

The Passion of Richard Seymour - On the history of the international “Pro-War Left” and the trajectory of journalist Christopher Eric Hitchens

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Review of: *The Liberal Defence of Murder* by Richard Seymour. London: Verso, 2008 (paperback edition, 2012), 358 pages, \$29.95 hardback and \$24.95 paperback.

***UnHitched: The Trial of Christopher Hitchens* by Richard Seymour
London: Verso, 2013, 160 pages, \$16.95 paperback.**

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THE CURIOUS WORLD of apostate radical intellectuals still awaits the irreverently absurd satire of a Woody Allen. In the meantime, we are fortunate to have the books of Richard Seymour to skewer the predictable platitudes and puncture the sanctimonious pretensions of the “Pro-War Left.” This was a transatlantic confederacy of journalists, public intellectuals, and bloggers that championed the March 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq as a “humanitarian intervention.”

The “Liberal Hawks,” as they were also christened, demonized the war’s opponents as coddlers of totalitarianism while promising that U.S. troops would bring economic development and cultural uplift to the Middle East. Ten years afterwards, what do we know?

According to a report issued last March by the Costs of War project, based at Brown University’s Watson Institute for International Studies, more than 190,000 people (70% civilians) have been killed in the decade since the war in Iraq began. The currently estimated U.S. price tag is \$2.2 trillion, including care for veterans through 2053, far exceeding the initial government estimate of \$50 to \$60 billion.

As a consequence of the invasion, terrorism in Iraq has enlarged dramatically, and tactics and fighters are regularly exported to Syria and other neighboring countries. Since the \$60 billion spent on reconstruction for Iraq has gone primarily to the military and police, and much of the rest was depleted by massive fraud, waste and abuse, Iraq’s health care infrastructure remains devastated. [[1](#)]

Was historian Tony Judt's 2006 appraisal of the pro-war left as "Bush's Useful Idiots" [2]) sufficiently harsh? I've never been keen on Trotsky's pitiless condemnation of people to the "dust-bin of history." (Does history actually collect dust?) But when I meditate on the horrific body count and human suffering triggered by such a policy, I can't help fantasizing that, on their next takeoff, at least a few of the Liberal Hawks will fly into a black hole and be flash-fried by a firewall of energy.

Reds for Bush

To be sure, none of the pro-war left fired a shot. They talked tough but were hardly Charles Bronsons to begin with. In delivering their big wet kiss to Paul Wolfowitz and Donald Rumsfeld, the real wrongdoing was deploying their progressive political credentials to give imperialism a liberal veneer, thereby shielding the war-makers from articulate criticisms.

Three decades earlier, during the Vietnam War, hundreds of writers and intellectuals inspired by Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn and others played an honorable role as instigators and truth-tellers. Memories of that Camelot moment of brief perfection raise the possibility that the Iraqi slaughter and its horrible aftermath might have been prevented as well. Instead, the pro-war left promptly succumbed to classic war hysteria, besmirching the hard-earned anti-imperialist tradition of radical intellectuals and performing an irreplaceable service to the Bush administration.

Everyone has the entitlement, indeed the duty, to change his or her mind in light of new information or a shifting world situation. Revolutionary Marxists dramatically revised their estimate of the leadership and direction of the Russian Revolution after Stalin came to power.

In the course of a lifetime of negotiating a world in turmoil, we aging activists of the 1960s generation made many mistakes, often due to inadequate knowledge, an over-optimistic estimation of the nature of the period, or trusting the judgment of those who otherwise seemed to have had good track records. Some of these miscalculations have already been addressed and more will need to be debated in the near future. [3]

The pro-war interventionists of 2003, however, combined the monumental blunder of supporting a classic imperialist invasion with an unconscionable, hyperbolic smearing of its socialist-internationalist critics. In manifestos and blogs there was no moral high-ground that they did not seek to occupy.

Liberal Hawks defined the conflict as one of secular humanism against medieval terrorism, designating the antiwar position as antithetical to progress. Those who refused to accept the outlook of the Bush administration became not rational agents to be persuaded through logical arguments, but enemies to be conquered.

The assertions that anti-imperialists of the new millennium were motivated by "self-hate" [4] only worsened a national political culture in which adversaries rarely interact but fulminate in their own echo chambers. Although they did not carry out the White House planning themselves, these "Reds for Bush" became a new version of "The Best and the Brightest" of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, enablers of empire whom their younger selves once held in contempt.

