DarkHorse Podcast with Brendan O'Neill and Bret Weinstein (1...

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**SPEAKERS**

Bret, Brendan O'Neill

**Bret** 00:07

Brendan O'Neill, editor at spiked host of the Brendan O'Neill show, welcome to the Dark Horse podcast. How are you, my friend?

**Brendan O'Neill** 00:16

I'm good, how are you?

**Bret** 00:17

I'm doing pretty well. So it's been a long time you and I had, we had a very good conversation on your show a couple of years ago. And we had planned to, to meet on this side of the pond, and then COVID hit and interrupted our plans to meet so we're going to do this remotely, which is the new face to face. Sounds good to me. So how have things been?

**Brendan O'Neill** 00:41

Things have been good? Well, personally, things are fine politically, things are completely and utterly screwed up. You know, the thing that I found most surprising and shocking and disappointing about the current moment or the past few months, is the fact that the COVID crisis has exacerbated all the trends and ideologies that people like you and I are worried about. And I thought it might have the opposite effect. I thought, a genuine threat to help or you know, serious problem facing societies might galvanize people to focus on things that are actually important, like health, the economy, ensuring everyone has a good life, and make them forget all the nonsense and crap that they've been spouting for the previous five to 10 to 20 years, but it's had the opposite effect. All that stuff seems to have intensified over the past few months, which I think is very disconcerting.

**Bret** 01:39

Well, I think it's part of a more general pattern, I think we've seen many events that could have galvanized us, but that there's something in our system that causes these opportunities to be missed automatically. And for us to descend further into madness, which is a pattern we need to notice that we certainly saw it with 911. We saw it with Katrina over here in the US. Certainly with COVID, the possibility existed, but was quickly lost. And so anyway, we seem to be as you point out, just hurdling faster in the same direction, and the disaster that will arise is completely predictable, if not with precision, certainly with a certain degree of, of accuracy. So what do you make of it? Why Why do these potentially galvanizing phenomena result in further derangement?

**Brendan O'Neill** 02:37

I think I think people struggle to make sense of dangerous things at the moment. I mean, you mentioned 911, that's a very good example of this, because in a different era, an attack like that might have been understood in a political way. As you know, a specific threat, a threat that needed to be dealt with from a group of people who needed to be dealt with, it would have been viewed primarily in that fashion. But what happened with 911, in the current era, when it happened is that it unleashed or intensified all the backward, reactionary deranged trends that had already been gathering pace. I mean, the very clear example of that is conspiracy theories, which very swiftly took over from rational discussion in some quarters. And we were suddenly led to believe that george bush did this not al Qaeda, Israel was probably involved in all these other theories that floated around in the absence of a framework through which to make sense of these kinds of events. And the absence of a framework at work, or the absence of a shared common Outlook or a common language is often the, I think, is the starting point of the derangement, that of the current moment, and particularly in the aftermath of something like 911. And of course, there was also a lot of the politics of fear. There was a panic, there was authoritarianism, there were very various illiberal laws, not only in the US, but in the United Kingdom, too, in terms of spying on people, restricting what you're allowed to say, and so on, and so forth. So it's very, I find it very interesting the way in which world events or problematic events or threats to our societies, the thing we seem to struggle with is, is finding a common way to understand them and talk about them and instead it fractures very quickly. And you have these competing claims as to what is the real origin of this event? What is the real meaning of it? What's the real impact of it? I think with COVID what I find quite striking about the COVID situation is the I think it was less the threat from COVID that intensified the derangement and more the lockdown because what the lock the lockdown was We had a lockdown in the United Kingdom, it was supposed to be for three weeks, it ended up being closer to four months. Of course, there were lock downs in Europe, there were various forms of locking down in different American states. And what the lockdown did, it intensified the atomization of people. It completed in the United Kingdom contest, it completely broke up the public, there was no longer any existing public. Instead, we were all scared individuals at home whose only duty was to wait for the daily government announcement on how bad this disease was, how many people had died, and we were just all watching the death tolls and listening to the horror stories, no connection with others, no democratic sphere, parliament was suspended. The right to protest was outlawed. There was no way in which people could come together to discuss things or talk about things. And I think in that moment, when the broken when the public was completely broken up, and any sense of collectivity was completely undermined. We saw the intensification of particularly that very atomized, individuated culture of identity, of a sense of victimhood of people, in people just conceiving of themselves as a broken down identity, one identity group versus another identity group. Those were the things that intensified most during the lockdown period. And I think it's fascinating that the lockdown only really ended in the UK anyway, with the Black Lives Matter protests, which was really an explosion of identity Aryan politics and explosion of what I would consider to be regressive politics or very destructive, illiberal censorious moments, statues were torn down, statues were defaced, comedy shows were banned. People were forced to take the knee, and if they didn't, they were humiliated in public, ritually humiliated for days on end. So it was striking to me that lockdown only came to an end with this incredibly physical manifestation of the identitarian regressive politics. And I think that really demonstrated to me anyway, that the thing that intensified during the lockdown moment was primarily the cult of identity, which I think is going to get worse and worse.

