



Free Speech Values Abandoned for Pro-Palestinian Voices | SYSTEM UPDATE

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): There is another aspect to the discourse surrounding the war on Gaza that I will admit surprises me. Because what is happening in the West, is that the rage and the anger that people feel from feeding on these videos about what Hamas did to Israeli civilians, which again, is rage and anger that I can not only understand but share. Is not only being channelled into what I think are sociopathic calls for the eradication of innocent life in massive numbers, but also the dismantling of core free speech rights in the West, as well as - as a way of fighting dissent - as well as the explicit invocation of what until about 6 seconds ago was universally reviled by the American Right as the excesses of cancel culture. Meaning that people participating in public debates and expressing views that those with power dislike should be - since you can't jail them with the First Amendment - should be scorned and fired and rendered unhireable. That has happened to a huge number of people who have expressed opposition to Black Lives Matter or who have called for more policing or who are opposed to affirmative action or who have expressed concerns about the excesses of the MeToo movement or who have argued against some of the more novel and radical expressions of the new gender ideology and the trans agenda. And the argument typically made against such people when they're fired because of those views is that the firing is justified because those aren't real views. Those are expressions of hatred against a marginalised group of people, that it's attacking vulnerable people and marginalising them and inciting violence against them. That it's basically hate speech and therefore not permitted. Which is exactly the same argument being invoked by the people who have spent years criticising that tactic to justify the firing or the barring from hiring of people who are in some ways expressing criticism of the Israeli government or solidarity with the Palestinian cause. And if someone wants to say, you know what, I do believe in cancel culture, my problem with the Left's use of cancel culture has simply been that they've directed at the wrong ideas, the views they want to punish our views that I don't think should be punished. But these views I do think should be punished. Then at least I can respect the intellectual consistency involved. But obviously that's not what's happening. People are simultaneously campaigning to have people fired or barred from being hired. And at the same time pretending that they're not engaged in these very tactics they've spent so many years denouncing.

So, first of all, let's look at the actual censorship emanating from the state officials. Here is from the UK, The Guardian on Monday: "Waving a Palestinian flag may be a criminal offence, Braverman tells police." That's the Home Secretary of the UK, which is like the attorney general. "The Home Secretary also suggests a clampdown on pro-Arab chants in a letter that will concern free speech advocates." Oh, do you think? Now, if you're somebody who hates the Palestinian flag, or who despises chants like Free Palestine or Free Arabs, you should hate that all you want. But then the question becomes, do you think the state should make it criminal to express these views because you hate them? Which is what we covered on the show all the time. That's happening and usually people are appalled by that kind of censorship. Here's from The Guardian, quote: "In a letter to chief constables in England and Wales, the Home Secretary urged them to clamp down on any attempts to use flags, songs or swastikas to harass or intimidate members of the Jewish community." Now, you might be saying, Oh, well, it's not just the flags, it's the harassing of members of the Jewish community. But what they mean by that is walking on the street, seeing a pro-Israel protest and then doing a counterchant or waving a Palestinian flag. And that's the argument always for censorship. Oh, if you go around denouncing the trans agenda, you're making trans people feel unsafe. You're harassing them and intimidating them. And every other minority group to whom that applies. Quote: "The Home Secretary's words, which followed deadly attacks by Hamas on Israelis and a military response, will deeply concern freedom of speech advocates and members of the Muslim community. In the letter, the Home Secretary Braverman said police should not restrict themselves to potential offences related to the promotion of Hamas, a proscribed organisation." So what she's saying is obviously it's a crime to defend Hamas. Do you think it should be a crime to defend Hamas, no matter how much you hate Hamas? Do you want that to be a crime? Do you want people to go to prison? If they say, oh, I think what Hamas did is justified? We just went over the fact that there are a few people saying that. Should those people be turned into criminals, should they be prosecuted? She's saying not only do I think they should be prosecuted - people defending Hamas - but many other people, quote, "It is not just explicit pro-Hamas symbols and chants that are cause for concern." She said, "I would encourage police to consider whether chants such as 'From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free' and whether that should be understood as an expression of a violent desire to see Israelis erased from the world and whether its use in certain context may amount to a racially aggravated section five public order offence. Quote, "I would encourage police to give similar consideration to the presence of symbols such as swastikas at anti-Israel demonstrations. Context is crucial. Behaviours that are legitimate in some circumstances, for example, the waving of a Palestinian flag may not be legitimate, such as when intended to glorify acts of terrorism." I guess it's okay to call for the complete and total eradication of Gaza, as Lindsey Graham did. That's legal. What's not legal is to wave a Palestinian flag if the state believes that you're doing so in order to glorify terrorism. Do you want the state in the business of doing this? Usually the answer is unequivocally no.

