

Funding the Future

Article URL

Published: January 12, 2026, 6:56 pm

Free speech is the foundation of democracy. Without the right to disagree, there is no freedom at all. Yet in the USA, Trump threatens dissenters, comedians are suspended, and protesters are labelled extremists. In the UK, Palestine Action supporters face trial for holding placards. This is the authoritarian playbook. And we must resist it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SR3ae0qLDw&si=rPhi9bvZhz1H4L4y>

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=a68q5-1978dec-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

Free speech is absolutely essential to democracy. Without the right to disagree, there is quite literally no political freedom. It is only on the basis of disagreement that we can work out what is the right thing to do.

In this context, what is happening in the USA is deeply troubling, and I'm going to refer to it a few days after all these events have happened because we've had time to take in the consequences of Charlie Kirk's murder.

We've had time to take in the consequences of Jimmy Kimmel's suspension.

And we've had time to think about the fact that the Trump administration is clearly

trying to suppress dissenting voices in the USA.

Trump says he wants to criminalise Antifa, which stands for anti-fascist, although there is no such organisation in existence.

And we should remember that in the UK, Palestine action supporters in their thousands now, are waiting to be tried as criminals for the simple act of protest - writing two words on a piece of cardboard, and holding it up in public.

And yet, as I pointed out right at the beginning, free speech is fundamental to protecting the voices of those who want to hold power to account; so powerful that, of course, it is protected in the USA by the First Amendment to the Constitution, and yet that is now under threat from Trump.

Disagreement is not a threat.

Making jokes about the president is not a threat.

But Trump disagrees. He says that's enough for you to have your license to broadcast removed.

And yet the whole basis of the fourth estate - the power of the journalists and other institutions to hold politics to account - is dependent upon this right to actually express humour at the expense of those whom you are lampooning or those who consider themselves so powerful that they are beyond accountability.

Suppressing dissent destroys accountability, and that is precisely what Trump is trying to do with his threats to the media.

And he only has to raise the threat. That's now very clear. He doesn't even have to ban these people anymore. He just has to threaten that he might take away somebody's license, and it appears that every broadcaster jumps to his tune, something that was last seen in Germany in 1933.

And yet, without disagreement, the sort of disagreement that is fundamental to the American late-night politics show, politics simply becomes obedience, and we can't afford obedience. We have to have the right to criticise as well. And if broadcasters fear retaliation, dissenting voices vanish. That's the threat of what Trump is doing.

The threat to Antifa is also extremely nebulous because there isn't something called Antifa. Everybody who's a critic of Trump is Antifa, and that's why he's chosen this idea. Labelling everybody as an opponent, as an extremist and as unlawful - which is what he is doing - creates the ambiguity that censors everyone without censors ever having to censor anyone. And this ambiguity is destructive because it delegitimises the whole process of talking about protest.

Criminalising disagreement is the authoritarian playbook. And we are again, and I stress this, seeing this in the UK. That is what the Palestine Action movement by the government is all about. They're trying to label protesters as extremists, but let's be blunt about it, it isn't extreme to say you have concerns about what is happening in Gaza.

For anyone to say so is to simply undermine the essential humanity of those who are being arrested. 80-year-old vicars, a lot of people who are in retirement, doctors; they are saying they've had enough, but apparently, that is a terrorist act.

And no, I don't think it is, and I reserve the right to say that, because I want to live in a democracy where disagreement is allowed and not censored or punished or criminalised.

And this is the fight we have on our hands now. This is the fight that is going on in America.

This is the fight that is causing people there to feel really frightened.

And frankly, which is causing people here in the UK to feel really frightened.

There are lawyers, there are NGOs, there are people who work with immigrants, there are people who work with refugees, all of whom are saying they now feel threatened because of what they do.

I feel threatened because of what I do, and why not? Because you could argue that I'm Antifa. I do oppose fascism. A lot of the things I talk about are about how to oppose fascism. But that doesn't make me an extremist. It just makes me a democrat. It makes me somebody who wants a fair, open world where I'm not denying the right of the right-wing to talk, although they're trying to do that to people who oppose them; I'm just saying I disagree with them. I disagree with authoritarianism.

So my point is this. We have to defend dissent as a democratic necessity.

We have to defend free speech because it means the right to criticise power persists.

And this struggle is not about left or right, but it is about freedom versus control.

Those are the key points. This is about everybody having the right to an opinion. And not some having the right to remove the objection of others to the opinions that they hold.

So what should you do?

You should, I hope, resist censorship.

You should defend the right to protest.

You should protect disagreement and say that it is valid.

We do need to talk about this. In our families, to our friends, in our workplaces, to our neighbours, and say, "I don't have to agree with you. And I have the right to disagree."

Keep talking about this. Keep watching this video channel. Look at others that share this view. And promote the opinion that democracy and the right to dissent matter.

Ultimately, keep on carrying on. Because unless we do, we are going to end up without the right to say what we think, and when that happens, we are not just all the poorer; we have lost every freedom that we had.

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