



Switch Hitching

Cavil as we may—and must—Christopher Hitchens is an extraordinarily gifted polemicist and was once great fun. Much of his stuff from the cheesy days of Thatcher

and Reagan would sit happily in this magazine today. But you can't stop progress. Having once been a decent Marxist, Hitchens is now a podgy (but still rather pretty) Captain America, convinced that the Great Republic is the last best hope of revolution. Who would have thought in the 1980s that the day would come when he would be on the same side as Charles Krauthammer and William Kristol, not to say Norman Podhoretz and Michael Novak? Who'd have thought that this devout atheist would become a shill for a born-again Republican president?

Who, for that matter, would have thought that he'd turn on Gore Vidal? In February's *Vanity Fair*, Hitchens did quite a bit of damage to the former Sage of Ravello, as any kid of 60 might when taking a rawhide whip to a crippled 84-year-old war veteran. There were obviously Oedipal issues here, and some of us reflected that what unites these two men (hatred of Christianity) is more significant than what divides them (whether or not to nuke Tehran). Still, when it comes to the global democratic revolution and the War on Terror, Vidal is on the side of the angels. Hitchens is on the side of Leon Trotsky and Dick Cheney.

Our man in Washington is now the hammer of the terrorists. Twenty years ago, he did not even believe in terrorism. It had been invented, he said in an essay for *Harper's* in 1986, to spread fear among the people, and if we weren't careful, it might one day lead to war. Here's how he saw it then: "A great power and a purportedly educated and democratic

intelligentsia have allowed themselves to be 'terrorized'. ... Stalin was a terrorist, Mao was a terrorist, Arabs are terrorists; Europeans are soft on terrorism; Latins are riddled with it. Whisk, whisk ... and there goes history, there goes inquiry, there goes proportion. All is terror. The best that can be said for this method is that it economizes on thought. You simply unveil it like Medusa's head and turn all discussion into stone."

Now, of course, Hitchens is on permanent terror alert. When news came on Christmas Day that a young Nigerian had allegedly set fire to his underpants on Flight 253, Hitchens did not for a moment think that was something anyone might do if he'd just heard that he was about to land in Detroit, but instead started to sound like a goon with an education: "We had better get used to being the civilians who are under a relentless and planned assault from the pledged supporters of a wicked theocratic ideology," he wrote in *Slate*.

It got worse: "[The terrorists] are already in our suburbs and even in our military. We can expect to take casualties. The battle will go on for the rest of our lives. ... Those who don't get the point prefer to whine about 'endless war,' accidentally speaking the truth about something of which the attempted Christmas bombing over Michigan was only a foretaste. While we fumble with bureaucracy and euphemism, they are flying high."

There is more than a hint here that only right-minded people have the courage to tell it like it is. Nineteen years

ago, in the *London Review of Books*, Hitchens wrote about another group of right-minded people who were brave enough to speak their minds—"Bertorelli's Blackshirts." Bertorelli's is a restaurant in Soho and the soi-disant Blackshirts were a gang of thinkers—Patrick Cosgrave, Kingsley Amis, Bernard Levin, Robert Conquest, Russell Lewis—who liked to believe that Britain in the 1970s was a country in which it was dangerous to hold conservative opinions.

Here was the drill, as described by Hitchens: "...a sample sally might begin: 'I know its unfashionable to say this' and go on to propose that, say, Hans Eysenck was on to something. Someone would lift a riskily brimming bumper and cry: 'Down with Oxfam!' Someone else might recommend a piece of samizdat from *Encounter*. And so the afternoon wore on agreeably enough, with daring satirical calls for South African port, Chilean wine, and so forth."

That's perfect. It was exactly like that in the 1970s. In the Kings and Keys, a Fleet Street pub used by *Daily Telegraph* journalists and other misfits, we liked to cry: "Compassion is the curse of the English middle classes" or (putting on a John Wayne accent) "Moderation is for ... moderates" or (borrowing from America) "You know what happens to middle-of-the-roaders? They get knocked down by trucks."

