

The Two Smokescreens

Obscuring the Real Meaning of the Clinton-Monica Affair

(written in October 1998 by George Virsik)

Everybody seems to be commenting on the Clinton-Monica tragicomedy. So here is how a retired Australian ex-academic sees the whole show.

First of all, I am quiet aware that of the two alternatives -- a disgraced ex-President or a disgraced presidency -- two thirds of Americans prefer a development leading to the second alternative. This is how it will also probably end. Clinton will not be removed from office only provided with a sort of psychological 'chastity belt' till the end of his rule. It has been said that your President is a political (and moral?) Houdini. Perhaps so: Houdini's success also assumed a credulous audience that would not / could not look backstage.

The following 'letter to the editor' from one of our dailies illustrates the impact this is having on some people from outside your country: "The grubby saga about President Clinton's shameful conduct, resulting from his voracious sexual appetite and the almost predictable reaction of many Americans, shows once again that the US has grown from infantility to senility, without ever reaching maturity."

Now seriously. To start with, one should not overlook the two 'smokescreens' used to obscure the whole affair:

(1) Unnecessary and distasteful sexual details with their moralistic implications (poor "betrayed" Hillary), and

(2) Legalistic nitpicking (perjury or no perjury, impeach or not impeach).

The first of these leads to a reaction, as described by the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, of wanting to throw up over the 'salacious details', and perhaps also over Starr. And not over the initiator of the whole affair? The second smokescreen leads to a comparison with the impeachment proceedings against your former President Nixon whose actions violated the very basics of the open democratic system, a comparison through which the Clinton case must necessarily come out as a triviality.

Of course, zealot Starr made his own contribution to this legalistic camouflage. On the other hand it is possible that he had also an entirely 'unlegalistic' aim in his mind, which would then explain the excessive 'salacious details' in his Report: To place your baby-boomer into a situation in which every honest public figure -- the more a Head of

State -- would resign. Actually, it was Linda Tripp who created this check-mate situation for Clinton by talking Monica into preserving her blue dress with the President's "signature". Were it not for that dress who knows what would have befallen naive Monica, she would have been accused of wishful thinking and if she continued boasting, who knows what else. Politically correct elites know how to make things happen their way. Of course, non-violently, bloodlessly, in distinction to sexually voracious rulers from the patriarchal past. The Clintons as members of the 'progressive' generation loudly condemn the practice of 'sexual harassment' and the patriarchal system which allegedly saw the woman only as a 'sex object'. That is, as long as their own hide is not threatened. Though Hillary naturally took no personal part in Bill's mischief she became an 'accessory after the fact' with her persistence at any cost to save her prestigious position of First Lady. Were she namely that self-sacrificing, suffering and loving wife she would have 'forgiven' her weakling husband Bill, under the condition that President Bill vacates the position he had disgraced, and thus stops embarrassing USA and indirectly the whole western world. One is reminded of communist ideologues who criticised the privileges of "classes of exploiters in capitalist countries" but enjoyed the same, if not greater, material privileges as soon as they came to power. Feministic and communistic hypocrisies are apparently not that much different.

That Clinton, not knowing about the preserved blue dress, was counting on Monica not being believed by anybody was apparent from the fact that instead of admitting his fault -- honestly and briefly, without explanations -- he voluntarily went on TV with an innocent face, wiggling his finger at the whole world. Had he owned up from the very beginning it probably would have cost him some compensation to Paula Jones, perhaps also a simple admission of 'sexual relationship' with Monica, and maybe an apology -- by far not as theatrical and forceful as the one six months later -- and by today the whole matter would have been long forgotten. Those would have been the actions of an honest, though weak, man. Should then, in spite of all this, some Starr have asked him about 'salacious details' he could have answered with all the dignity of a President: "None of your business." And consequently, so could Monica.

