

Funding the Future

Dowden's rather nasty message about freedom has 'shut u.

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Oliver Dowden MP, the chair of the Conservative Party, [tweeted this yesterday](#):



First of all, let's note that this speech was given at the very right-wing, pro-Trump, Heritage Foundation. They are best known for their annually produced index of economic freedom. They explain [their view of freedom as follows](#):

Economic freedom is the fundamental right of every human to control his or her own labor and property. In an economically free society, individuals are free to work, produce, consume, and invest in any way they please. In economically free societies, governments allow labor, capital, and goods to move freely, and refrain from coercion or constraint of liberty beyond the extent necessary to protect and maintain liberty

itself.

It's not hard to see through this. The freedom being celebrated is that of the individual irrespective of the consequence of their behaviour for others or, come to that, the planet. This is a definition of freedom based upon the idea of the right to exploit that has implicit within it the idea that virtue is indicated by wealth.

Note that Dowden used the word *nostrum* in his speech, which refers to a false medicine prescribed by an unqualified person. Implicit in what he says then are two things. The first is that what he supports is the truth. The second is that he is qualified to tell this.

Taking him at face value and presuming his judgement is, at least in his opinion, sound let's remember that Dowden chose to speak at the Heritage Foundation. He did not need to do so. And as he chose to do so he must have known of its views on what freedom might be. He clearly describes them as true as a result. That is what we must conclude.

Then let's look at some reports of what he said. This version comes from the [Huffington Post](#). I have not been able to find a transcript on line, as yet:

Dowden said it was up to conservatives to “mount a vigorous defence of the values of a free society” which he claimed were under threat from “woke ideology”.

And he took aim at left-wing activists whom he accused of being “engaged in a form of Maoism determined to expunge large parts of our past in its entirety”, citing the defacing of a statue of Winston Churchill [during protests in 2020](#).

The Tory party chairman said the “world watches” the relationship between America and its allies as they attempt to prevent Russian president Vladimir Putin from attacking Ukraine.

But Dowden said that just as “rogue states are seeking to challenge the international order...a pernicious ideology is sweeping our societies”.

“In Britain, its adherents sometimes describe themselves as social justice warriors,” he said.

“They claim to be woke, awakened to the so-called truths of our societies.

“But wherever they are found, they pursue a common policy inimicable to freedom.

“In their analysis, free speech is not a fundamental right necessary for the discovery of truth. To them, it is a dangerous weapon.”

He went on: “For all their fury at so called imperialism, these activists have absolutely nothing to say about that Vladimir Putin’s modern day empire building.

“Indeed, one of the perversities of this worldview is that the imperialist West is always at fault.”

Dowden claimed “woke” ideology is now “everywhere”.

“It’s in our universities, but also in our schools. In government bodies, but also in corporations. In social science faculties, but also in the hard sciences,” Dowden said.

“But I tell you, it is a dangerous form of decadence. Just when our attention should be focused on external foes, we seem to have entered this period of extreme introspection and self-criticism.

“And it really does threaten to sap our societies of their own self-confidence.

“Just when we should be showcasing the vitality of our values and the strength of democratic societies, we seem to be willing to abandon those values, for the sake of appeasing a new groupthink.

“The US and the UK may be different societies but we are joined by the same fundamental values.

“Neither of us can afford the luxury of indulging in this painful woke psychodrama.”

Let's look at this. First, picking on a theme of the moment, Dowden seeks to claim that those who are woke support Putin. That suggestion appeared in a comment offered to this blog yesterday, which I deleted. It is, very obviously, going to be a promoted narrative now.

It also is laughable. Anyone with any awareness of freedom knows that the kleptocracy in Russia is absolutely no friend of human rights. That Dowden can claim that there might be some link between the promotion of human rights and support for a totalitarian regime in Russia is laughable, but he clearly sees it as an argument worth pursuing. In the process he does, very strongly, undermine the credibility of his own claims about the threat from Russia. You cannot lie and be credible at the same time. He should be careful.

Second, let's be clear what woke means. As far as I can tell the etymology of the word begins in the 1940s when black America awoke to the idea of racial injustice, or as was said, they woke to the reality of the situation. For all the opprobrium that Dowden and others wish to pile upon it, what woke refers to is an awareness of inequality and social injustice, particularly with regard to race but also with regard to all other forms of social and economic injustice and inequality. I think that there is nothing more to it than that.

Third, in that case if Dowden is serious about the claims that he makes, what he is suggesting is that social and economic equality is the threat about which he is most worried. His call is for society to resist equality. In other words, he is calling for the perpetuation of inequality and the injustices that have been associated with it.

To put it another way, he is calling for the perpetuation of the Heritage Foundation view of freedom, which can be represented as the right to exploit.

Unsurprisingly, as a consequence, he is right to note that there is a fight around the merits of Western imperialism. A quick Google search offered this definition of imperialism, with which most dictionaries appear to be in agreement:

a policy of extending a country's power and influence through colonization, use of military force, or other means.

What Dowden seems keen to promote is the right to use force to coerce others into economic and social obedience. It's not exactly attractive, is it? The Heritage view of freedom is, of course, consistent with imperialism.

And what Dowden really reveals is that that he is frightened that those who are woke realise that this imperialist power was used to oppress much of the world for an extended period of time and rightly react to that by suggesting it was inappropriate.

That's not Maoist, as Dowden suggests. That's simply about learning how to do things better in the future and to not repeat the mistakes of the past. Unsurprisingly, education wants to tell people not to make those mistakes again. What else is education about if it can't teach about doing things better?

But what really is sad about Dowden's worldview is that implicit in it is his call for Western imperialism to defeat Russian imperialism, as if nothing has ever been learned. As those who are woke know, what he is seeking to perpetuate is what [Eisenhower once](#) described as the military-industrial complex which will, in both the West and Russia, be rubbing its hands in glee at the creation of the current stresses.

Those who are woke oppose that worldview from wherever it comes, and argue it must be defeated by the promotion of freedom. That is because it is the military-industrial complex that has denied freedom for so long. In the process it has oppressed so many whilst serving the interests of the few. And it is this worldview that Dowden describes as the UK - US values he wants to perpetuate.

Thankfully, some of us are woke to that. No wonder we will oppose all that he wants. We know his freedom comes at a direct cost to the vast majority, which is precisely why we will highlight the absurd claim he makes that he and his like are the victims in all this when the exact opposite is the truth.

There is but one person peddling false medicines here. That is Oliver Dowden, who

appears to be a man singularly ill-qualified to tell the truth, Boris Johnson excepted.