

Orwell, Hitchens, And The Hollow Self-Righteousness Of Anti-Communism

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[REVOLUTION DISPATCH](#)



Hitchens (left) and Orwell (né Eric Blair), two notorious communist apostates.

[dropcap]I[/dropcap]n addition to all of the propaganda pieces that anti-communists use to legitimize their position, they often utilize a more general rhetorical tool, which is the denunciations of communism that have come from two of the last century's most prominent intellectuals: George Orwell and Christopher Hitchens. These figures maintain large cult followings and are widely seen as moral authorities for their crusades against civilization's evil and hypocritical aspects, which for Orwell was a crusade against totalitarianism and for Hitchens was a crusade against organized religion. Yet the cultural and ideological makeup of both of these men caused them to infuse their works with the anti-communist agenda, and to give this agenda's followers the sense that they're righteous upholders of honesty and virtue.

Eloquent, polemically skilled, and morally self-confident, Orwell and Hitchens were perfectly suited to become cultural idols among politically and literarily minded Westerners, particularly of the leftist and anti-establishment kind. Their magnetic appeal among this demographic, however, is due to the fact that their messages reinforce the privileged and limited worldview of Western leftists who've been won over by a liberal ideology which rejects true radicalism.

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Both being Brits of a comfortable upbringing, Orwell and Hitchens weren't inclined by their circumstances to gain an adequate understanding of the revolutions that they judged from afar. Orwell (born Eric Blair) came from a bourgeois family that had colonial holdings in both the Caribbean and the British Raj. With that wealth, Orwell became an imperial police officer in Burma early in his career. In *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell wrote very little about the anarchist theory of the forces of Revolutionary Catalonia, and he wrote nothing about the structure of the communist brigades they were allied with (which he went out of his way to avoid).

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It was from this experience of not interacting with Marxist-Leninists, not exploring the world outside of white adventurism, and not extensively studying revolutionary theory that Orwell would produce his anti-communist works and statements. And what did these efforts no favors was the fact that he came at them not from the position of objective analysis, but from the belief that he was exposing indisputable facts in defiance of Stalinist villains. As Michael Parenti has [written](#) about this hubristic tone to Orwell's attacks against communists and the USSR:

A prototypic Red-basher who pretended to be on the Left was George Orwell. In the middle of World War II, as the Soviet Union was fighting for its life against the Nazi invaders at Stalingrad, Orwell announced that a "willingness to criticize Russia and Stalin is the test of intellectual honesty. It is the only thing that from a literary intellectual's point of view is really dangerous" (Monthly Review, 5/83). Safely ensconced within a virulently anticommunist society, Orwell (with Orwellian doublethink) characterized the condemnation of communism as a lonely courageous act of defiance. Today, his ideological progeny are still at it, offering themselves as intrepid left critics of the Left, waging a valiant struggle against imaginary Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist hordes.

It was with this conviction of his own moral superiority to the communist left that Orwell would approach the writing of *Animal Farm*. If one were to interpret *Animal Farm* as a totally accurate metaphorical account of the Russian revolution-which most of the Western world currently does-the resulting historical knowledge that one gains would be wildly inaccurate.

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The part where the pig Napoleon (who represents Stalin) drives out Trotsky's stand-in Snowball away from the farm in order to establish Napoleon's own dictatorial control is an absurd distortion of the truth. Trotsky was exiled from Russia [when he tried](#) to create subversive factions within the Communist Party, after which he spread lies, supported terrorism and assassinations, and collaborated with fascists in order to undermine the USSR.

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Animal Farm's villainous caricature of Stalin and its bleak depiction of Soviet history are wrong in numerous other aspects. The passage that describes Napoleon executing innocent animals is based on the claim that Stalin perpetrated the Soviet Union's miscarriages of justice during the purges- which were done [not by Stalin](#) but by the corrupt People's Commissar of Internal Affairs Genrikh Yagoda, who arranged for the arrest of many people who weren't conspirators in order to make the security services not appear idle. The book's conclusion, where Animal Farm has become an absolute dictatorship under the rule of Napoleon, presents a completely non-nuanced view of the USSR's development; a socialist democracy was in fact established in the USSR with Stalin's [enthusiastic appraisal](#). And the arc where the ruling pigs take on the position of the new bourgeois while depriving other animals of food doesn't reflect the real situation in the USSR, which [experienced](#) great increases in living standards in the decades after the revolution.

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With *1984*, Orwell expanded upon this misleading storytelling setup of Stalin being the villainous mastermind, Trotsky being the persecuted defender of truth and freedom, and the socialist revolution being a tragedy to be lamented rather than a complex political project that can be criticized. The equivocation of communism with Nazism throughout *1984*'s allegorical themes and historical commentary (Big Brother is another caricature of Stalin, and the character O'Brien matter-of-factly calls the Soviets "the totalitarians") is no doubt what's made the novel into such an openly promoted work within capitalist media and educational institutions. Were Orwell to have modeled his dystopia after corporate tyranny rather than create an exaggerated picture of the capitalist narrative about the USSR, *1984* would have been subversive and much more prescient.

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Orwell's pleasant prose and undeniable literary talent (the [brilliant construction](#) of *1984* alone still makes me have a lot of respect for the work) made Orwell and his writings into a source of vindication for the Western leftists who didn't want to abandon the Trotskyite dogma that dominated

their Cold War-era socialist circles. One of these leftists was Christopher Hitchens.

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Hitchens' life story was in many ways similar to that of Orwell, with Hitchens having grown up in a well-to-do English household before joining the political left and becoming a journalist and an author. Orwell was a major influence on Hitchens, and over time this had less and less of a positive impact on his political messages.

