

# Europe's press failed on elections forecast

by Hartmut Cramer

Up until Nov. 1, when the latest U.S. Gallup/CNN poll was published, presenting as a complete “surprise” the fact that House Speaker Newt Gingrich’s foolish strategy for routing the Democratic Party by focussing exclusively on the “Lewinsky issue” would backfire on Election Day, the European media without exception had touted the line that President Clinton would be “the sure loser,” and Gingrich “the sure winner,” in the mid-term elections. Expectations for GOP gains in the House ranged from at least “20 seats” (London *Independent*) to “about 40 seats, as forecast by Gingrich” (*Daily Telegraph*). But the latter, not just Britain’s, but Europe’s paper of record (a paper aggressively anti-Clinton), had to eat its words, and bemoaned on Nov. 5: “Tuesday’s result was worse than the worst Republican nightmare, and bore no relation to the big gains that Mr. Gingrich forecast and was expected to deliver. . . . Suddenly it is not Mr. Clinton, but his arch enemy, Mr. Gingrich, who is fighting for his life.”

After the publication of the Gallup/CNN poll, the line in the European press shifted, to say that, since Gingrich’s tactic seems to be backfiring, the race is now too close to call. But, this did not stop Europe’s main commentators, like George Bush-admirer Leo Wieland, Washington correspondent of Germany’s daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and the main British papers including the *Times*, *Guardian*, *Financial Times*, *Independent*, and the *Daily Telegraph*, to predict on the very eve of the elections, that Clinton would suffer a political defeat. Their argument: Even though the GOP would “not win as many seats as originally expected,” if they won “at least one or two” in the House, this still would be a clear “victory” for the GOP which would sufficiently weaken Clinton, allowing Gingrich to press ahead with his impeachment drive.

Exemplary of this line was the *Daily Telegraph*. On Nov. 2, under the banner headline “Republicans Set To Retain Power with Small Gains,” Washington correspondent Hugo Gurdon wrote: “Nine out of 10 incumbents can expect to win again, leaving the Republicans and their leader, House Speaker Newt Gingrich, firmly in control and ready to proceed with the probable impeachment of President Clinton.”

A few paragraphs below, the *Daily Telegraph* spelled out in detail how big a victory the British elite still expected the GOP to win, even after the high hopes of just a week before had been dashed: “Republican gains are expected to

be modest: Between one and four seats in the Senate, between six and 12 in the House, and two to four in governor contests.” As it turned out merely one day later, the paper was utterly wrong—on all three (“modest”) accounts! The Republicans won no additional seats in the Senate, lost five seats in the House, and ended up with one governor less than before.

## No mandate for impeachment

How confident the British elite was before these mid-term elections is made clear by the following, rather arrogant quote from the article: “A Republican pick-up of fewer than 10 seats would not be enough to suggest a mandate for proceeding against Mr. Clinton—the party of even popular Presidents customarily lose ground in mid-term elections. But a swing vote to Democrats big enough to make it clear that voters were siding with the President is thought highly unlikely.”

Gurdon even began to dream about a solid GOP majority “for decades to come”: “Republicans are forecast to win the governorships and control of the legislature in 19 states, compared with just six for Democrats. This would give the Republicans a huge advantage in redrawing constituency boundaries in 2000, and could help give them majorities in Congress for decades to come.”

Other British papers were also predicting a defeat for Clinton: “Turnout will be the key factor in many places. If all the Democrats who have been polled turn out, they could deliver their party a stunning win; but that is unlikely,” Andrew Marshall, Washington correspondent of the *Independent*, wrote on Election Day, despite the fact that the minorities, above all blacks and Hispanics, were especially mobilized.

“Early expectations, that 10 of the state’s House of Representatives seats—eight Democrat controlled—might be about to change hands, have been displaced by the less thrilling likelihood of a net gain, for the Republicans of two, maybe less,” is how Christopher Parkes of the *Financial Times*, the mouthpiece of the City of London, predicted the outcome of the mid-term elections in the state of California on Nov. 2. Reality turned out to be quite different, though.

This reality prompted one of the leading European members of the Trilateral Commission, Italy’s senior journalist Arrigo Levi, to state that he had badly miscalculated recent U.S. developments. In an editorial in Italy’s daily *Corriere della Sera* on Nov. 10, headlined “I Was Wrong on Clinton; I Beg Your Pardon,” Levi stated that at the height of the Lewinsky hysteria, “I dared to forecast that ‘within three months’ Clinton would have resigned. I made the mistake bigger by turning the prophecy . . . into advice. Clinton, I said, should immediately resign, without waiting for impeachment; otherwise, he will be a lame duck, and this will be a torment for America, and a catastrophe for the entire world.” Instead, Levi had to admit, “the President is strong and active.”