But the reason the Home Secretary of the UK is threatening to criminalise this is because she believes, probably accurately, that a large portion of the British population want that to be criminal. That's how the government exploits emotions surrounding war. This is exactly what they did in the war on terror. They said, Look, we know that ordinarily the Patriot Act would be unthinkable. But remember 9/11? Aren't you enraged by that? Don't you want us to be able to stop that? Well, you better give us these powers then. And people said okay, and they voted overwhelmingly, in fact, almost unanimously for the Patriot Act. That's how this always works. They leap in at the very first days when emotions are at their highest and they exploit them to gain authoritarian power. There was a similar protest in Canada, in Toronto, where people were waving Palestinian flags and chanting pro-Palestinian slogans. And the mayor of Toronto, Olivia Chow, tweeted the following, quote, "I'm aware of the unsanctioned rally at Nathan Phillips Square today. My statement is below." Quote, "The Government of Canada has rightly listed Hamas as a terrorist organisation, and we simply must not tolerate any support for terror, full stop. The rally to support Hamas at Nathan Phillips Square today is unsanctioned without a permit and I unequivocally denounce it. Glorifying this weekend's indiscriminate violence, including murder and kidnapping of women and children by Hamas against Israeli civilians is deplorable." I don't have a problem with her expressing those views, that it's deplorable. But she then goes on, quote, "I am receiving updates from the chief of police who assures me they will investigate and address any suspected incidents of hate." So she's not just threatening to use the police to investigate people expressing support for Palestine, which you may find deplorable and disgusting and enraging. But nonetheless, I hope you don't think that should be illegal in a free country and a democracy.

This is exactly what the Canadian government did when they tried to criminalise the protest of truckers who were protesting against vaccine mandates during COVID. Here you see a tweet from a Canadian journalist who during those protests tweeted, quote, "Ottawa police say the protesters do not have a demonstration permit." So that's exactly what they were trying to do to make those protests illegal, too. And most people found that enraging, repressive. I hope that view doesn't change simply because now it's a protest that you dislike. Here from Reuters on the same issue of the Canadian reaction, an attempt by the Trudeau government to criminalise the protest. There you see the headline "Canada Police Threaten Protesters With Arrest. Government Links Blockade to Extremists." So essentially the same argument is being made by people who are dangerous, who believe in extremism, who are glorifying violence, and therefore we can make this protest illegal. In the United States, thankfully, because we do have the First Amendment, not that many people want to criminalise the expression of opposition to the Israeli government action or support for Palestinians. But there are people who want to destroy the lives of those who are doing it, which I always thought was called cancel culture. That's what I always understood cancel culture to be. Somebody is at an event and they make a white supremacist sign using the OK sign. And then they have to be fired, there's pressure from media companies and journalists to get them fired, to make sure they're never hired. People post things on Facebook or Twitter about Black Lives Matter or the MeToo movement or the trans movement, and there's a

campaign to have them fired based on the view that those are hateful statements against vulnerable minorities that are likely to incite violence. That's cancel culture, at least as I've always understood it. And now a lot of the people who spent the last several years building a career and public profile based on opposition to cancel culture and the virtues of absolutist free speech are now involved in a very public campaign, often successful, to have people fired or barred from being hired who are expressing views on the war between Gaza and Israel that they dislike.

Here is Meghan McCain - who is a very stalwart defender of Israel, like her father, John McCain was - promoting and cheering and pointing to a tweet by Bill Ackman, who is a very wealthy Silicon Valley investor who is I think the CEO of a certain company. He's an investor in a lot of companies, a very rich Silicon Valley guy. And this is what he's saying, quote, "I have been asked by a number of CEOs if Harvard would release a list of the members of each of the Harvard organisations that have issued the letter assigning sole responsibility for Hamas's heinous acts to Israel, so as to ensure that none of us inadvertently hire any of their members. If, in fact, their members support the letter they have released, the names of the signatories should be made public so their views are publicly known. One should not be able to hide behind a corporate shield when issuing a statement supporting the actions of terrorists, who, we now learn, have beheaded babies, among other inconceivably despicable acts." Now, again, he's not actually talking here about people who have praised Hamas's massacre of civilians. He's talking here about student groups and students who have said that they think the broader context for the Israel-Gaza situation, namely the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the blockade of Gaza, is the cause or the blame for this conflict. That's a view shared by a lot of people around the world. Again, you may hate that view. You may despise it. You may be sickened by it. But I just want you to know that that is exactly how the Left feels about the views that they want punished. As much as you might hate the views that Bill Ackman is saying should be used to bar people from employment, he's demanding a list be assembled of people who aren't on Israel's side so that he and his CEO friends can collude together and agree not to hire them as they graduate Harvard or whatever other university where they're expressing this view. Because he considers this support for terrorism just like the Left regards the views they dislike as celebrating white supremacy or neo-Naziism or fascism or violence against trans people or gay people. That's what the Left genuinely believes about the views they want suppressed and punished. And I always thought the idea was that's wrong to do, that the solution to bad ideas is to engage people with better ideas - wasn't that the whole point of what we've been told for a long time? Is there now an exception? Explicitly and officially. And we've asked this question before whether there's a free speech exception on the right when it comes to Israel and Palestine, because I think there's evidence that there often is. This seems pretty explicit to me.

