

Clinton draws new battle lines against Gingrich gang

by Edward Spannaus

Amidst the fanfare of Newt Gingrich and his band of glassy-eyed followers celebrating the conclusion of their first 100 days of the new Congress, President Clinton was delivering a markedly different message in an address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Dallas. In this speech, delivered on April 7, the President said that in the first 100 days, the initiative may have been with the House of Representatives; but now, "in the second 100 days and beyond, our mission together must be to decide which of these House proposals should be adopted, which should be modified, and which should be stopped."

Although the "100 days" didn't technically end until April 13, House Republicans, led by Speaker of the House "Robespierre" Gingrich, were celebrating a week early with a rally on April 7, followed by Gingrich's nationwide televised address on April 8. But the celebrations were certainly premature, in more ways than one. As House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta aptly put it, there was "a lot of press action, a lot of PR, a lot of hype."

In fact, the only measures of the Republicans' "Contract with America" agenda which were actually adopted into law, were those few relatively noncontroversial matters which were supported by Democrats and by the Clinton administration. The two big-ticket items—the proposed constitutional amendments for office term limits, and the Balanced Budget Amendment—were voted down in the House and Senate respectively. And it is widely expected that the hard-core "Contract" items, such as welfare, tax cuts, and legal and regulatory reform, will be substantially modified in the Senate.

Asked for his assessment of the "100 days" during an interview on April 5, *EIR's* founding editor Lyndon LaRouche said that Gingrich and Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.)

certainly did not achieve their objectives. "They've made a little wreckage, they've caused distractions. . . . But what they've done in net, is they've sounded the alarm; and the Minutemen around the country are beginning to stand up in various constituencies, and they're going to mobilize to wipe this thing out, come the next election. And the effects of that will be seen as a process, not just at election time in 1996; but we're going to see it over the coming months, into the fall. We're going to see there's a big movement, coming up in these United States, which is going to get rid of everything that looks like, talks like, or smells like 'Contract with America.' And I think *that's* the plus side of the story."

The effect of this can already be seen, as the battleground on the "Contract" legislation now shifts to the Senate. Phil Gramm is demanding that the Senate pass the House bills virtually unchanged, but this simply is not going to happen. Sen. Robert Dole (R-Kan.)—like Gramm, an announced presidential candidate—is expected to take a much more cautious approach, as will many Republicans on the Senate side.

Drawing the Line

And now, to add another impediment to passage of the Gramm-Gingrich package, the Senate is working under a series of explicit veto threats from President Clinton. In his April 7 Dallas speech, Clinton, perhaps emboldened by rising public skepticism and opposition to the GOP agenda, for the first time laid out exactly which items are acceptable and which are unacceptable, which measures he can live with, and which ones he will veto if they remain in their present form.

The President described his own responsibility in this situation as being "to lead the quiet, reasoned forces of both parties in both houses to sift through the rhetoric, and decide what is really best for America."

Alluding to the populist demagoguery of the Gingrich-Gramm gang, Clinton remarked that the country has often been spurred on "by purist, reformist, populist agendas which articulated grievances and proposed radical departures," but that these initiatives have then been shaped by Presidents "who incorporated what was good, smoothed out what was rough, and discarded what would hurt."

"I was not elected President to pile up a stack of vetoes," Clinton declared. "I was elected President to change the direction of America." He then appealed to Republicans and to Democrats alike to keep the momentum for change going, and "not to allow the energy and longing for change now to be dissipated amid a partisan clutter of accusations."

Clinton then drew a series of lines in the sand as to where he stands on the current proposed legislation, which can be fairly summarized as follows:

- **Taxes:** Clinton said the GOP's proposed \$200 billion tax cut is a "fantasy," which we can't afford and can't pass. A realistic cut would be somewhere around a third of that, he said. He charged that the Republican plan is weighted heavily toward benefitting the wealthy, who, he said, have done very well in "the new global economy," whereas the middle class has suffered stagnant incomes and needs the benefits the most. Half of the American people "are working for the same or lower incomes than they were making 15 years ago," the President pointed out.

- **Welfare:** While saying he supports welfare reform, Clinton said the current House bill focuses too much on cutting costs, and that it punishes young children for the sins of their parents. "I think that's wrong," he said. "Rich or poor, black, white or brown, in or out of wedlock, a baby is a baby, a child is a child. It's part of our future, and we have an obligation to those children not to punish them for something over which they had absolutely no control."

- **Cutting the deficit:** "There are cuts I can't live with," said the President, and he identified some of these as cuts in education, immunization, school lunches, nutrition programs, and the like. The Republicans "want the poor in this country to bear the burden of two-thirds of their supposed cuts—their proposed cuts—and only get 5% of the benefit of the tax cuts." Clinton said that the rescission package (cuts from the current budget) passed by the House was "completely unacceptable," but that he would sign the \$16 billion rescission bill passed by the Senate, if the House agrees to the Senate version and it is submitted to him.

- **Regulatory reform:** The President said his administration is committed to changing "the culture of regulation that has dominated our country for a long time." But, he declared: "If the Republicans send me a bill that would let unsafe planes fly, or contaminated meat be sold, or contaminated water continue to find its way into city water systems, I will veto it."

- **Legal reform:** Clinton will veto any bill with a "loser pays" rule for civil suits, which would put justice out of the

reach of ordinary people, and which he compared to the poll tax which used to be used to keep blacks and poor people from voting. He said that a \$250,000 ceiling for punitive damages will not have a significant deterrent effect on giant multinational corporations.

- **Crime:** Clinton emphasized his support for much of the crime bill as passed by the House, but said that if the Republicans try to repeal the commitment to 100,000 police in last year's crime bill, or repeal the assault weapons ban, he will veto the current crime bill.

- **Environment:** While stressing his own commitment to environmental protection, Clinton declared: "I cannot and I will not compromise any clean water, any clean air, and protection against toxic waste. The environment cannot protect itself. And if it requires a presidential veto to protect it, then that's what I'll provide." He also promised to veto the House-passed requirement for specific levels of compensation to property owners, saying that if such a law were on the books in the states, "then local governments would completely have to give up zoning or be bankrupt every time they tried to change a zoning law."

- **Peacekeeping:** Clinton will veto the National Security Revitalization Act as passed by the House.

Following his enumeration of possible vetoes, the President discussed areas of his own agenda which he wants to promote, including health care reform, the minimum wage, and education.

The FDR Legacy

The President followed up his April 7 Dallas speech with an address at ceremonies commemorating the death of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, which were held in Warm Springs, Georgia on April 12. Here, President Clinton evoked FDR's memory to illustrate the positive role of the federal government, and the widespread benefits to the citizenry which accrued from Roosevelt's bold initiatives during the New Deal, including such matters as rural electrification, jobs programs, and social security.

FDR's first job, said Clinton, was to put America back to work. Today, he said, Americans are back to work, but are insecure, and for many their living standards have actually fallen over the past 15 years.

In the decades following World War II, Clinton noted, the whole country grew together. "Nothing like it had ever been seen before. Every income group, every racial group, all were improving their standing, and growing together, not growing apart." But this began to change around 20 years ago, Clinton continued, and the inequality among working people got worse. Today many people ask: "If there's an economic recovery, why haven't I felt it?"

On that score, the President has identified the crucial problem facing his administration. But, other than the absolutely necessary efforts to hold the line against the Gramm-Gingrich gang, he has not yet identified a solution.