However, what transpired and what apparently not even Starr counted on, was -- in the words of James Hall, an

Australian columnist -- "Bill Clinton is an honour-free zone". In an article (THE AUSTRALIAN Sept 18,1998) with this heading he wrote:

"Whatever happened to honour? In all the outpouring of sympathy and criticism surrounding Bill Clinton, that venerable word hasn't had much of a look-in ... It doesn't seem to be in his lexicon of contrition. ...

... If he weren't the President of the US maybe we could let it pass. But he isn't just any old Bill. He says he will not resign and many applaud. I cannot join in. This time he should not be guided by political necessity, legal contortion or popularity polls -- Oprahfied America will sympathise with any victim or villain if he talks long enough. Thankfully, we no longer expect a disgraced public figure to retire to the drawing room and shoot himself. But at least he can get off the embarrassing public stage.

Honour obviously doesn't mean much to Clinton and sadly, it does seem to be loosing its power and esteem everywhere. Pity. ... "

I browsed through the Starr Report on the very day it appeared on the internet. As far as the 'salacious details' are concerned, I found most scandalous the following passages:

"... the President acknowledged "inappropriate intimate contact" (and) as to his denial in the Jones deposition that he and Ms. Lewinsky had had a "sexual relationship," the President maintained that there can be no sexual relationship without sexual intercourse, regardless of what other sexual activities may transpire. He stated that "most ordinary Americans" would embrace this distinction. The President also maintained that none of his sexual contacts with Ms. Lewinsky constituted "sexual relations" within a specific definition used in the Jones deposition. ... He testified:

[I]f the deponent is the person who has oral sex performed on him, then the contact is with -- not with anything on that list, but with the lips of another person. It seems to be self-evident that that's what it is. . . . Let me remind you, sir, I read this carefully. He did testify that direct contact with Ms. Lewinsky's breasts or genitalia would fall within the definition, and he denied having had any such contact."

I would have thought that an "inappropriate intimate contact" would be if he for instance just pinched Monica's bottom. However, this is beside the point. What is remarkable, is that the person who prods in these 'salacious details' is not Starr but the President of the United States! Had he been accused of embezzlement or some other

financial or political wrongdoing it would have been understandable that he -- President or not -- would want to pinpoint the exact details of what happened in order to minimise his guilt or even exonerate himself. Even in case of a paternity lawsuit one could understand his explanations about 'only oral sex', or the use of a real cigar rather than the one he was born with. If, for instance, a wife accuses her husband of having had an affair with the girl next door, the only answers she is interested in are "yes" or "no". Not about the actual techniques of the act and other 'salacious details'. This is even more so in Clinton's case: the only dignified answers (truthful or not) were "yes" or "no" or "I won't tell." (Fifth Amendment?) And not legalistic nit-picking around disgusting details unbecoming any self-respecting person, not to mention the President of the United States. A defence based on salacious details that forces the Crown Prosecutor to go into equally disgusting details in order not to let him get away with this kind of legalistic acrobacy.

DER SPIEGEL in its comments believed at the beginning that America would be outraged, not because of Clinton's "immorality", "infidelity" or "perjury", but because of the way he disgraced the highest office and function in his country:

"Starr and the Grand Jury have produced an abundance of preparatory work in order to closely scrutinise "the first pornographic President" (so the conservative columnist George Will). Oral sex in the workplace, in particular if it is the Oval Office, represents in the eyes of Americans not only an offence against good manners but it borders on sacrilege and blasphemy: As if the Most Holy of the political religion of the United States were desecrated and besmirched."

And this is what it is all about: Had some prosecutor, for instance, found out and published 'salacious details' about the alleged relationship between Jack Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe, that would have been an 'invasion of privacy' and in that case the defence "The President betrayed his wife, not the country!" would have been valid and to the point. Similarly had somebody published a picture of him sitting on the toilet. But had the President been caught at, and the fact publicised that, say, while being drunk he relieved himself on the carpet in the Oval Office, that would not be an invasion of his privacy but a service to the public informing them that their President had disgraced his function and office. This is how probably Starr saw it when he wrote his Report. One thing is to wear only your bathers at the beach and another thing if you come dressed like that to, say, a church: Not the act as such is immoral

but the symbolic function of the venue makes it an act of disrespect, offence, indeed sacrilege.

