

'Crybaby Newt' Gingrich becomes Public Enemy No. 1

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Nov. 21, 1995 was a really bad day for Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. After suffering a week of non-stop public humiliation for his bungling of the Republican "showdown" with President Clinton over the shutdown of the federal government, Gingrich traveled to Nashua, New Hampshire to address a collection of die-hard "Newtonians" at the annual gathering of GOP governors. The appearance was expected to be an ego-boost for the battered Speaker. It came less than 24 hours after he was iced-out of the compromise deal between the White House and his fellow House and Senate Republicans, which sent government employees back to work and granted President Clinton major concessions, halting GOP plans to force through cuts in welfare, Medicare, and Medicaid, as part of the continuing resolution.

The New Hampshire appearance was to begin with a photo opportunity. But, when Gingrich arrived, he found that he was already upstaged by a not-quite Gingrich look-alike, with powdered gray hair, a teddy bear, and a baby bottle, wearing a diaper and a sweatshirt that read, "Crybaby Newt." With TV cameras and tape recorders rolling, the ersatz Newt (a Boston-based associate of Lyndon LaRouche) and a group of eight others, sang their rendition of Lesley Gore's 1963 pop hit, "It's My Party and I'll Cry If I Want To."

Typical of Gingrich's string of bad judgments, the police were called in to drag off the chorus, and, as a result, the entire press corp—cameras still rolling—followed the ribald protestors outside, where all the major TV networks filmed interviews and taped renditions of the song. The major New England TV and radio networks ran prominent news items. Among the demonstrators: a local GOP party official who came to Nashua to announce that she was quitting the Republican camp in disgust at Gingrich's performance.

The press corps and the Republican governors knew what the diapers and the other crybaby paraphernalia were all about. On Nov. 16, the New York *Daily News* ran a front-page cartoon of Gingrich in diapers, under a headline that read: "Cry Baby," subtitled, "Newt's Tantrum: He Closed Down the Government Because Clinton Made Him Sit at Back of Plane." The *Daily News* cover became the "cartoon heard 'round the world," as newspapers in Europe and television networks in Ibero-America and Asia reported the "cry-baby" drawing. Gingrich's international stature as the leader of the Conservative Revolution in America came crashing down with the flick of an artist's pen.

Gingrich brought on the deluge himself, when, in a Nov. 15 breakfast interview with the *Christian Science Monitor*, he admitted that he had crafted the bills that shut down the federal government and attempted to drive the United States, for the first time in its history, into default, because he had felt "snubbed" by President Clinton during the Air Force One trip to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's funeral.

The *Daily News* cartoon sparked a nationwide competition. The next day, the San Diego *Union-Tribune* published a cartoon of President Clinton addressing the media, announcing that he was installing a baby seat in Air Force One for Gingrich "to avoid future misunderstandings." The Baltimore *Sun* portrayed Gingrich as the Devil, in an editorial-page cartoon titled "The Face of Evil," which showed the Contract with America being fashioned in Hell.

White House press secretary Mike McCurry promised that next time the Speaker flew aboard Air Force One, he'd receive plenty of M&M candies in boxes bearing the Presidential Seal.

Mike Royko, the Chicago *Tribune's* resident political columnist, tore into Gingrich on Nov. 17: "Most of us have



"Baby Newt and the Young Caucasians" perform the 1963 pop hit "It's My Party and I'll Cry If I Want To," outside the Republican Governors' Association in Nashua, New Hampshire on Nov. 21, after having been thrown out of the conference hall.

gone to funerals, signed the book at the funeral home, somberly offered our condolences to the family members, sat quietly in the church, and driven grimly to the cemetery. One's behavior is expected to be restrained, dignified, and respectful of the dead and the grieving. So what's with Newt Gingrich, or 'Newtie,' as his mom always calls him? Here is a former college teacher, a pudgy giant among Republicans, a possible future presidential candidate. And he doesn't even know how to behave himself. Newtie has complained that when he flew on Air Force One to and from Israel for the funeral of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, he had to sit in the back of the plane while President Clinton sat way up in the front and ignored him. . . . How would you feel if you walked into Parlor A and were about to pay your final respects to the guy in the box when suddenly Newtie popped out from behind the flowers and said: 'Hey, let's cut a deal, huh?' "

A few days later, the White House released a set of photographs taken aboard Air Force One during the Rabin funeral trip. They showed President Clinton seated, toward the back of the plane, engaged in a conversation with Gingrich and Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.).

Nationwide anti-Newt ferment

The national media, which built up Gingrich as the Jacobin superstar of the Republican Revolution following the November 1994 congressional elections, did not target Gingrich because of any change of heart. Their private polls showed that the American public had already cast the Speaker into the role of Public Enemy No. 1. The bungled confrontation

with President Clinton over the federal budget, and over the government shutdown, merely catalyzed an already broad-based public revolt against the Gingrich program of imposing radical austerity on the majority of Americans, while granting lucrative tax breaks to the super-rich.

When President Clinton held his ground and told the American people that he would not sell them out to Gingrich's vicious austerity, he gave the public an "enemy image" to help focus their anger. The President accurately assessed the rapidly shifting mood in the country.

