however, one element is necessary: a complete liquidation of conscience.

To be able to contradict oneself as rapidly as the Democrats have is a simple matter of slaying that little voice in the

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—William Kristol
Kissinger: Portrait of a Mind
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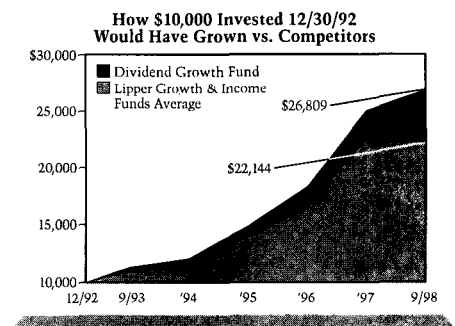
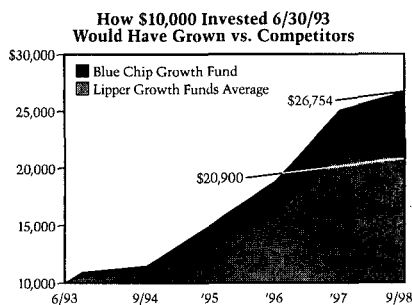
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back of one's mind that is always saying, "Don't be a creep." An indication of how the Democrats have succeeded in silencing conscience can be gained by comparing the president's "indefensible, outrageous, unforgivable, shameless" behavior with the grounds for impeaching a president written up by them in 1974. Then the Rodino Committee

reported that a president could be impeached for "behaving in a manner grossly incompatible with the proper function and purpose of the office." Collaborators on that report were Bill Clinton's first White House counsel, Bernard Nussbaum, and Hillary Rodham. The Clintons will soon be calling the writing of history a hate crime. ❄

very big desk. And even when he speaks from behind the podium's presidential seal no one outside select members of his staff is likely to see his hairy legs...and the garters holding up his socks. President Clinton is the first American president ever to go about the people's business in his undershorts. Members of the White House staff love it. It brings much needed informality to the White House, and in the summer the air conditioning will not have to be turned up so high. Perhaps other members of the staff will be allowed to work with their pants off—another Democratic innovation.

Now stop and think about it. Senator Harkin and Professor Dershowitz are not suggesting that they take their pants off at work. Professor Dershowitz, as a matter of fact, has very shapely calves; but neither man feels right about working pantless. Call them old-fashioned, if you will. Senator Harkin—being a liberal—can imagine that the day may come when for a whole array of healthful and ecologically congenial reasons men might take their trousers off at work. But for now he is keeping his pants on. What the president does is his business, and there is no evidence that the president's effectiveness in office has been impeded by his unusual practice. Only the Clinton-haters would deem it impeachable.

President Clinton, sitting behind his desk in the Oval Office, his pants neatly folded on the seat behind him, can still order bombs over Iraq. Relaxed, his legs free of those "scratchy" wool pants, he reads the morning intelligence reports from the CIA, free to contemplate serenely each threat to world peace. He used to get excited when he read reports of the North Koreans lobbing a missile over the Sea of Japan. Not now, when he can sit there in the pantless comfort of his own office. Congressman Henry Hyde sputters. The National Federation of Republican Women squawks. This president is going to stay the course—no pants, no hassle. This is our first 1960's-generation president. It is a cultural clash. The Republicans are just going to have to live with it. As Vice President Al Gore has said, Bill Clinton is "one of our greatest presidents." And his pants are off. ❄

Pants Off

The House managers arguing the case for convicting the president on two articles of impeachment have presented a formidable case. In response, the White House lawyers have displayed their usual energetic cunning. Still, the facts tower above the pettifoggery: The president lied under oath; he orchestrated a scheme to obstruct justice. Finally, and *entre nous*, he needs to develop more wholesome work habits. These facts notwithstanding, such moral and intellectual colossi as Senator Tom Harkin and Harvard Law Professor Alan Dershowitz argue that the president's behavior has been Unimpeachable.

Lying under oath, obstructing justice, and partaking of the mysteries that Our President partook of with his intern might be deplorable. Certainly neither Senator Harkin nor Professor Dershowitz approves. Nonetheless, neither gentleman believes that the president's behavior rises—as the phrase has it—to the level of Impeachable. Many leading Democrats agree, and it is not partisanship that moves them to this regimented consensus but simple common sense and human decency, the latter being the Democrats' forte if they do say so themselves.

So if lying and obstruction do not constitute impeachable deeds, what does? Senator Harkin tells us that treason would not go down well with his Democratic colleagues. If a president were exposed as a British agent the Democrats would bite the bullet and impeach, then convict. Bribery also constitutes an impeachable offense according to our nonpartisan Democrats, and also this very horrible-sounding offense:

"crimes against the state." Does this mean that aside from these terrible transgressions, an errant president will be allowed to go scot-free? Apparently so.

Well, what if upon being acquitted President Clinton decides that his trousers are "scratchy"? He decides that he is more "productive" working at his desk and in the White House west wing with his pants off. He wears a coat and tie, but no scratchy pants, unless he is meeting foreign dignitaries or appearing in public. Admittedly this would be unusual, but is it impeachable?

