

Nation columnist Christopher Hitchens fingers Clinton aide

Martin McLaughlin
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Saturday's proceedings in and around the Senate impeachment trial provided an instructive demonstration of the politics and principles of the milieu of ex-radicals and ex-Stalinists which sustains such publications as the weekly journal *The Nation*.

Within minutes of the release of a videotape of the testimony of White House aide Sidney Blumenthal, in which he denied any role in circulating invidious descriptions of Monica Lewinsky to the media, House Republican prosecutors released an affidavit by Christopher Hitchens, a British freelance writer based in Washington who pens a regular column for *The Nation*, contradicting Blumenthal.

By Hitchens's account, he and his wife, Carol Blue, had lunch with Blumenthal on March 19, 1998, in the course of which the White House aide told them that Lewinsky was known as the "stalker" and that Clinton had been the victim of her aggressive sexual advances.

The House prosecutors distributed copies of the Hitchens affidavit to the press and to the Senate. On Monday morning Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott sought to introduce the affidavit as evidence in the impeachment trial, only to be blocked by Minority Leader Tom Daschle, who has veto power under the procedures decided upon 10 days ago.

The sequence of events makes it clear that Blumenthal was the target of a perjury trap. The House prosecutors sought a blanket denial from Blumenthal, having already learned of Hitchens's contrary testimony. They obtained an affidavit from Hitchens on the evening of Friday, February 5, the day before the videotape of Blumenthal's denial was played to the Senate. As soon as the videotaped testimony was shown, a hue and cry went up from the Republicans and the press, branding Blumenthal as a perjurer.

As a matter of fact and law, this charge is absurd.

Blumenthal's attorney pointed out that the conversation was not between a "source" and the media, but lunchtime gossip between two men who had been increasingly close friends for 15 years. Their families socialized regularly and Blumenthal had passed on hand-me-down toys from his children to Hitchens's son.

Blumenthal was not leaking a "smear," but discussing a characterization of Monica Lewinsky that had been circulating in the media for nearly two months. The first article in the *Washington Post* noting that Lewinsky had been described in some quarters as a "stalker" is dated January 26, 1998. The first use of the term in reference to Lewinsky apparently came in an article by Michael Isikoff in *Newsweek* magazine dated January 21, 1998.

This episode is politically revealing. It demonstrates, not for the first time, the McCarthyite methods which are the essence of the right-wing campaign against Clinton. Both Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr and the House Republican prosecutors have sought to intimidate witnesses, either to coerce testimony from them or to punish them for opposing the drive to destabilize the Clinton White House.

Starr jailed Susan McDougal and now is prosecuting Julie Hiatt Steele for perjury, in both cases because they refused to parrot lies scripted by the special prosecutor's office. Blumenthal has been a target both of Starr and the House prosecutors. He was first hauled before a grand jury last spring, with Starr's office suggesting that political criticisms of the Office of Independent Counsel, authored by Blumenthal, constituted "obstruction of justice."

The White House aide was one of three witnesses selected by the House prosecutors for interrogation because he is regarded as an advocate of an aggressive response to the Starr investigation. A close adviser to

Hillary Clinton, he is held responsible by the Republicans for her televised denunciation last February of the "right-wing conspiracy" behind the attack on the White House.

Equally significant is the role of Hitchens. He is emblematic of the prostration of a whole layer of middle class ex-radicals before the right-wing political coup d'etat in Washington. Comforting himself with a little "left" rhetoric--such as criticism of the US bombing of Iraq, for instance--Hitchens ignores the significance of the political struggle in Washington and the historical implications of the ouster of an elected president through a right-wing dirty tricks operation.

Careerism too plays a role. Hitchens is about to publish an anti-Clinton volume that, in the circumstances, will find its principal audience in quarters that do not subscribe to *The Nation*. He would not be the first ex-radical to boost his market value in right-wing circles with a well-timed political provocation.

Marxists oppose Clinton and his policies through a struggle to mobilize the working class and build an independent political movement, based on socialist policies, fighting against the profit system as a whole. Our opposition to Clinton is based on principles. It does not signify any support for Clinton's opponents on the right. Precisely because we defend the democratic rights of working people, we implacably oppose the political conspiracy of the extreme right that underlies the impeachment drive.

The "plague on both your houses" attitude of Hitchens, however "left" the rhetoric, represents a capitulation to the right wing and its attack on democratic rights. It has led him to become not only an apologist, but a direct instrument of ultra-right and fascist forces.



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