**Bret** 07:22

So if I understand you correctly, you're saying that the atomization of our collective sense being broken apart physically from each other, resulted in an obsessive focus on identity, because the things that tend to blur that line are connections to other people whose identity may be related, but isn't the same. So I see a lot in that. On the other hand, there's certainly something to be said for the fact that people have over time innovated new modes. And you know, as much as zoom is lacking, for example, in some of the face to face sense, people have defaulted to it. And so I see simultaneously, people being atomized and also people coming together in ways that they were reluctant to before. Not maybe that because there's no meaning of physical proximity anymore. Due to the fact that we are you know, even if we're down the street from somebody, we may still do a conference call with them. That that may, it may allow us to choose too much who it is that we're interacting with, so that we may, or at least some of us may default into finding people whose identity is very similar, and therefore creating identitarian echo chambers.

**Brendan O'Neill** 08:50

Yeah, I think that's very true. And it's like, you know, social media. And these other technological breakthroughs are a double edged sword in a way in the sense that they allow us to communicate, communicate in ways that our ancestors could only have dreamt off. I mean, you know, it makes the it makes the printing revolution of the 15 and 1600s look like a minor affair. The fact that pretty much anyone on earth who has a mobile phone can publish his or her views, instantaneously, with no need for an editor, no need for a priest, no need for a politician to tell them what they may or may not say. Although social media, the social media oligarchs and are taking over that role increasingly, and are now saying, there are certain things you can't say publicly. But that's an incredibly radical moment. The Internet revolution was an incredibly radical moment unprecedented in human history. And that's all to the good. But what's happened I think, with technology in particular, is that it has molded itself around cultural trends that were pre existing and so I'm always reluctant to end In technological determinism, I don't think technology makes us the way we are. In some instances, in some historical moments, that may well be the case, but I think most of the time technology, we kind of get the technology we deserve as a society. So you know, in earlier periods, the technology was, you know, ships that were capable of traversing entire oceans, because that moment was one of exploration and daring and the expansion of human knowledge. Or the technology might be splitting the atom and nuclear power, or the space race and various other things, which tended to reflect a sense of aspiration, a sense of ambition, a sense of desire amongst sections of humanity. What we increasingly have today is technology that's that allows us to live in our bubbles, which which allows us to, to navel gaze, to self reflect, to express our identity tarian impulses in a public way. And to, as you say, create echo chambers and reinforce our existing views and protect ourselves in many ways. from ever being confronted with opposing views. Technology is now very good at protecting the individual from exposure to contrasting viewpoints, contrasting political ideas, and so on. So the great irony, I think, in modern technology, particularly online is that it creates the lonely crowd phenomenon, we're all you know, there was a lot of talk about the internet, reconstituting the public, and possibly even constituting a global public. But we all engage with it very much as atomized individuals expressing our own identity, Arian ideas or our own sense of self, into the void, essentially. And I think what technology has done is it's shaped itself around the kind of regressive trends that had been taking hold for the past few decades. And I think one of the striking things about the COVID period is there was a lot of connection, people did try to make connections during the lockdown. In the UK, for example, there were lots of local groups who were doing shopping for people and looking after the elderly. There was one where I live, and I was involved in that, and people really did want to have a sense of taking some collective responsibility for their fellow citizens. But the speed with which that got pushed aside by all the old rubbish, I thought was so striking. So very quickly, the the pandemic was racialized, for example, we were told, it has a disproportionate impact on black people and South Asian people. Which may be true for various reasons, but it was the intensity of the racialization. And the way it was folded into the victim narrative i thought was very striking. Of course, we've seen the rise of censorship, there are certain things you're not allowed to say about COVID, on YouTube, or on Twitter, and other platforms. And, and, as I say, the explosion of identity politics, which I think really reached its crescendo after the murder of George Floyd. So that's what I found depressing about COVID. And very interesting about the moment we live in, there was a collective impulse, there were people saying, we have to pull together, but they were conquered by the continuing assertion of the regressive trends of our time. And I find that quite worrying.

**Bret** 13:34

Well, if I can hunt around in that formulation for maybe a slightly different one, you say, we tend to get the technology that we as a society deserve. I'm reluctant about this, because you point out, you know, ocean going ships and the Age of Exploration, for example. Well, that brought smallpox and Conquistadores to the new world, and I can't say that there's anything that was going on in the new world that suggests that they deserve that it was just sort of an arbitrary consequence of new capacity to travel. On the other hand, I think what you're saying is that there's an amplifier, which takes our characteristics and increases their amplitude to an extraordinary degree. And one of the places that I see this happening is, you know, COVID, occurring at this moment, and interfacing with the identitarian politics seems to have brought the dumbest version of Marxism that I think the world has ever seen, which, you know, is saying something because there have been quite a number of very dumb versions and I say this with some trepidation because I know that at least Last time we spoke, you regard yourself as a Marxist of the Trotsky in stripe, which I know is a very different version. It's a very different view. But nonetheless what we are seeing at the moment is almost like social Marxism. And you know, this has been said by various people in various ways. Obviously, Jordan Peterson has called it Cultural Marxism. But I guess the point is, there's something about, like, it's a Marxism of opinion, that has downgraded leadership, and supplanted it with, like a spitballing session in which no idea is too stupid to be eliminated from the group. Does that make sense?

