

Liberal Nat Hentoff lays the “I” word on Obama

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It is just over one year since Nat Hentoff, long a mainstay of the super-liberal Village Voice, in addition to a PBS fixture and revered doyen of what might be called the coherent Left — and, more recently, a senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute — mooted the idea of impeaching the current president (“Bringing civics classes back to schools: Obama impeachment?” The Jewish World Review, May 29, 2013)

The problem, as Hentoff sees it, is Obama’s blatant disregard for the Constitution. In his JWR piece, Hentoff urges all of us, conservative and liberal alike, to please, for the love of Pete, sit up and pay attention. There is deeply troubling stuff being done on this president’s watch, possibly even on his orders, says this long-time icon of the Left. Stuff that matters.

When ticking off his bill of particulars against this administration, Hentoff cites the massive and systematic misuse of the all-powerful IRS for political ends. This is but one of the White House’s extra-constitutional excursions, notes Hentoff, a Nixonian travelogue which spans the spectrum from gun running to Congress-baiting recess appointments.

It must be noted that Hentoff did not morph magically overnight from a rabid Obama supporter into a champion of impeachment. Turns out Nat, while still at the Village Voice, never actually drained his Kool-Aid glass, even while such in-the-tank media cheerleaders as Chris Mathews were demanding seconds. Hentoff — historian, polymath, left-leaning journalist and certified wise-old-man — gazed into the future and could see nothing but rocky times ahead for the rule of law, given the empowering cult of personality that seemed to surround this fresh face from Illinois, he of the sealed academic records, dodgy state house attendance, and complicated patrimony story.

On Nov. 4, 2008, congratulatory wishes showered down on Obama from dictators around the world, with such sainted respecters of the rule of law as Putin, Chavez, Ahmadinejad and Castro blowing the first kisses (alas, heartfelt kudos from the Kenyan Red Alliance didn’t come until the 2012 re-election, possibly reflecting healthy skepticism in the old sod about the extent of Obama’s actual commitment to socialism in ’08. Any misunderstandings were subsequently cleared up, apparently). Meanwhile, a despairing Nat Hentoff sat alone at his desk at the Village Voice, a man frankly wary of his country’s future.

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A dues-paying member of the Left since time immemorial, and absolutely nobody's idea of a racist, Hentoff was nonetheless uneasy from the get-go with the idea of thrusting a one-time community organizer and unexamined freshman senator into the complex crucible of the U.S. presidency simply because he was of color, and crowd-pleasing glib. Installing an inexperienced unknown in the Oval Office under the impossibly imbecilic pretext of settling old scores with Simon Legree and Bull Conner made exactly no sense to Hentoff; it was, he quietly averred, a dangerous stunt bound to backfire.

The election over, Hentoff veered off-script and gave public vent to his misgivings. A couple of days later his employer boxed up his things, changed the lock on his office door (an oaken slab behind which he had toiled for 50 years) and declared him henceforth persona non grata at all future Barbra Streisand farewell galas.

The Obama victory was the predictable result of child-like anti-capitalist naiveté coupling in the back seat of a voting booth with decades of tormented white guilt. The PBS generation is, exactly as Hentoff predicted, today having to come to grips with its love child all grown up. In a few short years the affable, neo-socialist upstart with the secret CV has metastasized from a cute and cuddly mascot of the Left into a dangerous, chest-thumping, executive-ordering pit bull straining at his constitutional leash and snarling at congressional passersby, hell holding no fury like a lame duck president with fee simple ownership of the IRS, Justice, and Homeland Security.

President Obama teeters on the knife edge of some very serious constitutional trouble. Hentoff's mutterings about impeachment have to date gone exactly nowhere, but the fact that this icon of liberalism raised the point at all, and continues to proselytize on the subject, speaks volumes about the executive roguery which has come to define this presidency in the eyes of many.

Obama's bumper stickers promised change. Gotta admit, transforming a legendary half-century fixture at the smugly leftist Village Voice into a raving, Cato-ready Paul Revere, warning his countrymen about a massive and unprecedented assault on their Constitution by an unaccountable far-left president, would certainly qualify as change.

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