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Since Hitchens started his journalism career as a correspondent for the fervently anti-Soviet Trotskyite magazine International Socialism, he always sided with the capitalist line on the USSR, having [stated](#) at one point that Reagan was right to call it the "evil empire" and vaguely declared about the country: "it is evil. Wouldn't you think so if you lived there?" He also of course vilified Mao and Castro, and he put some of his best creative energy into demonizing the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In one statement from 2008, he [said](#) about north Korea:

Religion is a totalitarian belief. It is the wish to be a slave. It is the desire that there be an unalterable, unchallengeable, tyrannical authority who can convict you of thought crime while you are asleep, who can subject you to total surveillance around the clock every waking and sleeping minute of your life, before you're born and, even worse and where the real fun begins, after you're dead. A celestial north Korea. Who wants this to be true? Who but a slave desires such a ghastly fate? I've been to north Korea. It has a dead man as its president, Kim Jong-Il is only head of the party and head of the army. He's not head of the state. That office belongs to his deceased father, Kim Il-Sung. It's a necrocracy, a thanatocracy. It's one short of a trinity I might add. The son is the reincarnation of the father. It is the most revolting and utter and absolute and heartless tyranny the human species has ever evolved. But at least you can fucking die and leave north Korea!

What strikes me about this quote is how its intriguing analogies and eloquent wording, much like Orwell's dark paragraphs about the Soviet Union from the climax of 1984, presents a colossal lie in a way that's intellectually compelling for someone who hasn't been accurately informed about the subject matter. It would have gotten in the way of Hitchens' rhetorical flow to acknowledge that the DPRK is in fact a [deeply democratic country](#) which has freely and fairly elected all of its leaders, and whose current [diplomatic figurehead](#) Kim Jong Un will likely be the last one in his family to hold a major political position. Hitchens also defaulted on believing the [politically biased](#) and [frequently debunked](#) testimonies of paid north Korean defectors rather than mention the contents of the DPRK's constitution, which gives all of the country's citizens full freedom of speech, assembly and demonstration.

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With this statement, Hitchens was positioning himself as a defender of the oppressed while actually reinforcing the anti-DPRK narratives that the U.S. has been [using](#) to starve north Koreans with sanctions and threaten the country's people with a second genocide through nuclear annihilation. In the same vein as Orwell and the other left anti-communists, Hitchens acted as a figure of controlled opposition within the Western left. (Or, as the reactionary publication National Review has [called](#) Hitchens, "left-wing but honest.")

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It was this flaw in Hitchens' thinking that set him on the infamous "Trots turned neocons" path. A few years after denouncing Clinton's horrific bombing of Yugoslavia, Hitchens endorsed the invasion of Iraq. He [reacted](#) to 9/11 by announcing that he was no longer on the left, and that he "swore a sort of oath to remain coldly furious" until "fascism with an Islamic face" was "brought to a most strict and merciless account." After detailing the war crimes of Henry Kissinger, Hitchens embraced Iraq War architect Paul Wolfowitz as a friend and took out his American citizenship in a 2007 ceremony presided over by Bush's head of homeland security, showing that his hatred for hypocrites and the perpetrators of atrocities no longer applied.

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Like the other Trotskyites who've followed this trend of coming to support imperialism, Hitchens went through an ideological development comparable to that of 1984's Winston Smith, who came to adopt the Party's ideology after formerly detesting it. And what won him over wasn't coercion and terror like was the case for Smith, but the seductive nature of the empire's worldview of national exceptionalism and righteous global war against nefarious enemies. Neoconservatism is effectively Trotskyism; legal scholar Michael Lind has [pointed out](#) that:

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Most neoconservative defense intellectuals have their roots on the left, not the right. They are products of the influential Jewish-American sector of the Trotskyist movement of the 1930s and 1940s, which morphed into anti-communism liberalism between the 1950s and 1970s and finally into a kind of militaristic and imperialist right with no precedents in American culture or political history.

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As Orwell and Hitchens excoriated the exaggerated horrors of so-called totalitarian communist governments like the USSR and the DPRK, they contributed to a far more real form of oppression that they didn't seem to care about as much, which is the power structure of capitalism and empire. This horror is just as ghastly as the eternally domineering totalitarianism that they believed had taken hold in the communist countries.

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The surveillance of the U.S. empire on its own people has become total. Its propaganda is so powerful that it can turn democratically elected leaders into dictators and create WMDs out of thin air. Since World War II, it's regularly razed nations to the ground in a series of war campaigns that have [killed](#) around 30 million people. The global corporations that operate it have the ability to financially strangulate entire nations and kill disfavored leaders. The figures at the top of it are an oligarchic cabal of billionaires who [hold](#) more wealth than the majority of humanity combined does.

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Global capitalism is Big Brother. We're facing a worldwide corporate totalitarian dictatorship, and it may [take](#) a more oppressive form than ever after the planet comes to feel the full brunt of the climate crisis. North Korea, China, and the other ideological heirs to the USSR that Orwell and Hitchens demonized are the [strongholds](#) in the resistance against this tyranny, even as the Western left largely continues to treat them like enemies.

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It's time for us to recognize the hollowness of these figures' self-righteous disavowal of the existing socialist states and find new heroes, ones who actually have experience with fighting against imperialist subjugation. [Stalin](#), [Mao](#), [Kim Il Sung](#), and the other socialist leaders and thinkers who Orwell's camp has demonized may ironically be the people that our society will need to look towards to overcome Orwellian tyranny.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Rainer Shea uses the written word to deconstruct establishment propaganda and to promote meaningful political action. His articles can also be found at [Revolution Dispatch](#).



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