**Brendan O'Neill** 15:47

Yes, that does make sense. Um, you know, one of the, one of the things I'm most unpopular for his I'm all I always feel uncomfortable with the description of the current political trends as Marxism. And that's not because I think we have to defend Marxism as this kind of pure thing from history, which was wonderful and unquestionable. And, you know, never let it be sullied or anything like that. My view is that Marxism is done and dusted as an ideology. It had some good ideas, it had some bad ideas, and it didn't work. And so I'm pretty happy that to say that that is part of history. And I don't think that politics is coming back and what makes me uncomfortable with the use of that word to describe what's going on at the moment, the point I often make to right wing friends of mine or anti communist friends of mine, you don't have to be on the right to be anti communist by any stretch of the imagination. The point I often make to them which infuriates them, I have no doubt is that if it's Marxism you're worried about, you should actually be delighted by the rise of identity politics, because I see identity politics in particular, but also the politics of environmentalism, which is an even more controversial claim. I see those two forms of politics as pretty hard core proof that Marxism as a project or the left as it was traditionally constituted, no longer really exists. Because those two things identity politics, and green politics, those two things in particular seem to me to run so obviously counter to what the left was traditionally about. So in the round, the left was about collectivity, it was about class in particular, it was about what we had in common. Workers of the World unite to use an old slogan, it was about common bombs, it did not obsess over race and gender. Certainly as it progressed through time, it started to see those as minor details in the broader necessity to unite people according to their class interests. So it was about collectivity on the one hand, and it was about progress and growth on the other. And if anyone reads Karl Marx's writings about Thomas Malthus, Thomas Malthus was the notorious late 1700s, early 18 hundred's population, theorized who said that there was not enough food to feed the world and we would all starve to death. He failed to foresee the Industrial Revolution because he was a pessimist and did not believe that mankind would be capable of something like the Industrial Revolution. So he was completely wrong. And Marx's writings on Malthus are very interesting, because he says, The problem with this politics is that it naturalizes poverty, it's it's a liable against the human race, because it presents poverty as a natural thing. Whereas the left belief is that poverty is a function of an unequal society, and therefore can be overcome by changing society. So you know, a very rough estimation of what Marx's left wing politics used to be about would be to say that it was about collective bonds and the progress of society through economic growth. And both of those things strike me as being completely absent from the contemporary left, so they have no interest in collectivity, they're very much obsessed with group identity. It's an extraordinarily divisive movement. It's very, very fragmentary. So not only is it black versus white, but it's now black versus black, where you have the debates about colorism and how light skinned black people have it better than dark skinned black people.

**Brendan O'Neill** 19:43

The Gay movement is now split apart by the rise of the trans ideology. why women are constantly told by black female campaigners that they have lovely lives and they've sold their souls to the patriarchy. So it's a divisive moving but the one that becomes more divisive all the time. So I don't see that as being a collective form of politics in the way that the left traditionally was. And of course, the contemporary left is very, very down on economic growth. You know, they idolize people like Greta thunberg. And rather Doom laden message about the dangers of economic growth and the need to stop economic growth, which is a very easy thing for an upper middle class school girl from the north of Europe to say, I'm sure the 3 billion people who still live in poverty will have a different point of view. So this is the thing that kind of loses me friends sometimes, because they think I'm defending Marxism, but I'm not what I what I'm more interested in in what's is what's new about today. And what's different. And I think sometimes we fall back on the language of the 20th century to try and negotiate negotiate our way through the very strange, unpredictable 21st century. And I think that can end up making things even more confusing than they are. That makes sense.

**Bret** 21:05

Oh, it does. The tragedy of the moment is really incredible. Because you know, as you point out, for some reason, there doesn't seem to be a vibrant left, that which takes the mantle of the left is regressive at best. And really, I think manifesting a kind of collective psychosis that isn't, doesn't belong on any reasonable political map. It's just vindictive and insane. But at the same time, we know a great deal now about what could work if we could find ourselves driven collectively to seek it. In other words, I think we can say a great deal theoretically, for example, about why Marxism is such an attractive idea but devolves in one of two directions, inherently. And in light of that, we can move on from it. It's a very, as you say, it's, well, you didn't exactly say, but we can consign it to the dustbin of history as an experiment that's now been run enough times that we know these things. And we could seek, frankly, a very different kind of forward looking plan for humanity. In other words, I think, in some sense, what has kept us stable is a tension between left and right because it was the best regulator we could come up with that both left and right, are prone to accesses and the best thing we could do to modulate them was allow each one to control the other enough that we didn't fall off either of the two cliffs that they suggested. But we can do better than that now, we now understand where we are, we understand ourselves enough that we can explore the question of in light of the values that most of us share, what system is it that realizes those values at the highest rate with the least Carnage? And we could pursue it which, you know, that's, you could hear that as a collectivist idea, you could hear that as an attempt to, to liberate individuals, and it is in fact, both, but the sad thing is, we won't do it because at some level, we're too busy bludgeoning each other online, over arguments that, frankly, to me, all dead.