How was it possible for the latest crop of deradicalizing intellectuals to formulate a doctrine, claiming to stress human equality and universalism, which they actually intended to be a rationale for violent acts of aggression, domination and exploitation? Richard Seymour's *The Liberal Defence of Murder* offers one answer: The *kriegsideologie* (war ideology) of liberal intervention is to be appreciably understood as the deranging upshot of centuries of organized white supremacy.

Armed and Dangerous

Only 36 years old, still a graduate student at the London School of Economics, and best-known since 2003 for the popular blog “Lenin’s Tomb” [5], Seymour is particularly armed and dangerous when it comes to the subject of those political activists who ostentatiously migrated from Marxism to the cause of Liberal Interventionism (more accurately, Liberal Imperialism) just before and after 9/11.

In *The Liberal Defence of Murder* he embeds them (Christopher Hitchens, Paul Berman, Kanan Makiya, Bernard-Henry Lévy, and many more of this mostly male phenomenon) in a long tradition of intellectuals who formulate humanitarian reasons for backing empire.

His book is a polemic, based primarily on secondary readings, and makes no pretense of providing a balanced, well-rounded view of historical situations. Yet the cogency and sophistication of his achievement as an overall perspective should not be underemphasized. In conception, steely scholarship and piercing insights, it is a Marxist masterpiece of this particular genre.

With elegant asperity and mordant antipathy, Seymour undresses the unsavory record of the liberal apologists for empire in a sane and steady voice that will enrage many and enlighten more. He combines an electrifying and formidable historical study with close readings and incisive analysis, not to mention a brilliant eye for the horrible detail of hypocritical posturing.

In four trenchant and learned chapters, preceded and followed by a Prologue and Conclusion in coruscating prose, Seymour expertly traces the regularity with which liberal moralizing has been joined at the hip with bloody conquest. Beginning with the 17th century subjugation of Ireland, liberal ideas established the currently-deployed terms of discourse, such as “civilization” and “progress,” to disguise genocide, slavery and occupation.

Using great erudition, rich prose and a rare ability to integrate sophisticated historical and sociological analysis, Seymour shows how Enlightenment liberals, victims of their own political fantasies at best, replaced an originally skeptical attitude toward empire with “an almost uniform support for the colonial enterprise” especially targeting those “who advocated the extension of self-government domestically” (27).

The names of John Stuart Mill, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Charles Dickens are only the first of a long list of surprising figures caught up in this tradition. Late 19th and early 20th century social democracy also contained “pro-imperialist currents” that drew upon “Enlightenment ideals of progress, social engineering and humanitarianism to legitimize, rather than criticize, empire.” (35) Moving into the mid-20th century, Seymour shows the record of the Communist-led Popular Front to be almost as disturbing. (58)

The U.S. imperial idea and the central part played by its “tumultuous racial hierarchy” (80) receives an entire chapter. A sub-narrative of John Spargo, a British-born U.S. socialist who became a government propagandist during World War I and drifted steadily to the right in its aftermath, offers a compelling case for an early version of neoconservatism. But it was Cold War anti-communism that created the conditions for the modern neocon moment with which the recent pro-war left has the greatest similarity.

The signers of the 2006 *Euston Manifesto* (a declaration attacking the anti-imperialist Left as anti-American) recall no political formation so much as the Cold War intellectuals who pioneered “CIA socialism.” [6] Starting out as an “‘antitotalitarian’ Left,” with roots in the late 1930s and 1940s, these writers for the *New Leader*, *Partisan Review* and *Commentary* provided arguments and a vocabulary that fed the reactionary wing-nuts of their day, such as Counter-Attack and Red

Channels.

Although justified in contesting Stalinism, they championed “the West” as their protector, adding weight to the disastrous two-camp (U.S. vs. USSR) vision of the world. Throughout the 1950s, while still professing social democracy in domestic policy, their defense of U.S. global supremacy remained paramount. This eventually led to a bitter clash with the arising New Left, ignited by the 1956 combination of the Suez Crisis and Hungarian Revolt that alienated young people from both West and East.