Here is an article in Forbes about this campaign that has been launched. "Billionaire Ackman, others pledge they won't hire Harvard students who signed letter blaming Israel for Hamas attack." Quote, "Billionaire hedge fund manager Bill Ackman on Tuesday roundly objected to

a controversial statement from a group of Harvard student organisations solely blaming Israel's occupation of Gaza for Hamas's weekend attack on Israel, calling for the names of the students to be released in an effort not to hire them. The statement was penned on Saturday by the Harvard Undergraduate Palestine Solidarity Committee with signatures from 33 university student organisations arguing Hamas' military assault on Israel, quote, 'did not occur in a vacuum'. Comparing the Gaza Strip to an 'open-air prison'" - which is common in Israeli discourse to say that Gaza is an open-air prison where 2 million people are trapped and can't leave - "while claiming that Israel's, quote, 'apartheid regime is the only one to blame'. Harvard's student newspaper, the Harvard Crimson, reported. The statement says Israel is, quote, 'entirely responsible' for the violence that began on Saturday when Hamas militants crossed from Gaza into southern Israel. Ackman, the CEO of Pershing Square Capital Management, tweeted he has been approached by, quote, a 'number of CEOs' asking for the names of the student organisations to ensure 'none of us inadvertently hire any of their members'. Jonathan Neman, the CEO and co-founder of healthy fast casual chain Sweetgreen, responded to Ackman's post on X, saying he, quote, 'would like to know so I know never to hire these people.' To which healthcare services company EasyHealth CEO David Deuel responded, quote: 'Same'. DoveHill Capital Management CEO Jake Wurzak also supported Ackman's plea to release the names of the students, though Ackman's request did not receive universal support, with Meds.com CEO Stephen Sullivan writing people should quote, 'be angry at the administrators and teachers' but cautioning against putting college students names on a list. The statement also gained national attention from business leaders and some lawmakers, including Congresswoman Elise Stefanik, Republican from New York, and Senator Ted Cruz, Republican of Texas, who asked on Monday, quote, 'What the hell is wrong with Harvard?'" .

Now, again, if you support that, that's fine. Please don't come to me and tell me that you hate cancel culture. Please just don't pretend that. Just say what is true. Just be honest about your perspective and your argument. I don't actually have a problem with cancel culture in principle. In fact, I support cancel culture in principle. I believe that people who express repellent views should have their careers put in jeopardy and be fired from their jobs. My problem with the Left isn't that they use cancel culture, but instead use cancel culture against people whose views I like. And instead it should be used against the views I hate. The Left just hates the wrong views, the Left wants to punish the wrong views. The Left wants to get the wrong people fired - just say that! Here's Aaron Sibarium, who is a friend of the show and somebody whose reporting we've approvingly cited many times. We had him on our show before. He is an outspoken opponent of cancel culture on campuses. That's one of the things he most prominently covers. And in response to people objecting to this campaign on the grounds that it sounds a lot like the left-wing cancel culture you typically denounce, he replied, quote, "I think there's a pretty big difference between firing someone for a poorly worded tweet or an opinion shared by half the country - especially when that opinion is not relevant to their job - and firing someone for endorsing terrorism." Now, first of all, we've read you the relevant parts of the statement that the students signed. They did not celebrate or