**Brendan O'Neill** 23:38

Yeah, I think that's a very good description of where we're at at the moment. And I think I see us I think we're living through the death rattle off the end of Left, Right politics, we haven't escaped the ripple of the falling apart of that political system, because you're right, you know, left, right was the balance through which almost everything was understood, for a very long period of time, really, from the French Revolution onwards, when they split, the revolutionary Parliament between the left side and the right side. And political life was governed by that global affairs was governed by that there was the West there was the east and within countries themselves, people were split along similar lines and institutions emerged, which gave expression to that divide, work in men's groups, conservative associations, Republican groups, etc, etc.

**Brendan O'Neill** 24:35

So when that falls apart, or when left and right loses its meaning or loses its direction, I think that has a knock on effect, which is still being felt and if we, you know, lots of people talk about the end of left and right, particularly at the end of the 20th century when the with the fall of the Soviet Union and the knock on effect that has on left wing parties across the west to kind of become pretty pointless at that stage. I still think we're living through the the aftermath of that falling apart. And we're still struggling to find a new language through which to make sense of humanity's needs and how they might best be pursued and best enacted. I think what we've ended up with it often is a left right politics, which is very much a pantomime, a shouting match, it doesn't have any of the substance of the set or the seriousness of what it did in the past. You have right wing panto villains who are looked upon as just evil, everyone's the new Hitler, according to the kind of infantile left who have no understanding of how much they are engaging in Holocaust relativism when they compare everything that happens today with what happened in the 1930s. And the right is guilty of this to the right will, you know, there are some right wing libertarians in the US who I meet, who think that any form of collective politics is basically leninism. You know, they will tell me that the National Health Service in the UK, I have many criticisms of the National Health Service, but they think even collectivized Health is essentially the Russian Revolution, you know, and so they engage in that kind of pantomime politics to without stopping to think about the substance of what they're saying. I think one of the most striking things about today, and it's really worth thinking about this is the extent to which the left has become like the right used to be in this. And I mean, a particular form of the right if you go back to the 20th century, particularly the kind of mid 20th century, there were sections of the right that were very shrill, illiberal censorious. I'm just about old enough to remember, when the people who wanted things banned tended to be right wingers, they tended to be conservative Christians, they tended to be people who, who literally could not sleep because they were so obsessed with pieces of art, like, piss Christ, for example, or who wanted to ban any exhibition of art that was lewd or salacious or grotesque. One of the first things I did when I was very young, I got involved in a campaign to defend a computer game launched in the UK, the computer game was called Carmageddon. And it was basically a game which allowed you to drive your car around and kill people and mow them down. And it was very bloody, and actually very good fun, and so on. And the people who wanted it banned were conservative Christian, right wing lobby groups. And that was really the last harar of their movement. That's kind of the mid 90s. And today, you fast forward to today and the people who are at the forefront. I think some on the right, still favor censorship. But the people who are at the forefront of the new censorship or the or the desire to ban anything, any piece of culture or any piece of entertainment, or any individual like Brett Weinstein, who doesn't fit their mold, the people at the forefront of that tend to be ostensibly left wing people, ostensibly radical people, who now act and speak very much like those kind of helmet haired Christian ladies, who wanted to ban everything that offended them in the 20th century. So that shift is also very interesting. And it speaks to how disorientated political life in the West has become an I think one of the great challenges of our time is not simply to confront this regressive politics every time it expresses itself. As a kind of, that's quite a defensive mechanism, I think it's important to be defensive and to fight them every time they raise their heads and say or do something dangerous. But at the same time, we have to start developing a language and a politics that is capable of taking us beyond the left, right, pantomime, and into an era in which people can give expression to their viewpoints in a way that makes sense, and in a way that could impact positively on human life. And I think the discovery of that new political language is something that is still wanting, and I think it's something it's worth thinking about.

**Bret** 29:28

Yeah, this is very much in keeping with with what I'm seeing, which is, we have what we need to reinvigorate the discussion and have a new landscape of possibilities that weren't accessible to us 40 years ago, but the irony is we can't get there because somehow people who have no idea what it is they're actually advocating, have veto power over the discussion. And so you know, the The people I see as representative of high quality left thinking are typically categorized as on the right in order to dismiss them, which leaves the left nominally under the control of people advocating things that very frequently when I hear these formulations, I feel like it would take adults 10 minutes of discussion to figure out why these things don't work, can't be tried, and to just put the ideas to bed, but instead, we're going to take apart civilization in order to run an experiment, the outcome of which is absolutely certain. So something about the veto power, which is obviously in part the result of an empowerment that comes from social media. I have mentioned to others that I think we are suffering the consequences of the loss of the role of leadership, that leadership has been demoted to the status of influencer and that the problem is influencer is a producer consumer modality. And the consumer is at the point that a leader might tell you something that you don't want to hear, but you need to know a an influencer may say it and people will switch to some influencer that's less likely to cause them axed. And that that, that loss of leaders is resulting in, you know, just the most foolish beliefs rising as if they are new, as if they have meaningful content as if they can even be spelled out in some sort of consistent form that would allow you to evaluate them when really, in each case they run through your fingers like water.