For most of the now middle-aged “state department socialists,” the enunciation of the neoconservative brand of politics was in place by the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, an outlook unqualifiedly hostile to Black militancy, feminism, Palestinian rights, and the cultural emancipations of the recent decade.

A comparable phenomenon emerged from the European New Left itself during the late 1970s, when yet another self-proclaimed “antitotalitarian” movement appeared in Paris. This was also largely populated by ex-Marxists, especially Maoists from the heady 1960s. These “New Philosophers” of the Left Bank had little new to say about Stalinism but deepened the Eurocentric indictment of “Third Worldism” as a guilt-ridden abandonment of Western culture.

U.S. intellectuals step by step began to follow a similar progression, especially after the fall of the Soviet Union. Seymour spends many pages arguing that “Much of the Left responded to the disintegration of Yugoslavia by romanticizing, or at the very least championing, one of the constituent nations or would-be nations” and “ended up demanding intervention on their behalf by European or American power.” (194)

Mastery of the Subject

Getting the most out of Seymour’s text can require perseverance — sometimes the syntax is overly-convoluted and the “humor” is closer to sarcastic asides — but it rewards hard work.

While I am far from an expert on the ins and outs of the British Empire, or pre-20th century U.S. history, I have considerable acquaintance with the Left intelligentsia of the 1930s and its makeover after World War II. Many of the recently published books and articles explaining how and why this generation was transformed by the very society that it set out to change are cursory. Some contain anti-anti-Communist simplicities that conflate Trotskyism with liberal anti-Stalinism, and sidestep the dreadful realities of the Soviet Union and China. Others offer fatuous claims about neoconservatism as Trotskyism inside out, rapidly penned by those who couldn’t care a hoot for the real historical issues at stake.

Therefore I am rather stunned by Seymour’s refreshing mastery of the subject and the convincing case he makes for establishing the pro-war left as significantly within a longer tradition. The *Liberal Defence of Murder* may have a martini-in-your face title, but it helps us retrospectively comprehend what we have just witnessed.

One hopes it will also be a wake-up call to those intellectuals and activists who are retrospectively succumbing to a romanticized and sanitized version of Cold War Liberalism. [7] Although Seymour’s emphasis is relatively restricted by his accentuation, this is a book with the potential to reshape the entire study of deradicalization.

Where *The Liberal Defence of Murder* is weak is where one might expect it to be. Seymour does not

attempt a “bottom up” study of the intellectuals whose political changes are brought under his magnifying glass to reveal the fingerprints of history. Rather, his method is to affiliate them with the predominant line of argument; he uses select quotations and snapshots of positions to demonstrate that intellectuals serve as the enablers of empire by recurrently providing moral rearmament when aggression is required.

This results in a degree of homogenization of his cast of characters that will surely yield complaints of unfairness from those who will insist that their individualized trajectories should disqualify them from the general pattern. And it is certainly true that a genuine scholar such as Michael Walzer of Princeton’s Institute for Advanced Study should not be confused with the shallow media showman Bernard-Henri Lévy.

Walzer wrote some dreadful pro-war polemics about the need for a “Decent Left.” [8] Lévy officially opposed the invasion of Iraq (as morally right but politically wrong), but his melodramatic efforts to establish his own bullying authority in exposing the left as hate-filled make him appear as deranged as Nurse Ratched. [9]

This is especially conspicuous when one adds in Lévy’s ludicrous defense of Dominique Strauss-Kahn and naive reliance on the arguments of a non-existent philosopher (“Jean-Baptiste Botul,” a hoax) to refute Immanuel Kant. [10] If one’s concern is the nuances of individual careers, more focused and detailed biographical treatments are in order.

As if in response to that objection, Seymour subsequently produced a briefer study of the trajectory of journalist Christopher Eric Hitchens (1949-2011) as part of Verso’s “Counterblast” list of books, a lively series that also includes short volumes about Bono, Thomas Friedman, Bernard-Henri Lévy, and Michael Ignatieff.

In *Unhitched: The Trial of Christopher Hitchens*, we again find Seymour’s customary clarity, rigor, and intelligence as he offers a brilliant analysis of the shifting landscape of Hitchens’ path from socialist internationalist to Liberal Hawk. It is a work brimming with hot anecdotes and tangy tidbits as Seymour goes at it mano a mano with “The Great Contrarian,” recapitulating the menu of contradictions that comprise the life of this practiced ironist.