justify Hamas' massacring of civilians. They did not endorse terrorism. They said that the context is crucial for understanding this war, and they think Israel bears the blame for this war. That's not the same as endorsing the targeting of innocent civilians. But let's assume that it is. Let's assume that that's a fair and accurate characterisation. And by the way, we asked Aaron to come on our show tonight. He told me he would come on to talk about this, but wasn't able to in the next few days. So hopefully we'll have him on our show soon to talk about it, obviously in a civil and constructive way. That's what I promised him I would do while making clear I did not agree with what I consider this use of cancel culture. But let's assume that characterisation is right. That it's fair to say these people who signed the letter were somehow endorsing terrorism. The Left only tries to get people fired, only tries to get people kicked off the internet, only tries to ruin people's reputation, not when there's a trivial disagreement, but when they really believe that somebody's supporting white supremacy. Or terrorism against black people or Latinos or against trans people. That's exactly their argument. That's exactly the last rationale for getting people fired and censored. Oh, this isn't like any other political debate. This isn't about how much the tax rate should be or how much the interest rate should be. Those are normal political debates. What they're doing, the people they're trying to get fired - is endorsing racism and inciting violence against marginalised groups. That's different. That's hate speech. That's what he's saying here. Exactly the same thing. The only difference they have is not over the tactics that are appropriate to punish the people you disagree with. Just which views ought to be considered sufficiently repellent to justify punishment. Here's Jordan Peterson, with whom I had maybe a month or so ago, two months or so ago, a great two hour discussion for his program. It hasn't yet been published, I understand it will be soon. It wasn't really about politics, even. It was more about psychology and spirituality and a lot of really interesting things. I really enjoyed the discussion. But Jordan Peterson, who also has made a big name for himself, aggressively denouncing attempts in colleges to punish people for their views, in fact, they're currently trying to punish him for his views on the grounds that he spawns hatred against trans people. He responded to Steven Pinker, a Harvard professor. Steven Pinker said, quote, "I agree with Nicholas Kristof, the New York Times columnist, and I'm ashamed to be at the same university as the endorsers of this fatuous and morally monstrous statement. Deliberately murdering civilians and abducting women, children and the elderly are heinous war crimes, and this regime is avowedly racist." I don't have a problem with what Professor Pinker said. I mean, I don't agree with it, because I don't see these students as endorsing the murder and massacring of women and children. I don't think that's what they're doing. But even if they are, all he's doing is calling them reprehensible, saying he's embarrassed to be associated with them. He's not calling for them to be fired or to be punished. But in response, Jordan Peterson said the following quote, "Maybe Professor Pinker, it's time for a free speech Faculty strike, maybe with like-minded professors at Yale, Columbia, Stanford. Seriously, Sir, enough is enough." Jordan Peterson has become a very vocal supporter of Israel since he travelled there, which of course is his right and not entirely sure what he means by a free speech faculty strike. But it seems like what he's saying is unless these institutions come out and either punish these students or issue their own statement supporting Israel, that there should be what he's calling,

quote, a "free speech faculty strike", meaning the faculty refuses to work for these institutions until they either punish these students or issue their own statement.

In response to this call by this billionaire hedge fund manager Bill Ackman, for the names to be made public, someone named Max Meyer said, quote, "Here's the list that Ackman wants and not just Harvard." And he published what he called a college terror list, a helpful guide for employers, which is a Google document that contains the name of every individual student who signed anti-Israel or pro-Palestine petitions so that billionaires can ensure that they don't hire those people. So there is now a list. And on top of that, one of the biggest law firms in the country, Winston & Strawn LLP, had extended an offer to the president of the NYU Law Student Bar Association, which they have now rescinded based on her signing one of these statements. Here is the tweet from Winston & Strawn. Winston & Strawn has fired Ryna Workman, the president of the NYU Law Student Bar Association, who declared her support for Hamas. And they have this statement saying that her values that she expressed are completely at odds with the firms and therefore we don't want her here. And pretty much everyone I saw that has been making a career out of denouncing cancel culture was applauding and cheering this. Even though they would be outraged if this law firm had fired somebody for expressing racist views or anti-trans views or misogynistic views in the eyes of the Left. Or sharing the Confederate flag, which the Left sees as a monument to white supremacy. Obviously, people would be enraged by a law firm withdrawing its offer, but here they are cheering this, so it again would suggest that the complaint, the grievance is not with cancel culture itself, but with the views that are being punished and stigmatised with it. I've seen this before. I've seen people on the American Right who claim to be free speech absolutists suddenly start not just cheering the firing of people who are critics of Israel, but invoking exactly the same rhetoric the Left uses. To justify suppression of the views. And I don't mean they ironically invoke what the Left says. I would be okay with that if they were doing it satirically or saying, oh, we're going to claim exactly what the Left claims, that we need to fire this professor because they're creating an unsafe space. No, they mean as earnestly.

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