White House aides report that since he stopped wearing his pants to the office President Clinton has become much easier to get along with. Director of Oval Office Operations Nancy Hernreich tells ABC's Cokie Roberts, "He has not had a tantrum since the new policy. Who wants an irritable president near the nuclear trigger?" Lanny Davis reminds Chris Matthews that "what the President wears in his office is *his* business." After all, it is not like he is appearing in public with his pants off. Hillary has not objected, nor any members of his spiritual therapy team. In fact, they too might take their pants off while meeting with him—very relaxing, very human. Besides, the president is not wearing briefs, but rather modestly cut boxer shorts—cotton.

They remind Dee Dee Myers of the jogging shorts that the president and the vice president used to be seen wearing during their first months in office. "No big deal," she quips. And, incidentally, what is the point of the president wearing uncomfortable pants when he addresses the nation from behind his Oval Office desk? It is a

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The Hum of Hate

The progressive Hive has a new queen.

Readers who go way back may recall an earlier column (Capitol Ideas, February 1981) in which the bee hive was used as a metaphor for the world socialist enterprise—the community of progressives. The Hive image, first proposed by the writer Joseph Sobran, illustrated the key point that liberals and Communists, seemingly distinct, belong to the same Hive. They share the same goals, even if they perform different tasks. The metaphor allows us to speak of their activities as coordinated without having to invoke a conspiracy. The queen bee was the Kremlin, and the worker bees toiled in coordinated fashion to serve the queen without ever taking orders. Real bees work in that fashion. They communicate. They signal openly. They serve the queen. What goes on in their “minds” we do not know and do not need to know. But a careful study of their signaling patterns allowed researchers to decode them.

In the same way, liberals and socialists and Communists communicate openly. Their claims and arguments fall into a consistent pattern. There was a period (up to and including the 1930's) when Communists did indeed have to conspire—that is, communicate secretly. Alger Hiss began his career in that period. But by the 1950's open communication had become possible. H.G. Wells foresaw something like this in his 1928 book *The Open Conspiracy*.

Then, less than a decade ago, unexpectedly and swiftly, the Kremlin-centered Hive expired. Sometimes, for no apparent

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reason, this happens with real hives, too. The workers kill the queen. They surround her and pack themselves in close until she suffocates. In analogous fashion, that may be what happened with the progressive Hive.

The workers didn't particularly like the Moscow queen. She had far too many faults. She was too weak, in a way, too unfashionable, too impoverished, too undemocratic. The workers wanted something more up-to-date, something they could be proud of. The Berlin Wall fell and, in December 1989, Mikhail Gorbachev paid his courtesy call on the Vatican. His steady and revered predecessor, Stalin, had asked, “How many divisions has the Pope?” Now, it seemed, the Pope had won. In effect, the Soviet leader had surrendered. The queen died, and that Hive expired.

The old Hive was finished, but the workers were still alive and well. They began to look for a new leader. It seems now that they have found one. A new Hive is a-swarming. It is not fully in place yet, and its fate is uncertain. There are counter currents, rival formations, divided loyalties, great battles ahead. Some old workers have died and been replaced by novices. But the hum is again heard in the air, the hum of hate. It is heard on behalf of the new queen, who lives in a surprising place: the White House. Its occupant must be protected to the death; her enemies swiftly stung. The old war, the Cold War, was lost. But the new war, the Culture War, can be won. The old Queen is dead? Long live the Queen! In isolated pockets, grizzled old capos like Castro and the man in North Korea still soldier on, loyal to old banners and slogans. They don't know that it's a whole new war out there.

A few months ago, the workers themselves signaled unmistakably that they were still supporting the same cause when they issued their familiar attack cry, their *tora tora tora*: “McCarthyism!” This time, of course, it was “sexual McCarthyism.” The old fatwa! In the Cold War, it had sent the signal that those unsympathetic to Communism must be attacked. It *seemed* to be a cry for help. (“We are being attacked for our innocent beliefs.”) But that, of course, was a deception. In fact, it was intended to rally the attack bees. Today, the cry of “sexual McCarthyism” signals that those unsympathetic to what may be called sexual Communism (“All orifices are created equal!”) are perceived as vulnerable and must be attacked.

Many of those whose drone was heard in the old Hive remain active in the new; same people, same formation, new leadership: Gloria Steinem, Anthony Lewis, Garry Wills, Al Hunt, Arthur Miller, Barney Frank, John Conyers, Arthur Schlesinger, Jesse Jackson, Roger Wilkins, Betty Friedan, Jonathan Alter, Alan Dershowitz, Peter Jennings, Sidney Blumenthal, Lars-Erik Nelson, Robert Scheer. These are only the better known communication bees in the Hive, which is an entity immeasurably larger than such a list suggests. There are millions more whose names we do not know. Some of the old familiars are dead or in retirement by now—Bella Abzug, Tom Wicker, and Walter Cronkite come to mind—but there are new recruits, some very adept, such as *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich.

The Hive, old and new, is the communion of apostasy, the home for heretics, the base-community for all spiritual renegades. Now it is in full cry once more, alive and joyously stinging, with a heroic leader to defend: the President of the United States. He has the full