

Freeports are dangerous

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I have, as usual, published a new video this morning in which I suggest that Rishi Sunak's very limited legacy will include the creation of freeports. They are, however, deeply dangerous places where the normal rule of law is suspended for the benefit of financial capital, usually at cost to the workers in the places and the communities that host them. As such, they undermine democracy. What could possibly go wrong?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRz8S6D55r8>

The audio version of this video is here:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=ivj3e-164b84c-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=c73a3a&font-color=&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=ff6d00

The transcript is:

Freeports are dangerous.

That, as an opening claim goes, is a big and bold one, because we have quite a lot of freeports in this country now, but they do nonetheless represent a significant threat to our well-being.

Why is that?

What is the problem with a freeport?

Look, let's describe what a freeport is.

A freeport is a place where regulation of the normal sort that applies within the country is suspended for the benefit of those who are running businesses in that location. So, almost invariably, therefore, free ports exist to provide benefits to companies, employers, and those who are undertaking trade. And they do so by suspending the normal rules of taxation, and sometimes on other matters, like environmental protections, or employee protections, or whatever else.

Now, why should we have parts of the country where we deliberately suspend normal laws? What is the benefit of that for everybody else?

And why should some people be subject to lower levels of protection during the course of their working life because they work in a freeport compared to what they would have if they worked outside the freeport?

And that's most especially true when no freeport has an advertised boundary. In fact, finding the border of a freeport is something that is incredibly difficult to do because these are, well, almost imaginary spaces. A few warehouses here, a warehouse or so there, ring-fenced inside a planning zone which is itself loosely described on a map, but which has no obvious border.

These freeports are figments of planner's imaginations. Planners of all sorts; tax planners, regulatory planners, those who wish to plan to abuse environmental protection, those who most definitely want to abuse the rights of employees. And the danger is that when you create these things, and now most especially, put them under the control of private sector companies who are tasked with administering the reduced regulation in these areas in a way that is, well, to their best interest, not to the best interest of society at large, you end up with something which is particularly pernicious that is ruled by corporations.

Rule by corporations is a form of fascism. That is exactly how Mussolini described it as, in effect.

So let's be clear. Whilst the free ports we have provide relatively limited exemptions from regulation at present, their very existence is a threat to the democratic control of this country by the government. And for that reason, they're deeply pernicious and as dangerous as tax havens have ever been to the effective control of democracy over the well-being of most people in this world.