

By Arnold Beichman

The sins of politicians in democratic societies are for the most part forgettable and forgivable because there is always the possibility that unhappy voters can rid themselves of such transgressors at the next election.

But there are some sins of politicians which can neither be forgiven nor forgotten regardless of election results. I, for one, cannot forgive British Prime Minister Tony Blair for an action I will describe in this analogous fashion:

Supposing a British academic who had long been openly sympathetic to the Nazi Party and to Adolf Hitler, despite all kinds of documented revelations about his inhumanity, and supposing this academic had even become a member of Oswald Mosley's pro-Nazi British Union of Fascists; and supposing this British academic had publicly argued that Hitler had been trying to build a better world and that therefore the human sacrifices, however great, were justifiable; and now suppose that despite the despicable personal record of this British academic, a British prime minister had awarded him one of the country's highest accolades. You say: it couldn't happen, not in England, no way.

Well, it did happen — except that the British academic I am describing was and still is a defender of Josef Stalin, Hitler's rival in terror; that this British academic was a longtime member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Yet British Prime Minister Tony Blair inducted this man —

Arnold Beichman, a Hoover Institution Research Fellow, is a Washington Times columnist. He is the editor of the forthcoming "CNN's Cold War Documentary: Issues and Controversy" (Hoover Press).

No enemies on the left? Blair honors academic who reveres mass murderer

Professor Eric Hobsbawm — into one of the highest awards in Britain for lifetime achievement, the Companionate of Honor.

I learned about Mr. Hobsbawm's fanatical devotion to Stalin in "Reflections on a Ravaged Century," a collection of just-published essays by Robert Conquest, the eminent historian. On pages 10 and 11, Mr. Conquest describes an interview with Mr. Hobsbawm, a leading Marxist historian, as reported in the Times Literary Supplement Oct. 28, 1994. The interviewer, Michael Ignatieff, asked Mr. Hobsbawm how he justified his longtime membership in the Communist Party.

Mr. Hobsbawm: "You didn't have the option. You see, either there was going to be a future or there wasn't going to be a future and this [the Communist Party] was the only thing that offered an acceptable future."

Mr. Ignatieff: "In 1934, millions of people are dying in the Soviet experiment. If you had known that, would it have made a difference to you at that time? To your commitment? To being a Communist?"

Mr. Hobsbawm: "This is the sort of academic question to which an answer is simply not possible. I don't actually know that it has any bearing on the history that I have written. If I were to give you a retrospective answer which is not the answer of a historian, I would have said, 'Probably not.'"

Mr. Ignatieff: "Why?"

Mr. Hobsbawm: "Because in a period in which, as you might imagine, mass murder and mass suffering are

absolutely universal, the chance of a new world being born in great suffering would still have been worth backing. Now the point is, looking back as an historian, I would say that the sacrifices made by the Russian people were probably only marginally worthwhile. The sacrifices were enormous; they were excessive by almost any standard and excessively great. But I'm looking back at it now and I'm saying that because it turns out that the Soviet Union was not the beginning of the world revolution. Had it been, I'm not sure."

Mr. Ignatieff: "What that comes down to is saying that had the radiant tomorrow actually been created, the loss of fifteen, twenty million people

might have been justified?"

Mr. Hobsbawm: "Yes."

You have to read this exchange twice because it is unbelievable that anyone could today vindicate Stalin's terror in the name of a socialist revolution that never was. And it is even more unbelievable that Mr. Blair recently made this man a Companion of Honor, one of the highest awards in the realm, limited to 50 holders, rewarding "services of special importance to the nation."

Oh, yes: it will be argued that Mr. Hobsbawm is a great historian, albeit a Marxist, and therefore to be forgiven. Let me then cite the case of Martin Heidegger, the leading German existential philosopher, who became a collaborator of the Nazis. What would Mr. Blair's reaction be if a German chancellor had bestowed one of the highest Bundesrepublik honors on this supporter of Adolf Hitler?

Mr. Blair has yet to explain why he chose to confer such a high honor on an intellectual who still defends Stalin. As Paul Johnson wrote in the London Spectator at the time of the award:

"After all, these are national awards: by selecting Hobsbawm for such an accolade, Blair appears to suggest that the British people associate themselves with the crimes of a human monster. In the meantime, it is those innumerable Russians who resisted Stalin and died for it, and now lie unremembered in unmarked graves, who are the true Companions of Honor."

I forgot to mention — Mr. Blair says that his government represents New Labour.