Chris or Christopher?

Everyone loves a con man until they are conned, which may explain why so much of the Left responded to Hitchens’ political migration to the Right with an outrage recalling the duped investors in Bernie Madoff’s 2008 ponzi scheme. British MP George Galloway denounced Hitchens as “a drink-sodden ex-Trotskyist popinjay” (which means a self-centered chatterbox — I had to look it up), [11] while others referred to him as a “scoundrel” and “renegade.” [12]

One anti-Hitchens tirade was titled “How Hitch Poisons Everything” (a parody of the subtitle of his 2008 best-selling book *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*), another announced “Hitchens Never One of us,” and a third greeted his death from esophageal cancer with the following in bold-faced type: “The Hitchens I admired passed away many years ago, about 11 September 2001, to be exact.” [13]

His is a pretzel-twisted story. Regarded by many as informative, witty and delightful; reputed to be a marvelous raconteur; and famed for his opulent intellect and stylistic bravura, Hitchens was the type of political-literary intellectual known as a “manic impressive.”

He could be diamond-hard and brilliant, taking on powerful adversaries such as Henry Kissinger with a saucy fearlessness, but he could also wear his erudition ostentatiously on both sleeves, bloviate in a manner that made him seem more huckster than visionary, and combine the traits of a Marxist militant and a radio shock jock.

Above all, Hitchens had an unquenchable thirst for excitement and a desire to be at the heart of things. His slogan might have been “Go big or go home.” He was determined to stand out, and he certainly did.

Hitchens also led a complicated double life, moving among different versions of himself and experimenting with alternative personae. The most notable of these began in his earlier years as a socialist agitator when he published in *International Socialism* (the journal of the British International Socialists, now the Socialist Workers Party — ed.) as “Chris Hitchens.” He was even then succumbing to enchantment by the intellectual elite, which he came to know better when he launched his journalism career in the *New Statesman* as “Christopher Hitchens.”

From an upper middle-class family, Hitchens attended Balliol College, Oxford. In 1967 he was expelled from the Labour Party for his anti-war activism and soon became a well-known member of the International Socialists group. [14]

In the decade spanning his graduation in 1971 and his move to the United States in 1981, Hitchens worked for several prominent publications. His ties to the International Socialists faded (definitively around 1976, at the time of the revolution in Portugal) even as he consolidated an independent reputation as a fierce anti-imperialist and friend of Palestinian rights.

This admirable record continued during his U.S. career, which commenced at the left-liberal *Nation* where he contributed a regular column. [15] In 1992 he became a contributing editor of *Vanity Fair*, an occasionally-controversial popular culture, current affairs, and fashion magazine.

Seymour knows far more about Hitchens’ writing than myself, and perhaps anyone else, and the chapters of his “trial” are a marvel of precise condensation. Unlike Hitchens’ own work, which is mostly naked of citations so that inquisitive readers are thwarted from retracing the author’s interpretive steps, Seymour documents his accusations even as he avoids committing murder by footnote.

He takes on almost every stage of Hitchens’ thinking, relentlessly pursuing his own interpretation: that Hitchens, somewhat like Walter White on the cable TV series “Breaking Bad,” was flawed from the outset. That is, the older Hitchens was not necessarily in as much contradiction to the younger as one might suppose. Over the decades the formerly recessive qualities emerged as dominant and he only became more of what he was.

Hitchens worked assiduously to manufacture a persona as a rebel without a pause, waging war on clichés and spearing apostate leftists such as Paul Johnson and Conner Cruise O’Brien. Yet he ended up (and here Seymour quotes 18th century literary critic William Hazlitt) “a living and ignominious satire on himself.” (110)

Some of Seymour’s revelations come as little surprise, less a shocking transformation than a series of confirmations, but it’s still a devastating exposé. The scalpel is wielded lethally against Hitchens’ soft spots for empire (India, the Falklands), infatuation with Margaret Thatcher (who is said to have playfully swatted him on the butt), turnabout on the Balkan wars (when he discovered his affinity for neoconservatives), deteriorating relation to Islam (connected with his role in the Salman Rushdie affair and friendship with Ahmed Chalabi), bashing of religion (as barbarism), and his 2002

abandonment of socialism (but not Marxism!).