**Brendan O'Neill** 32:03

I think the the crisis of leadership is actually key to a lot of this because the thing that is, is very striking is you know, a lot of the kind of the woke mob or these these gangs of social media vigilantes who go off to anyone who says something disagreeable. You know, they are quite scary in the sense that they are obviously unhinged, I mean, there's a real problem here. I mean, they're, they're often quite hateful individuals, I get the most obscene emails from people like this, threatening things and saying things which are really objectionable. And they behave in a very, very bad way. If you look at JK Rowling, for example, who's getting a lot of abuse at the moment, because she believes in biological sex, which is blasphemy in the woke era. You know, they do things that they send her pornographic pictures, or if she posts a tweet about a children's book, and lots of children respond to her, these people will post pornographic pictures in those discussion threads. This is not normal behavior. This is unhinged, regressive, incredibly anti human anti social behavior. So they are sometimes quite scary. But But the other striking thing about them is that they, they're often very small in number. So when I've encountered controversies on at British universities, where there have been groups of people protesting against a visit of mine, for example, you know, it's they're always fairly small in number. They're always quite socially awkward, strange, young people. You know, we're not talking about vast numbers of well adjusted human beings. So the question I always ask myself is, how is it possible that these mobs of strange people have such a big influence? And I think you've actually nailed it. It's it's the interplay between the vociferous nature of these people and their censorious desires. It's the interplay of that with the crisis of leadership and with the crisis of institutions. And I think one of the main players in the current climate is institutional cowardice, the way in which institutions just roll over as soon as seven people write them an email saying, you know, take down this monument or rename your halls of residence or take down that bust of someone who died 200 years ago, there are so many institutions who just not along and do as they are told, or big companies, no big companies. All it takes is for a handful of people on Twitter to tell Netflix or some other big company that they are advertising on a controversial website or they're advertising on a right wing magazine, for those into those corporations to withdraw their adverts. there's so little backbone that you know, no one's willing to stand up. And of course, all of this is just gives a green light to the mob. It feeds their desires, it feeds their sense of power. And so I think there's a really close connection between those two things. And I think the the failure of politicians to take a stand against this stuff is also very striking. You know, when Trump gave his Mount Rushmore speech recently, on the Fourth of July, and he talked about canceled culture, that was actually a really good speech. I have no idea who wrote it, I'm pretty sure Trump didn't write it. But it was a really good speech, not very well delivered. But it was a really good speech. And it was so striking that he This was the first time a major politician had said things like this, where he said they want to cancel the American Revolution, they want to cancel the ideas of Western civilization. And that's absolutely correct. And so, if more people did what Trump did at Mount Rushmore, I think we'd probably be in a better position. So that's a really key point. And I think what's becoming more and more clear over time, is that this is an assault on Western civilization. And if you look at the mania of the past few weeks, in relation to Black Lives Matter, and tearing down statues and everything else, you know, on the surface, it looks like an attack on Confederate statues or statues of slave owners. And, you know, not many people are going to lose sleep over a statue of a slave owner being torn down in Bristol in England, fine, who cares. But it's not just about that this is part of a broader campaign, which depicts modern Western history as one crime after another, the way in which America is currently talked about as this disgusting, sinful, racist country, you know, racism is the original sin of the American Republic, which it will never wash clean. And, you know, and this conscious effort on the part of New York Times, type people to, to change the founding data of America from 1776 to 1619, is so interesting, because that's really an effort by sections of the liberal elite, or the the illiberal elite, to rewrite history itself to refashion America as a country that was founded in sin founded in crime, rather than one that was founded in revolution, and the search for freedom and the First Amendment and all those other wonderful things. The same thing is happening in the UK, the way that left wing activists and often school teachers and university educators the way they talk about Britain, you think it was the most evil country that ever existed, all we hear about is the slave trade and Empire and colonialism and all these things, which had many, many, many terrible consequences around the world. No one's doubting that. We don't hear about the English revolution, we don't hear about the Chartist movement for democracy, we don't hear about the struggle in the 1600s for press freedom, which influenced the founding of America to a large degree, we don't hear about the Magna Carta, we don't hear about England as the birthplace of liberty in many ways. So there's a conscious effort on the part of this emerging elite, to to reimagine Western history as just a litany of crimes. And I think that's something is absolutely essential to stand up to.