When over 1 million black men marched to the steps of the Capitol on Oct. 16 to protest the mean-spirited attitude of official Washington to the plight of inner-city Americans, Gingrich was one of the objects of their fury. When AFL-CIO delegates swept the do-nothing Lane Kirkland leadership out of office in the first contested election in the union's history, the victorious John Sweeney, in his acceptance speech, vowed to mobilize the American labor movement to re-elect President Clinton and sweep the Gingrichites out of Congress.

In cities all across America, groups of citizens are coming together to protest against the Speaker and his Contract with America: protestors at a federal building in Pittsburgh, groups in Cleveland, Phoenix, Minneapolis, Wilmington, and, of course, Nashua. A groundswell is building. The president of the Chicago local of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), interviewed on Chicago's most widely listened-to African-American radio station, declared that her rank-and-file is going to mobilize to secure

Clinton's re-election. The President, she said, "cannot be intimidated by Newt Gingrich."

London says, 'Bye-bye, Newt'

The Speaker is also faced with abandonment by his backers in London. Nobody likes a loser, especially the Windsor/Club of the Isles crowd, which, in a fight for its own survival, has staked a lot on the Gingrich-led Conservative Revolution being able to cripple President Clinton, and the United States, in his "war and a half" against London.

On Nov. 16, the *Wall Street Journal*, in a column by Albert R. Hunt, one of its in-house writers, pronounced Gingrich a political liability. The showdown between the Congress and the President had not yet been settled, but, Hunt observed, "unlike several months ago, the odds are no longer with the Republicans—who have miscalculated, overreached, and deceived themselves." For Hunt, the problem boils down to Gingrich, who "performs a hat trick for the opposition: He alienates the public, unifies Democrats and stiffens the President's notoriously weak spine. Congressional Democrats rejoice every time the Speaker holds a press conference." Hunt warned Gingrich that he'd better drop his complaints about the Air Force One incident, because, "in fact, he was the only guest who was accompanied by his spouse—at his insistence—who also has had a job with Israel Export Co., a concern trying to get business to relocate to Israel in exchange for Israeli government incentives."

Next came a pronouncement from the semi-official

House organ of Windsor Castle, the *Times* of London. Martin Fletcher, the *Times*'s Clinton-bashing, America-hating Washington correspondent, declared on Nov. 22: "Newt Gingrich is in free fall, a year after masterminding the Republicans' capture of Congress and being hailed as America's de facto President." He continued, "The House Speaker badly mishandled his party's budget showdown with the White House; his perceived 'extremism' provided the perfect foil for President Clinton's political recovery, and he is expected to acknowledge the reality of his situation on Monday, by formally ruling out a presidential bid."

As the final twist of the knife, Fletcher wrote: "The Speaker also inspires intense personal dislike and a hostile media fanned that antipathy; a recent *Vanity Fair* profile, for example, portrayed him as a megalomaniacal philanderer. . . . Polls show big majorities of Americans disapprove of his performance, and distrust the Republican agenda. Mr. Clinton's approval rating has reached 53%, the highest since February 1994, and he has opened a 15-point lead over Sen. Robert Dole, his probable Republican presidential opponent."

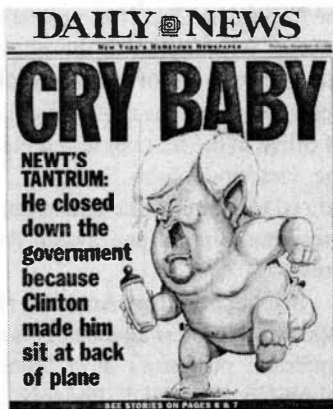
A year ago, following the GOP mid-term election sweep, Lord William Rees-Mogg, former editor-in-chief of the London *Times*, had confidently pronounced Bill Clinton a "lame duck—no, make that a dead duck." He subsequently forecast that either Colin Powell or Newt Gingrich would make mince-meat out of the President in the 1996 election.

My, how things have changed.

House votes: You can't call Gingrich a 'crybaby'

The Nov. 16 New York *Daily News* became the inspiration for many Democrats in their attacks on Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) during the day. It featured as its front-page story the headline "Crybaby-Newt's Tantrum: He Shut Down the Government Because Clinton Made Him Sit at the Back of Plane."

The story was accompanied by a cartoon of a pudgy baby, with blow-dried white hair and a baby bottle, in diapers, crying while stamping his feet. But House Republicans showed



that they have absolutely no sense of humor.

The tussle began when Lloyd Doggett (D-Tex.), in a one-minute floor speech, referred to Gingrich as a "crybaby" while displaying the *Daily News* front page. Martin Hoke (R-Ohio) raised an objection, asking, "Is it parliamentary to call the Speaker of the House a crybaby?" Speaker *pro tempore* Bob Inglis (R-S.C.) ruled that both Doggett's language and his display of the *Daily News* were out of order.

A few minutes later, George Miller (D-Calif.) came to the floor for a one-minute speech, also displaying the *Daily News* front page, to which Jack Kingston (R-Ga.) immediately objected. Miller said that it was in order to show the newspaper because it "provides and has provided to 800,000 New Yorkers the explanation of why the Speaker shut down the government." Kingston demanded a ruling from the Speaker *pro tem* that the newspaper was a violation of House rules, and Inglis ruled that the material was "demeaning to another member, the Speaker." Doggett appealed the ruling and Kingston moved to table Doggett's appeal. Kingston's motion was approved by a vote of 231-173.—*Carl Osgood*