In this book, Hitchens cascades rightward like the unstoppable BP oil spill until he finally takes the oath of American citizenship presided over by Michael Chertoff, head of Homeland Security under Bush. Yoking into an orderly fashion all these heterogeneous positions in 100 pages must have been as hard as keeping together mercury on a dish. It was a dirty job but somebody had to do it.

Yet I'm not quite certain that the case is closed on understanding Hitchens' personal evolution. Seymour relates a number of unsavory episodes about Hitchens' resentment of Hillary Clinton's no-show at a dinner party, snitching on Sidney Blumenthal, failing to credit collaborators, smearing rivals, even plagiarizing. I suppose that one way to look at Hitchens' life is as a lesson in the perils of self-preoccupation, but I am not exactly pole-axed by any of this.

It's not that I hold to the cynical view that "every man is a part time-bastard," but so many writers with unattractive personal lives have nevertheless been good social and cultural critics. As is often said, the truth of Euclid's proofs is not affected by how he treated his servants.

Like the rest of us, Hitchens seems to have been both a rational being and a creature of impulse. He clearly switched sides on major political questions of our time, but I wonder how much point there is in hair-splitting arguments over gradations of perversity. Where there seems to be more to his story involves the hidden life of his own emotions. For all the autobiographical references in his writing, his wives, children, and even the spectacular death of his mother — in a double suicide with her lover, a de-frocked priest — seem to register as little more than blips in his political timeline.

Novelist Martin Amis, his closest friend, attributes Hitchens' political conversion to a late 1980s midlife crisis involving his divorce and the death of his father. [16] One suspects that Hitchens led a life of compulsive escapism from some grievous tragedy beneath; he was evidently a man who was driven, passionate and perfectionist, yet completely benighted about what was going on in his own heart, loins and character.

As Gabriel Garcia Marquez observed, "Everyone has three lives. A public life, a private life, and a secret life." [17]

Bad Boy Image

I confess to being one of those who never had a celebrity crush on Hitchens' imitation-Edwardian prose style. But more insufferable was the endless media fawning over his U.S.-cultivated image as decadent upper-class British bad boy, staggering into his television talk-shows in a wrinkled cotton suit, seeming half-shaven and conceivably unslept.

Hitchens' numerous feuds, including the break with collaborator Edward Said and the on-and-off one with his ex-Trotskyist-turned-religious-conservative brother, Peter, seemed strategically planned to help him remain noticed and noticeable. Independent of his political trajectory, an increase in narcissism and sense of entitlement was evident toward the end when he chanted stale patriotic mantras as unchallengeable truths.

Still, here was a man who would surely go down writing; Hitchens, in fact, pretty much died at his laptop. What I also liked was his candor and a certain brute common sense. This is above all prized when exposing the modern social contract, insidious because it can be exercised so invisibly.

Hitchens really did have a great turbine of a mind, all the more exciting because respecting

boundaries was not his thing. He saw everything as teachable moment in which he could explain his position and he could be hilariously mean, as in his book *The Missionary Position: Mother Theresa in Theory and Practice* (1996):

"[She] was not a friend of the poor. She was a friend of poverty. She said that suffering was a gift from God. She spent her life opposing the only known cure for poverty, which is the empowerment of women and the emancipation of them from a livestock version of compulsory reproduction."

Of Nixon's secretary of State, he wrote: "A good liar must have a good memory. Kissinger is a stupendous liar with a remarkable memory." And no one can forget this one: "The governor of Texas, who, when asked if the Bible should also be taught in Spanish, replied that 'if English was good enough for Jesus, then it's good enough for me.'" [18]

Hitchens was compelling as a champion of anti-imperialist causes and scourge of American hubris. And he was his most effective when using language the way George Orwell did, mainly for clarity of thought with precision.

In the hands of many Marxist writers, a Trotskyist analysis can seem so much like a litany of betrayals that reading almost any Trotskyist publication becomes an endurance test. But Hitchens channeled Trotskyism enviably, perhaps because he agreed with Mark Twain that "against the assault of laughter, nothing can stand." [19]

Hitchens Unravelling

Whether Seymour is accurate in suggesting a decline in Hitchens' brainpower and prose along with the degeneration of his politics I am not sure. Years after 2003 he continued to write magnificently of both John Brown and the Bolshevik cause, and there are many bright literary moments in his massive 2012 collection *Arguably*.