Let me emphasise again and again that what is being forgotten in the heap of 'salacious details' around Monica and the cigar is the context in which the whole brouhaha started: the charge of 'sexual harassment' (now more or less an established fact) by Paula Jones. Had this not happened, today nobody would have to know about Monica and the President would not have felt compelled to deceitfully wave at us his finger from our TV screens. The charge of 'sexual harassment' -- often referring to situations in which the over-courageous or over-cheeky perpetrator can lose his job and which in the past would probably have been dealt with by a loud "Stop it!" or perhaps a very public slap in the face -- is an achievement of the 'progressive' ideological camp. Its application becomes objectionable only if it is guided by feminist zealotry and not by common sense. For instance, here in Melbourne we had a well known case of a university lecturer, whose name was dragged through the press by feminists and who eventually lost his job. His transgression: he touched the breasts of one student during a ballroom dance and told another one that he was having sinful thoughts whenever he looked at her. And a conservative West Australian politician had to depart from the political scene after having told a pestering reporter that he would "unscrew her tits". Even from a common sense point of view, not to mention the feminist zeal, Clinton's behaviour to both Paula and Monica was far beyond those listed above.

Indeed, the lamentations of conservatives over the "immorality" of what happened, lamentations that the politically correct only laugh at, camouflage the fact that the President:

(a) Violated the rules ('no sexual harassment') of the game or religion of which he himself is a High Priest. A couple of years ago an Irish bishop resigned after his former housekeeper, or what, named him as the father of her son and demanded indemnity, or so. Many protestant bishops have sons and there is nothing to it. This Catholic bishop, however, accepted certain 'rules of game' which put him in a prestigious and responsible position, a part of which was also celibacy. Though he did not resign after having violated the rules, he did so after he was found out. For his own good but also for the good of the Institution that he represented. Clinton violated at least twice the feminist rules: with Paula and with Monica (as well as Kathleen Willey?).

(b) When he found himself in a situation that demanded an

honest admission, perhaps a brief apology, he not only lied (that might be understandable) but also used the power emanating from his position to belittle the name of the "victim". In inverted commas, because, of course, Monica was in no way an innocent victim but that is irrelevant here. Only recently a South Australian judge was attacked by our feminists just because he ventured to claim that there is a difference between a rape of a seventeen years old virgin and that of a forty years old prostitute. This is apparently a part of the feminist creed. However, if you accept that then it follows that Clinton's deeds were of the same severity as if Paula and Monica were virgins. No sane person would, of course, go as far as that, but technically that's how it is. If I, as a university lecturer, would have been found out to be in a 'Paula or Monica situation' with a young student I would almost immediately have lost my academic job. Nobody would be particularly interested whether the student started it all. My 'position of power' as her teacher would have been the determining factor. Of course, this position is not nearly as overwhelming as that of the President of the United States vis-a-vis a twenty-one year old intern. And our feminists would prosecute me for my sin against their commandment more than would our pious ladies condemn me for my sin against the sixth commandment. If I were married my deed would also constitute an act of infidelity, but in the context of 'sexual harassment' this is completely irrelevant. Therefore I think that all that crying over poor Hillary is just a part of the whole smokescreen.

DER SPIEGEL wrote similarly about Clinton's behaviour towards Monica: "A behaviour, classified as 'indecent towards subordinates', in America would have led to an immediate dismissal of any manager, professor or military officer...". And in a commentary about his "attrition" they wrote with barely concealed irony:

"Before the weekend the President tried to stop the usurpers by once more seeking to captivate the nation with a calculated outburst of emotions. The opportunity arose Friday morning through the annual "Breakfast Prayers" with the representatives of all of the important religious communities in the White House: Clinton apologised with moist eyes to all who were disappointed, concerned or injured, even to the maltreated Monica Lewinsky. "I am a sinner, help me to better myself" pleaded the President. ... Just as by accident, the TV cameras were present. Did the President once again put all his trust in his persuasive power to change the mood of the nation and to solicit forgiveness? But not even forgiveness would bring him back the trust of the nation and only on this depends the power of the President, not on the mercy of the public.

