

A telling incident: MSNBC's Chris Matthews' exchange with Sen. Elizabeth Warren

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The testy exchange that took place June 19 on MSNBC's "Hardball with Chris Matthews" between the host and Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts is deserving of at least a brief comment.

First, the irritable character of the interview stands out in contrast to the normally comatose character of media and official public life in America, and thus created something of a stir. And that irritability itself is a sign of growing nervousness and divisiveness in establishment circles over the social situation in the US, as well as foreign policy disasters in Iraq and elsewhere. Associated with that is the rapidly growing unpopularity of the Obama administration, the most reactionary in American history, as registered in recent polls.

No political novice, Matthews, who began his career working on the staff of various Democratic Party politicians and served as chief of staff to Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill for six years in the 1980s, clearly has his finger in the wind.

The MSNBC talk show host, who fancies himself a "populist," opened his program June 19 with a relatively blunt questioning of the Obama administration's plan to send the US military back into Iraq. Addressing his viewers, he asked, "Do you ... think we should be doing this, getting back into the Iraqi fighting, this time in the midst of its civil war? Do you think the president has the constitutional and/or the moral authority to be doing this?"

He continued, "Is this what the American people really want?" Matthews knows perfectly well that there is overwhelming opposition to a new Iraq war or any new American military intervention.

Later, when MSNBC political analyst David Corn suggested that Obama was considering renewed military action in Iraq "because he feels the pressure, mainly from the right," Matthews interjected, "Screw them!" All in all, the discussion on Iraq reeked of bitterness, tension and pessimism. As another of his interviewees, Anne Gearan of

the *Washington Post*, suggested, "The politics are impossible."

Enter Sen. Warren—whom Matthews had earlier referred to as "a huge hero to progressives in the Democratic Party and around the country, and perhaps the most powerful elected voice among the progressives right now."

The Massachusetts senator's "progressive" credentials are a fraud, based on her occasional—and essentially toothless—criticisms of the banking industry as Special Adviser, appointed by Obama, to set up the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB).

Warren is a special "hero" to the left-liberal charlatans in and around the *Nation*, whose gushing comments about her (especially those by John Nichols) would fill an especially deceitful and unpleasant volume. A few of the countless headlines will provide some idea of the magazine's attitude: "Elizabeth Warren Wants to Give Students a Fighting Chance," "Presidential Prospect or Not, Elizabeth Warren Has a Lesson for Democrats," "Elizabeth Warren Steps Up for Populist Politics," "Elizabeth Warren Comes Out for Expanding Social Security," "Candidate or Not, Elizabeth Warren Has the Right 2016 Message," "Elizabeth Warren, a Great Investment," "Elizabeth Warren Tackles Wall Street," "Elizabeth Warren Heads to Washington, an Uncompromising Senator for the Left," etc.

If the *Nation's* campaign on Warren's behalf didn't threaten to create further popular confusion, it would be merely laughable. She is a conventional bourgeois politician, who represents no danger to any element of the status quo. In 2011, for example, the *New York Times* took note of Warren's "charm offensive," while still Special Adviser, in top financial circles: "Ms. Warren's calendar this year has been jam-packed with meetings on Wall Street. She has met with the chief executive of every major Wall Street bank, including Jamie Dimon of JPMorgan Chase, Vikram S. Pandit of Citigroup and James P. Gorman of Morgan Stanley. Her industry outreach included talks with dozens of

community bankers, too, and meetings with top credit card executives like Ajay Banga, the president and chief executive of MasterCard.”

In any event, Warren was on *Hardball* in June to peddle her new book, *A Fighting Chance*—and herself, as a possible candidate for national office. As Matthews had previously noted, “In polls of Democrats, she often comes in second only to Hillary [Clinton]. Her voice will be heard, even if she doesn’t run for president.”

By the time he got to Warren, however, Matthews had built up a certain contrarian head of steam. He first asked the senator, “What can and could, or will, the Democratic Party do, since it is the party that wants to do it, to create real jobs for people?,” and illustrated the situation with several examples of economic desperation and hopelessness.

Warren replied with obviously canned and empty comments about the need for “investment” in education, infrastructure and so on (this, from the representative of an administration that has destroyed hundreds of thousands of education jobs since 2009!). “Every time we talk about roads and bridges, when we talk about power grids, it’s really about setting the table, so that small businesses can start, so that business can grow, so they can flourish, so they can create jobs here at home.” Blah, blah, blah ...

For whatever reason, Matthews wasn’t in the mood that evening for the usual hot air. “So, what are the Democrats going to do then?,” he reiterated, and carried on: “We have got so much in this country falling apart under our cities. It’s going to be underwater some day, thanks to climate change. We have got nobody working. I don’t understand the union movement in this country. Why aren’t they bitching and moaning and complaining every day, ‘We want big construction projects?’”

The host pressed the point, “And the president of the United States isn’t doing it. I don’t hear him talking about it. He talks about one thing one day, something else the next day. But I’m telling you, I don’t hear you getting it done. The Democrats control the US Senate. The Democrats control the White House. When are you going to do what you just said you would like to do? Just when? Give me a date. Is it 2017?”

The conversation continued along these lines:

WARREN: No. It’s now.

MATTHEWS: 2023? When is it?

WARREN: It’s now.

MATTHEWS: It isn’t now.

WARREN: Stop ...

The senator, her plans for a smooth and presumably celebratory appearance somewhat in disarray by this point, angrily interrupted Matthews and proceeded to blame all the problems on the Republicans in Congress, who are

“filibustering in the Senate.” In fact, as her interviewer pointed out, the Obama administration is proposing nothing in terms of job creation.

The host pursued the issue: “And I’m afraid, five years from now, we’ll be having the same conversation with you. And you are a fine senator, but it isn’t happening. It just isn’t. ... Why don’t you call the president right now and say, ‘Why don’t you do something really big on infrastructure?’ It will grab the public imagination. He’s not doing it.”

Warren, losing her temper, replied with further excuses and meaningless catch phrases: “We’ve got to get out there and fight ... Look, we are fighting back. We are fighting for what we believe in. We are fighting to build a future for America ... We need people across the country to help push on the Republicans.”

The former Harvard Law School professor offered absolutely no relief to the tens of millions suffering from poverty, joblessness and miserable wages and conditions in America. She resolutely rejected any criticism of the record and policies of the increasingly discredited Obama administration.

The conversation ended in some degree of awkwardness.

So much for the “progressive” wing of the Democratic Party. Inadvertently no doubt, Matthews lifted the lid for an instant June 19 on its insincere, worthless and right-wing character.

Of course, even the more combative arguments in the American media invariably take place within a political and ideological straitjacket. The question of questions, capitalism, can never be raised.

It would never occur to Matthews or any of his colleagues to examine the economic interests that make alleviation of any of the social ills impossible, much less to consider an alternative to the bankrupt profit system. The MSNBC host well knows what can and can’t be said, and conducts himself accordingly. Inevitably, in the end, his arguments veer off in a reactionary, nationalist, anti-communist direction.



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