**Bret** 38:36

Yeah, I resonate with all of this, the cowardice is breathtaking. And you know, it's rooted in a very simple, game theoretic comparison between my ability to get through today in the face of a mob that's threatening me and our ability to get through next week. And so what's happening is that, corporations, individuals, colleges, are all making the same calculation, which is they're solving their today problem at the expense of a much larger tomorrow problem. And it is, you're 100%, right about the attack on Western civilization. And the funny thing is, I remember the moment at which I became aware of this. During the Evergreen meltdown. I detected that this was what was going on. And I said out loud, I believe it was in a faculty meeting, that not only was this an attack on the institution, but this was really an attack on not only the Enlightenment, but the concept of enlightenment. And what came back was not the denial that I expected, it was an embrace of what I had just said. And the idea was, right, enlightenment is a white people thing. It's bad. It is, you know, the root of slavery and all other, you know, sins. And therefore we are right to tear it down. And I just thought, Oh, my God, what are what are we playing with here? You know, we're we're really at root dealing with whether we will have any agreement that would allow us to establish even a single claim on some basis other than power. Right? You know, we saw on Twitter very recently, a battle over whether two plus two actually equals four. And of course, that has a history and literature but the fact that people were actually earnestly arguing This tells us where we are. And it has caused me to think the following thought. I don't think almost anybody is this dumb? Right? I don't think, yeah, as you point out, these are tiny movements, but they're not even. It's not even this tiny number of people who believes these things, I think almost nobody believes these things. And that in effect, they are like a uniform. And they are simply declaring I am with those people. And the fact is, what's frightening is I am with those people, those people may well have the power to uninvent, the West. And if they do, we will be left with tyranny. And then maybe we will reinvent the West later if we survive to do it. But the question is really one of net effect. There are obviously major structural problems in the West, there is a problem with inequity if we use the standard definition of that term, rather than the modern fashion. But did the West accomplish vastly more than it has failed to accomplish? It did, and so on inventing it over that which it has not attained is lunacy. And yet, somehow, I have to tell you, all the people with enough wealth to pick up and move seem to be fleeing cities, because somehow, even though there is no evidence whatsoever that the populace wants the police defunded, we are now watching the defunding of police. Because we think some mob is demanding it when in fact, we don't even know you know, the mob because it doesn't have leaders. We can't say what fraction of the people who are attacking federal buildings actually advocate the abolition of the police, what fraction of them what police budgets reduced? What fraction of them is simply out to make mayhem? But in any case, it isn't civilization demanding this, it is the tiniest fraction that is now apparently in a position to dictate terms to the rest of us.

**Brendan O'Neill** 42:50

Yeah, I think we are living through a bourgeois reaction against the enlightenment. And it's terrifying actually. And you see it all the time. Now, you know, the very idea of reason is called into question. So often these days the existence of free will the desirability of freedom of speech,

**Brendan O'Neill** 43:15

a belief in in the autonomy of human beings or the potential autonomy of human beings, all these ideas that drove Well, first, the Renaissance and then the Enlightenment, are explicitly called into question, particularly on campuses, but in the political sphere, more broadly. And and what we're living through is a reaction against the enlightenment. It's a counter enlightenment movement made up of various different groups of people. There's the noisy Brigade, the kind of woke mob, who are the most explicit in their regressive backward views. There are the institutions which are increasingly incapable of standing up for the values that they were founded to stand up for. So you have museums in the UK, for example, and museums around the West, in fact, which are now beating themselves up constantly about what they can put on display, whether they should send certain artifacts back to Africa or, or back to Greece or back to wherever they might have come from. No sense that they might have a you know, an intellectual responsibility to uphold the value of the Enlightenment, the idea that you could study things that you could collect things that you could improve man's understanding of himself through founding these kinds of institutions for the public good. Even at that level, the values of the Enlightenment moment are just being trashed all the time, often by the people who are supposed to be upholding them. One of the things I find most grotesque in all of this is something you've mentioned there about the way in which the Enlightenment is seen as a white people thing. You know, that's that's for white people, less for Europeans. You know, let's talk about what what black People need or what minority groups need. And, you know, apparently they need a form of politics that is less based in reason less based in science. I mean, we've seen some stuff over the past few days and weeks, in which ideas like timekeeping are described as a white trait, or a belief in the exercise of reason, over passion is seen as a white trade. This is explicitly racist. I mean, I always was concerned that woke politics would rehabilitate racial thinking through through the identitarian ideology, but it's actually just rehabilitating racism. Because if you think white people are good at keeping to time and understanding the world, and scientific reasons why, but but black people are not, you are a racist, I have news for you, you're a racist person. But you know, if you look at one of the interesting consequences of the turn against Western history, in the turn against Western civilization, is the obsession with slavery. I think the contemporary obsession with slavery is, is less an intellectual pursuit, which is fine. We of course, we should have historical intellectual studies of the slavery period. But it's more slavery is used as a constant indictment of Western civilization. And one thing that they forget in relation to all of this is the Haitian Revolution, in which slaves revolted against their enslavement, and created the first free people's nation, made up of slaves run by made up of former slaves run by former slaves in Haiti who, who liberated themselves, what inspired them to do that the Enlightenment, it was the values of France and they said to France, hold on, you have all these wonderful ideas and values, and you won't let us be part of them. And there have been numerous movements through history which have, you know, instead of demonizing the West and saying, Look how you've mistreated us for so long, what they've said is we want part, we want to be part of your way of life. And we're going to fight in order to have that. I mean, it's the same with the civil rights movement. The Civil Rights Movement wasn't concerned with saying, America is an inescapably irreparably evil country. They put on their Sunday best and demonstrated in the streets and said we want to have, we want part of the freedom and rights that you claim to uphold. So those were incredibly positive movements. And what we have now are just actually racist, or racialist movements, which demonize the Enlightenment, demonize reason and depict people of color in particular as being unfit for that way of thinking, you know, one of my, just to go back to Marxism, one of my heroes is CLR, James, a Trinidadian Marxist, who wrote the black Jacobins which was about the Haitian Revolution, which is one of the best history books ever written.