Clinton marches towards the inescapable retribution and no Breakfast Prayer can prevent this. Neither a visit to the psychiatrist.”

This was about a month ago. Today also DER SPIEGEL writes differently because apparently they too underestimated the thick skin of the President and his 66% of Americans. Probably there is no hoping he will resign, nevertheless, here are some quotes from respectable American sources as well:

“I personally feel that if the president has any integrity at all, and I realise that’s questionable, he should resign for the good of the nation. The fact that he’s president of the United States his actions and choices have created an environment that threatens our nation.” Rep. Walter Jones Jr., R-N.C.

“For the sake of the country, the best thing he can do is quietly resign. Let (Vice President) Al Gore pardon him and get it off the front pages and into history.” Franklin Graham, son of evangelist Billy Graham, a friend of the Clintons.

“President Clinton can no longer spare us the ordeal of the last eight months, but he can spare us the ordeal of impeachment proceedings and a crippled presidency. He can spare us this ordeal by doing the honorable thing resigning.” Gary L. Bauer, president of American Renewal, a conservative organization.

On the other hand, as far as his impeachment is concerned, I have to agree with what Andrew Sullivan wrote recently in THE SUNDAY TIMES:

“Clinton should have resigned out of honour a long time ago. But if he isn’t going to resign, and I would not hold my breath, then it seems to me to be overkill to use the ancient and sombre weapon of impeachment to force him out. ... This President has already cheapened the office of the presidency. There is no reason he should cheapen the process of impeachment as well. Nevertheless, it’s becoming difficult to translate this commonsensical distinction into a legal distinction.”

May I dare to put it more drastically? Like an unscrupulous cornered individual holding in front of him a hostage forcing the policeman to remain inactive, Clinton covers himself with the opinion of those 66% Americans and the critical global economic and financial situation. As the policeman, however heavily armed, is unable to do

anything, apparently no threats of impeachment and consequent removal from office will force the cynical and ‘honour-free’ Clinton to let the hostage go. That is, to resign thus allowing USA and the world to immediately forget the whole matter, while allowing the new politically and morally unconstrained President to pay his full attention to solving the serious economic and political world problems. Part of Clinton’s cynicism is that he knows how to exploit world’s dependence on USA which expect him to act efficiently rather than ‘honourably’. So he is getting an applause not only from feminists but also from the UN General Assembly where ordinary people in a similar situation would face condemnation or at least a painful silence.

Those who like to compare Clinton’s case with that of Nixon ought to realise that although the US does not permit their ruler to be beyond the law, not nearly all countries in the world are that democratic. However, they all accept that the Head of State who is held to ridicule is less stable than the one who is feared and respected. (The former Czechoslovak President) Novotny did much worse things than Nixon did but the Russians kept him in power as long as the Czechs were afraid of him and hated him. Only when they began to laugh at their President did the Russians decide to replace him (by Dubcek who ‘backfired’ but that is a different matter). Similarly, Khrushchev was no democrat and compared to him Nixon was a political angel, but he remained at the helm of the Soviet Union for many years. Only when he made a fool of himself by banging his shoe at the United Nations in New York, was his fate sealed. And the fact that today the Russians cannot make their Alzheimer (or vodka) affected President to resign bears witness, more than anything else, to the political crisis in their country. I did not use to watch David Letterman very much, but recently I stayed switched on for his obligatory introductory jokes about your (and his!) President. However, it is not only entertainers and professional comedians who often make more fun of your President than of Yeltsin. Also in our country, Clinton, Monica, cigar, blue dress etc. became symbols used in semi-serious political speeches to make a point (our elections were held on October 3). Of course, the thick skin that could not be penetrated by so many calls to resign, will be even less penetrated by a barrage of jokes.