Perhaps the bonds between his Marxism and crypto-Thatcherism formed a double helix, dynamically self-reinforcing, and flowing endlessly in both directions. Alex Callinicos, a leader of the British SWP (formerly International Socialists), who learned many of the basic ideas of Marxism from Hitchens, may have expressed the situation best when he said of Hitchens' transformation, "I still find this fully hard to explain." [20]

Too many anti-Hitchens critics employ the genre of morality drama known as psychomachia (from the Medieval Latin poem by Prudentius), in which good and evil angels (Tony Cliff and George Bush?) fight for the soul of a character named Christian (Chris/Christopher Hitchens?).

To me, Hitchens' story is unfinished because he himself has supplied almost all of the available intimate biography and is an unreliable guide to his body of work in *Hitch 22* (2010) and elsewhere. There are simply too many omissions and clearly he is framing the machinations of his life.

Rather than recant his Leninism or express contrition about his support of the war in Iraq, Hitchens rationalizes and revises, sometimes making a wretched bid to retrieve a flagging trope. The result may be a coup for personal mythmaking but a disaster for an accurate political history of intellectuals in our time. One always claims that one is writing autobiography to remember, but one can also write to sweep things under the rug.

The strength of Seymour's scholarship strikes me as an example of "passionate thinking," a concept very different from the customary notion of passion in opposition to reason. The passion I see in

Richard Seymour is more in the vein of what Hannah Arendt memorably saw in the young Martin Heidegger (and then herself absorbed): a passion that powerfully orders and illuminates all of one's other capacities and gifts.

In the instance of *The Liberal Defense of Murder* and *Unhitched*, that passion stems from an intense hatred of the racialized colonialism of empire. This is understood to be the fundamental horror contradicting the West's claim to uphold the ideals of the Enlightenment. Seymour maintains that a kind of "colonial unconscious" is expressed today through the Liberal Hawks' gravitation toward Western supremacism as the answer, minus the language of overt racism and masked by rhetoric borrowed from socialism and even anarchism.

Seymour's stance, however, is of necessity a gladiatorial one, over-determined by the influence and vehemence of his targets. Thus his books contain no mention of the genuine quandaries faced by the Left that has set out to build independent alternatives to Western Empire, brutal local dictatorships, and reactionary fundamentalist movements.

Most vexing are the mind-boggling uncertainties that occur when civilians are in danger of immediate annihilation and the left lacks the power to intercede on its own. [21] No authentic socialist wants to sacrifice living people to abstract ends or totemic dogmas, and emotional commitments are sometimes so deeply embedded that they seem like moral and political principles. Yet any debate about intervention must include a candid consideration of who is doing the intervening and what the ultimate consequences will be.

As Tariq Ali reminds us, and the Iraq War proved again, in the long run "lives are not saved by Western military intervention." [22] Support must be given to forces within a society that offer the best hope for a humane, politically and economically just future; and their means of struggle must be respected even if one also expresses disagreement in an appropriate venue.

Trying to formulate a "correct position" about a crisis-in-progress when facts are in contention and the clock is ticking can be like fiddling with unlabeled colored wires in the effort to defuse a homemade bomb. If one balks at someone's demand to mechanically line up on one side or the other, one can expect to be denounced on the internet as an apologist for something. But refusing to support a lesser evil is not always a tacit endorsement of the greater; sometimes the color of truth is gray.

The transformation of Christopher Hitchens is an entirely different matter, of course, from the internal rifts on the Left. Despite Hitchens' sincere revulsion against religious fundamentalism and his joining an ACLU lawsuit against National Security Agency monitoring, no one can take seriously his claim to remain a Marxist while embracing the U.S. empire.

At the end he drew progressively more close to *FrontPage Magazine* editor David Horowitz, his political Chucky, [23] obfuscating the fact that the domestic Right is the main illiberal threat facing U.S. society. Through his inability to acknowledge how much he had fundamentally changed, Hitchens was in a deep denial, one recalling the deluded German philosopher Carl Schmitt who famously proclaimed, "I have drunk the Nazi bacillus, but it did not infect me!" [24]

The singular anti-racist and anti-colonial passion motivating Richard Seymour's polemics is brilliantly captured in a long quote from the Martiniquean poet Aimé Césaire serving as the frontispiece to *The Liberal Defence of Murder*. It begins: "We must study how colonization works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism...."