**Brendan O'Neill** 48:06

In he wrote that in the early 20th century, fantastic book, everyone should read it. And his point was, he was incredibly anti colonialist, anti Empire argued constantly against the things that Britain was doing in Africa and other parts of the world. But his argument was always that the great crime committed by those things was that it deprived certain people off the benefits of Western civilization, and the benefits of the enlightenment. And his point was always that, you know, Shakespeare is not just a writer for British people Shakespeare is is a writer for Trinidadian people. Shakespeare is a writer for African people. And that Universalist sense that sense of the aspiration to be part of a more enlightened, reasoned free a world, which drove so many movements over the past 200 or 300 years that's been completely lost, and trampled underfoot by these new regressive movements which hate the Enlightenment, think that black people are less capable of autonomy and reason than white people, and who are doing an enormous amount of damage to progressive politics.

**Bret** 49:21

Yeah, I feel like I'm in a good position to make this point, but it never seems to land. Because as a Jew, the Enlightenment was not a Jewish project. I don't want to tear down the enlightenment. I want to wield the product of it, like a broadsword and I want to teach other people to do it. And that's what I was doing at evergreen when some ironic protest movement decided to challenge me as I've said many times, people I'd never met decided that what I was doing was legitimate. But the basic point is, look, we've got two choices here we've got a sort of Harrison Bergeron version in which we Tear down the tool that's working so well, so that nobody has access to it. Well, that's not going to work. But that's the plan. And the alternative version is we figure out how to fully democratize it. So everybody has access to that tool. But pretending that the tool is somehow resident in one group that it fits their, their cognitive style, it's garbage, that's absolute garbage. And it runs completely afoul of my experience in the classroom. I'll tell you that much. The fact is, we are all built to be scientific. And if you don't encourage that mode, it disappears in youth. But if you do encourage it, it flourishes and it's, you want to liberate black people make sure that they have access to math and science and logic at the highest quality, right? What is it that has facilitated the continued power of Europeans in the new world is disproportionate access to these things, so democratizing it has always been the name of the game. And somehow, we're attacking everything that sought to do that, including now the civil rights movement, which is viewed in the most ironic, conceivable terms? Yeah,

**Brendan O'Neill** 51:20

absolutely. And I think, you know, even though these movements, these groups, these individuals, even though they talk a great deal, about history, they're actually historically illiterate, or they have no understanding or appreciation of what life was like, for most people, prior to the Enlightenment, and prior to the industrial revolution in particular, you know, life was nasty, and brutish, and short. And untraveled and ignorant, you know, people didn't read, people couldn't read, people never traveled more than three or four miles from where they lived and work. They were serfs they will often owned by other people, or certainly had incredibly, a very little amount of freedom. You know, life was nasty and horrible. And what the Enlightenment did by unleashing the scientific potential. And by harnessing the scientific potential expressly to the aim to the end of improving human life, and improving human understanding, that brought humanity forward in a way that had never been experienced at any other time. The Industrial Revolution, in many ways, made good on the promise of the Enlightenment by really utilizing those scientific discoveries. You know, as Francis Bacon, the Enlightenment scientist said, he said, Our job is to, is to tease out all of nature's secrets, you know, don't let nature have any secrets, let's really understand what nature is and how it works. That's what the industrial revolution is when you, um, when you tap into sunlight that has been stored in coal for millennia, and you unleash it in order to power vast new ways of producing things and transporting things, and it's almost magical. It's so it's so remarkable. And it transforms human life. Of course, the initial impact of something like the industrial revolution is that life becomes very tough. It remains very tough, very short, you know, the the great cities in the United Kingdom that exploded into existence or, which grew enormously after the Industrial Revolution, London, Sheffield, Glasgow. These were not nice places to live in the mid 1800s. But over time, by being in the city, working cheek by jowl being shoved together, people start to demand the right of their children to go to school, people start to demand the right of themselves to have the vote. People start to demand the right to express themselves to organize to be political beings, and not just workers. All of that is a knock on effect of enlightenment science, reason and industry. And the ignorance of these people who want to go back to a time in which the vast majority of humanity worked tirelessly for their whole lives and then died at the age of 46. It's so spectacularly ignorant. And it's often an argument that is made by people who actually live incredibly comfortable lives. You know, it's often upper middle class people, tick tock revolutionaries, you know, the kind of kids we saw out on some of those black lives matter. Protests, you know, upper middle class kids having some fun before they go off to their Ivy League universities smashing up black areas, which has an incredibly detrimental impact on the economy. And the livelihoods of the people who live there and there are quite a few videos going around showing black people reprimanding these kind of upper middle class whites for destroying communities in destroying local shops and destroying local police stations, you know that these people are historically illiterate. And I think it's really worth reminding them of how important these leaps forward for humanity were. I think you're also right. I think another key aspect of this is conformism. And you could well be right that no one is stupid enough to believe this stuff. But the problem, of course, is that there are some things you have to say if you want to be part of acceptable society. If you want to move in the right circles, if you want to be seen as a good person, you have to put a black square on your Instagram page, to say that Black Lives Matter, you have to take the knee, you have to say that a trans woman is a woman.

