



'Freedom Conservatives' Defend Free Speech—Even for National Conservatives

Description

WORLD : National Conservatives saw an unlikely party leap to their defense amidst a buffoonish and unacceptable crackdown in Brussels. None other than their arch-rivals, the "Freedom Conservatives," stepped up.

The Freedom Conservatives, an umbrella group who are broadly old fusionists in their outlook, opposed the cancellation of NatCons, while reminding them about their appeal to the principles of liberalism, open debate, freedom of speech, and reduced governmental powers.

"Although Freedom Conservatives have many and profound disagreements with National Conservatives, we condemn any attempts by the government to hamper or extinguish the peaceable exercise of anyone's fundamental rights to free speech, assembly, and association," their statement noted.

John Hood, a signatory to the statement and the President of the Pope Foundation, reminded me that NatCons also have an obligation towards bridge-building if they seek a genuine movement:

Any political movement broad enough to win elections and govern effectively will encompass individuals and institutions who disagree on some matters of principle or priority.

Robust debate about such disagreements can be healthy, as long as it's substantive and folks still share enough in common to work together. Over the past decade, however, I've seen these debates turn increasingly toxic. And what we share can't just be progressivism as a common foe. That's not enough.

And that's precisely why the FreeCons are reaching out in support of the NatCons: "Although FreeCons and NatCons differ on many issues, we ought to be able to agree on freedom of speech and the other foundational principles of a free society," Hood said.

The European venue this year was in Brussels, capital of the European Union and seat of NATO. What transpired was downright absurd. Two venues were forced to cancel the conference under pressure from mobs, antifa, and the Socialist-party mayor of the precinct, Emir Kir.

The third venue witnessed a massive police buildup—ironic in a city known for its inability to ever stop a terror attack or museum vandalism—but when they refused to shut down the conference, the police laid siege, refusing entry of people, food, and water.

A British Member of Parliament, Miriam Cates, had to be escorted wearing a head-cover through a backdoor.

That's just one of the several examples of speech rights violation at the center of the European Union. Ultimately, after it spiraled into an international diplomatic incident, the Belgian supreme court reversed the order for the police siege and the conference was allowed to continue, with the Belgian prime minister tweeting why free speech should never have been violated. But by then, as the Economist noted, the damage to the reputation of the EU was already done.

“It is the sad reality that an emergency legal challenge had to be mounted in order to peacefully assemble in the political center of Europe. How can Brussels claim to be the heart of Europe if its officials only allow one side of the European conversation to be heard?”

Paul Coleman, International Executive Director of the Alliance Defending Freedom, told The American Conservative in an email. “What we have seen in Brussels is an overt attempt from authorities to censor and suppress free speech and ideas that they disagree with—tyranny at its finest.”

He cited multiple speech right violations within the EU, including the high-profile cases of the Finnish Christian MP Päivi Räsänen and of Isabel Vaughan-Spruce, a Catholic activist in the UK.

“In this instance with NatCon, common sense and justice have prevailed,” he said. “But the battle to protect free speech throughout Europe is far from over.”

But the theoretical contradictions were visible this time, and are becoming increasingly hard to ignore. The left-wing mayor who tried to cancel the NatCon event tried to do so in the name of liberty and authority, and the NatCons appealed with card-carrying liberal principles of free speech.

The National Conservatism movement is predicated on two fundamental pillars: first, that nation-states are the fundamental units of international relations, and they chart their courses independently; and, second, a broad opposition to the fusionist conservatism that has run the Anglo-American right since roughly the late 1960s to the present day.

With the increased secularization of society and the lack of an overwhelming external secular-authoritarian threat in the USSR, the bonds of a 50-year period of social cohesion disintegrated.

The NatCons therefore believe in a return to a more communitarian economy, a program of social cohesion and assimilation, and a return to more religious overtones in the social contract.

So far, so good. The problem, of course, occasionally arises from the definitions of these terms. As

Max Weber wrote in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, freedom of speech, for example, stems from a broadly Anglo-Protestant theological impulse, which also opposes increased economic communitarianism—increasingly an orthodoxy in the NatCon section of the right.

There are also other philosophical conflicts. NatCons in the last four years have opposed “foreign interventions,” “Covid tyranny” and lockdowns, and state-mandated vaccinations backed by penalties, but they supported school choice and defunding higher ed; at the same time, they rhetorically denigrate libertarians and fusionists.

In foreign policy, that gets even more problematic. The Hungarians and the Poles, for example, are on the opposite side of the Ukrainian question, with the American NatCons falling firmly on the Hungarian side, and the British NatCons closer to the Poles.

Outside Europe, Modi’s India, a potential ally and example for NatCons across the world, is comically opposed to the very Anglo foundation of the modern Indian state formed in the aftermath of British withdrawal. No one really knows where the NatCons fall on the question of free speech.

These are not criticisms. Every movement has different subsets within it; part of the job of growing a movement is to seek common ground.

These questions will be increasingly important in an election year, as besieged left-wing forces in the government facing public opposition and hostility turn to the authoritarian use of state power to crush dissent in Europe, America, and potentially in a Labour-governed UK.

“It is laughable that the Brussels thought police were sent out to shut down a conference of democratically elected politicians representing the views of millions of people.

They clearly didn’t want to hear about how we can secure our borders and protect our citizens,” the current Member of Parliament and former British Conservative Home Secretary Suella Braverman told TAC, adding that “the more ridiculous their attempts to shut us down, the more cheered I am that we are winning the arguments.”

But, while Braverman is the last best Tory hope against a second Blairist assault on the UK, and at least somewhat identifies and understands the main cause of all Anglo-American social dysfunction, the Brussels episode highlights that arguments and debates in and of themselves are clearly not enough; political power and willingness to use that power towards democratic ends are also urgent and necessary.

And that is perhaps the question that needs a better answer from any future conservative thought summits, whether organized by FreeCons, libertarians, fusionists, or NatCons.

The reality is that Johnny Public doesn’t really care about theories of governance. He sees a practically open border and unlimited foreign aid to secure foreign borders.

He also sees his voice being drowned in their local school boards, mind-numbing breakdown of inner cities, crime on the streets due to lax governance and a flawed punitive philosophy, massive inflation and deficit due to a bloated government, a particularly self-loathing and destructive education sector, and a political class that is indifferent to his cultural patrimony at best and antagonistic at worst.

He sees increased taxes, but also decreased policing and broken roads and other primary services for which they pay tax.

Ultimately, however, the common enemy of the FreeCons and the NatCons is the same: an unelected political and bureaucratic class, ever-growing and self-sustaining—an edifice, a superstructure, a governance by swarm, as Michael Brendan Dougherty once noted.

Democracy, in any form, whether populist, statist, nationalist, or localist, loses all meaning against that, as the swarm has no accountability and no hierarchy.

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