More than political convictions about the Russian Revolution, or a belief in an historic destiny for the industrial working class, it is that passion that binds together the radical generation of the 1956-68 New Left (or what remains of it) and the current partisans of the have-nots who are active in the World Social Forum, Occupy movements, and community-based Workers Centers. In this passion one finds hope for a multigenerational new socialist movement that can contest the Liberal Hawks and their reliance on the remedial power of conquest.

Alan Wald

P.S.

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Footnotes

[1] Last March, the total of U.S. service members killed in Iraq was 4,488. At least 3,400 U.S. contractors died as well, a number often underreported. Estimates of the total number of people killed varies, and many are significantly higher than the Watson Institute study. See: <http://news.brown.edu/pressreleases/2013/03/warcosts>.

[2] <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n18/tony-judt/bUShs-USeful-idiots>. The term “Useful idiots,” referring to propagandists manipulated by cynical rulers, is often falsely attributed to Lenin.

[3] A few of the websites considering past mistakes on the part of the Far Left include: <http://internationalsocialistnetwork.org>; <http://swphistory.com>; and <http://revolutionarysocialism.tumblr.com>.

[4] See <http://www2.kenyon.edu/Depts/Religion/Fac/Adler/Politics/Waltzer.htm>.

[5] www.leninology.com

[6] See the fine commentary on the Euston Manifesto by Scott McLemee: <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/mclemee/mclemee174>.

[7] For example, see Kevin Mattson, When America Was Great: The Fighting Faith of Liberalism in Post-War America (2004).

[8] Walzer’s argument was much celebrated by the reactionary Right; see: <http://archive.frontpagemag.com/readArticle.aspx?ARTID=24456> and <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/politics-and-passion-by-michael-walzer/>.

[9] See his book, Left in Dark Times (2008).

[10] Botul was said by his mischievous inventor to have originated the thought system of “botulism,” which ought to have given the game away. See: <http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/essais/20100208.BIB4886/bhl-en-flagrant-delire-l-039-affaire-botul>.

[html](#).

[11] See <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/may/18/usa.iraq>.

[12] “Scoundrel” was used by the World Socialist Website, a ghastly monument to sectarianism: <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2011/12/hitc-d17.html>. The term “renegade” was employed more lightly by Terry Eagleton in one of the smartest published appreciations of Hitchens’ career: <http://harpers.org/archive/2011/12/man-of-the-world/>.

[13] See <http://www.talk2action.org/story/2007/4/30/162545/816>, <http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2010/07/29/christoper-hitchens-never-one-US>, and <http://www.counterfire.org/index.php/articles/opinion/15340>.

[14] This was originally the Socialist Review group founded by Tony Cliff (a Trotskyist proponent of state capitalist theory) in 1950, and used the name International Socialists from 1962 to 1977 when it became the Socialist Workers Party.

[15] For a thoughtful and fair-minded discussion of Hitchens’ career in comparison with that of Alexander Cockburn through the late 1990s by William Keach, see: <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/isj2/1998/isj2-078/keach.htm>.

[16] See <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/apr/14/politics>.

[17] <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/arts/la-ca-gerald-martin3-2009may03,0,2231866.story>.

[18] These and other fine quotes can be found on a number of websites such as <http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/3956>. Christopher_Hitchens and http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Christopher_Hitchens.

[19] <http://www.twainquotes.com/Laughter.html>.

[20] It should be noted that Callinicos made this observation prior to the publication of Seymour’s book: <https://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=27053>.

[21] Against the Current has made an effort to debate and discuss some of these issues. For example, see the editorials and exchanges of views around “NATO’S Road to War/Ruin” and “Libya: Revolution, Intervention and Crisis”: <http://www.solidarity-US.org/site/node/1944> and <http://www.solidarity-us.org/current/node/3243>.

[22] <http://isreview.org/issue/81/imperialism-arab-spring-and-crisis>.

[23] Yes, I mean the creepy doll possessed by the spirit of a serial killer who tries to transfer his soul to the body of a boy in the “Child’s Play” film series.

[24] <http://reason.com/archives/2002/10/01/dangerous-thinkers/1>.