What follows from all this? I think that was best expressed by our young columnist Sophie Masson. In her piece “Youth, not honour, the new Grail” (THE AUSTRALIAN, Sept. 22, 1998) she wrote:

“... Correctly, he [James Hall whom I quoted at the

beginning] identified the appalling and complete lack of honour in Bill Clinton's behaviour, and labelled it a symptom of Oprahfied America, which will grant absolution to any fool or swine or creep as long as he talks long enough.

... our Zeitgeist is dominated by the middle-aged, those who cannot let go of their own youth and so cannot allow the younger to be young. They do not value honour because it demands that they be both inspiration and guide by living well and truly.

... by aping young people, by bowing down in front of youthful stereotypes and in the same breath, discounting the hunger of youth for honourable ideals, well-meaning older people can in fact stifle the spirit of youth."

This is a very deep thought placing Clinton and his 66% of politically correct Americans into a wider context. It reminds one of the classical observation, that Ancient Rome was in ascent while age, experience, wisdom were venerated, and its decline started when, instead, youth, easy going 'carpe diem', orgies etc, were put on the pedestal, became the new ideals. My own experience at the university taught me that in general Asian (and Jewish) students worked harder and with more enthusiasm than many 'whites' who often seemed to be lost for motivation. I think one of the reasons for this was described very accurately by Sophie Masson: Those from the older generation who are supposed to serve them as role models, as examples to follow, are aping them instead of inspiring them. I remember how in our native Slovakia we used to make fun of American grandmothers dressed all in pink and covered in heavy makeup, whereas our old ladies dressed modestly and soberly without pretence of youthfulness? Today, of course, we are used to old ladies in pink and think nothing of it. Nevertheless, it makes one think, whether this innocent aspect of American life were not the embryonic beginnings of the decline that Sophie Masson refers to. A context in which also the Clinton affair and the reaction of his 66% Americans become more comprehensible.

From what I saw on the TV screen, namely which of the Senators or Congressmen defended Clinton, I got the impression that the impeachment procedure will end the same way as O. J. Simpson's trial. Simpson's acquittal, in spite of seemingly clear proofs, must have pointed to the political correctness of the jury. Clinton will probably also be acquitted; as a criminal act or breach of state security his sleaziness is indeed trivial, even irrelevant. His sophistries and evasions, however, attest to the fact that for him as

well as for the apologists from his ideological camp, concepts like personal honour and respectable behaviour are also trivial. I do not know what follows from the O.J. Simpson acquittal. Before the trial he was hardly known outside the USA. On the other hand, Clinton represents the "new America" before the whole world and something must follow from the way his moral standing is perceived not only in the USA but in the whole world.

Moral categories or characteristics such as responsibility, honesty, honour, dignity, respectability etc. are personal, not collective or communitarian attributes. Even as Christians we are told to "Love your neighbour" and not to "Love your neighbourhood". Today this is being forgotten with often dire consequences.

Also, if Joe Doe is continually reminded of his responsibility for acts perpetrated by his predecessors, or if one talks incessantly about Joe's duty to apologise for things done by other individuals with whom he is connected only through shared culture, race, nationality or denomination, Joe's sense of **personal** responsibility and accountability will suffer followed by a devaluation in Joe's conscience of moral categories, including the ones mentioned above.

However, Joe's sense of **personal** responsibility and accountability will suffer also if he is continuously reminded of grievances suffered by individuals with whom he is connected only through shared culture, race, nationality or denomination and of his rights to moral (and often also financial) compensation for injustice done to individuals to whom he is only thus indirectly connected.

This, however, belongs already to a much wider, though related, topic.

Dear reader. I hope you read this through without condemning me too much for my heresies. What I mean is that today conservatism is to the politically correct what heresy was to the mediaeval Church. Thankfully, today the punishment is much more subtle, certainly non-violent.