

Breaking With Obama?

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Those long-hoping, long-enduring members of the liberal intelligentsia are starting to break away from the least-worst mindset that muted their criticisms of Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential campaign.

They still believe that the President is far better than his Republican counterpart would have been. Some still believe that sometime, somewhere, Obama will show his liberal stripes. But they no longer believe they should stay loyally silent in the face of the escalating war in Afghanistan, the near collapse of key provisions in the health insurance legislation, the likely anemic financial regulation bill, or the obeisance to the bailed out Wall Street gamblers. Remember this Administration more easily embraces bonuses for fat cats than adequate investment in public jobs.

Of all the loyalists, among the first to stray was Bob Herbert, columnist for The New York Times. He wondered about his friends telling him that Obama treats their causes and them “as if they have nowhere to go.” Then there was the stalwart Obamaist, the brainy Gary Wills, who broke with Obama over Afghanistan in a stern essay of admonition.

If you read the biweekly compilation of progressive and liberal columnists and pundits in The Progressive Populist, one of my favorite publications, the velvet verbal gloves are coming off.

Jim Hightower writes that “Obama is sinking us into ‘Absurdistan.’” He bewails: “I had hoped Obama might be a more forceful leader who would reject the same old interventionist mindset of those who profit from permanent war. But his newly announced Afghan policy shows he is not that leader.”

Wonder where good ol’ Jim got that impression—certainly not from anything Obama said or did not say in 2008. But hope dims the memory of the awful truth which is that Obama signed on to the Wall Street and military-industrial complex from the getgo. He got their message and is going after their campaign contributions and advisors big time!

Norman Solomon, expressed his sharp deviation from his long-time admiration of the politician from Chicago. He writes: “President Obama accepted the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize while delivering—to the world as it is—a pro-war speech. The context instantly turned the speech’s insights into flackery for more war.” Strong words indeed!

Arianna Huffington has broken in installments. But her disillusionment is expanding. She writes: “Obama isn’t distancing himself from ‘the Left’ with his decision to escalate this deepening disaster [in Afghanistan]. He’s distancing himself from the national interests of the country.”

John R. MacArthur, publisher of Harper's Magazine, was never an Obama fan and has been upset with what he calls "the liberal adoration of Obama." In a piece for the Providence Journal, he cites some writers still loyal to Obama, such as Frank Rich of The New York Times, Hendrick Hertzberg of The New Yorker, and Tom Hayden, who are showing mild discomfort in the midst of retained hope over Obama's coming months. They have not yet cut their ties to the masterspeaker of "Hope and Change."

Gary Wills has crossed his Rubicon, calling Obama's Afghanistan escalation "a betrayal." Wills is a scholar of both the Presidency and of political oratory (his small book on Lincoln's Gettysburg address is a classic interpretation). So he uses words carefully, to wit: "If we had wanted Bush's wars, and contractors, and corruption, we could have voted for John McCain. At least we would have seen our foe facing us, not felt him at our back, as now we do."

Rest assured the liberal-progressive commentariat has another two years to engage in challenge and chagrin. For in 2012, silence will mute their criticisms as the stark choices of the two-party tyranny come into view and incarcerate their minds into the least-worst voting syndrome (just as they have done in recent Presidential election years).

It is hard to accord them any moral breaking point under such self-imposed censorship. Not much leverage in that approach, is there?

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