

Funding the Future

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US Vice President J D Vace showed that diplomacy was an art beyond his reach yesterday when making a speech in Munich. He was speaking at an event on security. He took the opportunity to become the aggressor, saying:

The threat that I worry the most about vis a vis Europe is not Russia, it's not China, it's not any other external actor; what I worry about is the threat from within, the retreat of Europe from some of its most fundamental values, values shared with the United States of America.

He continued, saying:

We must do more than talk about democratic values. We must live them now.

He then suggested that Europe had forgotten the lessons from the Cold War and the fight against oppression that it represented, saying:

To many of us on the other side of the Atlantic, it looks more and more like old entrenched interests hiding behind ugly Soviet era words like misinformation and disinformation, who simply don't like the idea that somebody with an alternative viewpoint might express a different opinion, or, God forbid, vote a different way, or, even worse, win an election.

To make the issue very personal, he asked:

What you are defending yourselves for?

He then suggested:

If you're running in fear of your own voters, there is nothing America can do for you, nor, for that matter, is there anything that you can do for the American people who elected me and elected President Trump.

If American democracy can survive 10 years of Greta Thunberg's scolding, you guys can survive a few months of Elon Musk.

But what German democracy, what no democracy, American, German or European, will survive, is telling millions of voters that their thoughts and concerns, their aspirations, their pleas for relief, are invalid or unworthy of even being considered.

There was more, but this is enough to get a feel for what he was suggesting. There appear to be three strands, at least, to his argument.

The first is that European governments are tyrannies.

The second is that they are ignoring the will of voters.

The third is that the US will not stand for this.

Those ideas need to be considered.

It is undoubtedly true that European governments are not good at:

- * Listening to voters.
- * Considering anything but neoliberal views.
- * Respecting the rights of dissidents, most especially on the left.
- * Protecting minorities and vulnerable groups from oppression.
- * Planning for climate change.
- * Delivering the basic services that people expect because far too many have been outsourced.

These charges are appropriate, but they are not the ones that Vance made.

In contrast, European governments have been, broadly speaking, good at:

- * Upholding the rule of law.
- * Protecting migrants (although there are ample enough exceptions to suggest things could be done very much better).
- * Putting in place laws (even if they are not always upheld as I would wish) to:
- * Prevent discrimination.
- * Move countries in the direction of greater equality.
- * Provide religious and intellectual freedom.
- * Uphold free speech as long as it is not used to promote intolerance and abuse or promote threats to others.
- * Allow free elections, albeit within forms of democracy that in some cases (the UK being the stand-out example) cannot fairly reflect the opinions of voters.
- * Delivering stability, albeit as the neoliberal model fails that is beginning to look like a form of very stagnant inequality where opportunity for many is being denied.

I am not saying, in that case, that the governments we have in Europe are exempt from criticism. Far from it: I think that there is a great deal more that they can and should do.

But I do not think their failings are remotely like those that Vance, who is a participant in the fascist coup taking place in the USA in real-time right now, is suggesting. He would have us:

- * Ban migration and remove those who have migrated.
- * 'Other' minority groups in society.
- * Remove the rights of women.
- * Deny the rights of LGBTQ people.
- * Deny the right to freedom of those who the far-right would wish to threaten and abuse.
- * Grant the freedom to abuse.
- * Permit market abuse and exploitation of the consumer.
- * Remove the social safety net.
- * End democracy.
- * Deny climate change and take no action on it.
- * Abandon the rule of law.
- * Cease to care.

This is not my vision of a good society. I do care. If I am about anything, it is that. The lesson I have learned from life is that unless we care for the other, even if we do not agree with them or share their values, then tyranny awaits.

That is what, I think, most Europeans uphold. That is why they are so shocked by the far-right and its rise because the hatred, intolerance and callousness of their words and actions - which are deliberately designed to promote fear - are so alien to all that we think we are and should aspire to be.

And this is exactly what Trump, Vance, Musk and their cohort dislike about Europe. They hate that Europeans care when they do not care.

The only thing that matters to them is their own well-being. They will intimidate and directly threaten those that they do not agree with to get what they want. Their definition of freedom is that the right to threaten should be permitted. This is what Vance was suggesting yesterday, above all else.

Meanwhile, in the USA, the rule of law is being shredded.

We know Trump used violence - resulting in deaths to which he was indifferent - to try to stay in office in 2021. He has forgiven those who partook in that. Democracy is under direct threat.

And what Vance did was straight from the Goebbels handbook of fascist misinformation techniques. He accused Europe - who he casts as his enemy - of doing exactly that for which he is responsible.

Don't get me wrong. I have many criticisms of the way in which Europe is governed. I have considerable difficulty with their culture of neoliberalism, which is fast taking us on the road to nowhere.

I want radical reform so that people might really enjoy what is possible in this country and many others.

But never, ever confuse that criticism with what Vance might be saying. He is acting for a few at a cost to many.

I believe that the frustration in Europe is that the many are not getting what they deserve because there is an elite denying most people what is rightfully theirs to enjoy - an elite of which Trump, Vance and Musk are a part and whose interests they are pursuing to an extreme not yet seen in Europe.

I want government for people. Vance wants anything but that.

The battle lines are drawn.