How we laughed at our daring. How we cringe in shame now. If it had taken courage to be a conservative in the 1970s, Margaret Thatcher would never have become prime minister.

Some people say that Hitchens himself is now a conservative. That is absurd. But he might one day make a great police chief. ■

Haitian-Building

From the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Port-au-Prince

By Roger D. McGrath

The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is, in extending our commercial relations to have with them as little *political* connection as possible.

—George Washington,
Farewell Address

THE MARINES HAVE LANDED in Haiti—again. They’ve been there many times before, not in the aftermath of an earthquake, but in the chaos caused by warring factions and rulers destroying infrastructure and terrorizing the population. These interventions cost American taxpayers millions and the Marines blood and lives. In the long run, they proved entirely futile, though they did add to the heroic lore of the Corps. The three most decorated Marines in history all served tours in Haiti, with two of them earning the Medal of Honor there.

Born in revolutionary fervor, Haiti has traditionally called itself a republic, but its history has been marked by strongmen anointing themselves Emperor for Life or ruling like one while observing the title of president. Coups and assassinations have been the surest path to power. From 1908 to 1915, the Haitian government changed hands seven times, with four presidents dying violently and the other three fleeing the country. Men were tortured and mutilated and women raped. Voodoo incantations guided the masses. The country resembled nothing else in the Western Hemisphere.

During this period, American companies doing business in Haiti suffered losses, and their claims against the government mounted. Roger Farnham, a

principal of the National Railway, tangled with the government over its refusal to pay for several sections of badly constructed track. Farnham was also vice president of the National City Bank of New York City and of the Banque Nationale in Haiti. Moreover, he was chief adviser to the Wilson administration on Haiti and influenced, if not determined, State Department policy toward the country.

The result: a graphic demonstration of gunboat diplomacy. In December 1914, the USS *Machias* steamed into the harbor at Port-au-Prince and landed a party of U.S. Marines. With 1903 Springfield slung over their shoulders and Colt .45 semi-automatic pistols on their hips, they removed \$500,000 in Haitian government funds from the vault of the Banque Nationale and carried the cash to the *Machias*. The money was then transported to NYC and deposited at the National City Bank. Back in Haiti, the Banque Nationale lowered the French flag that had flown over its headquarters and raised the Stars and Stripes.

Early in 1915, the State Department sent two special commissions to Haiti in an attempt to negotiate an American receivership, which would include U.S. control of customs. Such an arrangement might have brought some measure of stability, but the Haitian government, which had a typically tenuous hold on power, knew it would be inviting a coup d’etat if it compromised national sovereignty. By the spring of 1915, the State Department ruled the situation in Haiti hopeless, deeming the Haitians incapable of governing themselves. President Wilson agreed. His advisers began laying

the groundwork for military intervention.

Meanwhile, the Haitians lived down to the State Department and President Wilson’s low opinion of them. Late in February, Jean Vilbrun Guillaume Sam ascended the presidency in a coup. He suppressed other aspirants to office, jailing and torturing hundreds of them. On July 27, he had nearly 200 political enemies executed, including former president Oreste Zamor.

As news of the executions spread, riots erupted. Sam fled to the French embassy and was given asylum. Undeterred by diplomatic niceties, a mob stormed the embassy, found Sam hiding in a bathroom, and beat him to death. His body was dragged into the street and dismembered and disemboweled. The various body parts were then paraded through the streets of Port-au-Prince while onlookers hooted and looted.

The next day, the Marines landed. The Wilson administration said they were needed to protect American lives in the wake of Sam’s death and the collapse of his government. But the Marines had been dispatched long before the assassination and had been waiting on board the USS *Washington* in the bay at Port-au-Prince. They were there to protect American business interests whether or not Sam remained in office. With World War I raging in Europe, there were also worries about possible German threats to the Panama Canal should a future revolutionary Haitian government open its ports to the Kaiser’s ships and submarines.

By midmorning on July 28, some 300 Leathernecks and several dozen sailors had come ashore. They were soon rein-