**Brendan O'Neill** 55:48

You have to say to someone like me, when I asked you do you think a trans woman is literally a woman, you have to say yes, you have to say these things. Because otherwise you risk being cast out. And there's an incredible religious undertone to this politics, where lots of people say these things, without necessarily believing them. It reminds me I was brought up Catholic. And it's absolutely fine to be brought up Catholic. I'm not criticizing that. I know many people who are religious and who get a great deal from religion. But I remember at the age of 16, and 17, when I was losing my faith, I'd be at Mass on Sunday, saying things I didn't believe repeating things in hymns or the responses to prayer, which I knew to be untrue. And that's the kind of culture I think we have now on a grander scale and a scarier scale in relation to politics where people say things that I'm sure they know are untrue or incorrect, but they feel they have to otherwise they will suffer the the Salem fate and be sent out into the wilderness and and canceled and I think that's such a destructive censorious culture.

**Bret** 57:02

There's something about it. I'm trying to figure out what the formulation is. But many people have invoked a religious devotion to these claims. And obviously, there's a lot to it. But there's something so juvenile about the certitude, right, in the case of religion, I understand at least what it is the idea is that this version of history has been handed down. And, you know, in effect, treating it as true is essential. But in the case of any new belief system, there has to be a skepticism about To what degree do you have it, right? You know, a trans woman is a woman, there are obviously ways in which we can and probably should treat trans women as women. And there are other ways in which we obviously can't medically for example, or when it comes to prisons, you can't just simply have any man convicted of a sex crime, let's say, declare himself a woman in order to be sent to a woman's prison, it's obviously something you have to prevent, for logical reasons, that should be clear to anyone who spent a minute or two thinking about it. But instead, what we get is, it's like six year olds that reach a conclusion. And then the point is, well, there's nothing else to know, I know why this is true. And, you know, at the very least, it is an extreme version of verification ism, where having seen something they are incapable of seeing anything that would contradict it, which means, you know, as many of us have said, it's the death of nuance, the idea that people who are incapable of nuance know anything about how civilization should be refactored is obviously crazy on its face. But oh, I just, it seems like this is the exact moment for a, frankly, a revitalized, intellectual left to emerge. It's the perfect moment, we have a vacuum of thinking and we have the basis for creating a a new understanding of how we might make civilization more fair. And we might further banish austerity, right? This is now possible at a practical level, it's not a utopian belief. It's just a matter of understanding where the waste in the system is and how to detect the difference between does desirable inequality which is part of what fuels the discovery of new things and to separate it from structural inequity, which is not desired. But we're never going to get there because at some level we have to fight with the six year olds over whether or not you know, all of the important truths of the world can be summarized in a sentence that anybody who expresses the slightest doubt is obviously a heretic.

**Brendan O'Neill** 1:00:16

Absolutely, absolutely. And I think the certitude is such a worrying thing. I mean certitude is the enemy of reason. One should always doubt oneself.

**Brendan O'Neill** 1:00:31

You know, my favorite painting is Caravaggio's painting of St. Thomas, who refuse to believe that Christ had risen from the dead until he could actually feel the wounds. That's really we need more doubting Thomases. We need more skepticism, we need people to question things, things that they are told are true, and things are told that they must believe. And, you know, john Stuart Mill makes this point in on liberty, one of the key points he makes in on liberty, which is one of the best things written about freedom of thought and freedom of speech, he makes the point that the only justifiable way that you can believe that you are right, is by subjecting your ideas to as public as debate as possible, exposing them to questioning and criticism and ridicule. And that will allow you Firstly, that will grant you one of the greatest freedoms of all, which is the freedom to change your mind. But also, it will allow you to sharpen your argument to deepen your argument to make it clearer, to make it more substantial. But what we have at the moment in in the culture of the echo chamber and the culture of the safe space is the precise opposite of that we have this pathological and willingness to subject our belief systems to public confrontation, because apparently, that would be a form of Eurasia, that would hurt us, you know, words wound. You know, public debate is now understood as a form of assault. You know, words are akin to violence. That's how it's seen. So everything is done, everything possible is done to protect our beliefs from any form of challenge. And so of course, what happens is that they become dogma. Because if you believe something, just because you know, it's right, rather than because you have tested it, then that's not a belief at all. It's it's a dogma, it's something it's rigid, it's, it's, it's unflinching, it's, it's unreal. So I think the certitude as you describe it of these, you know, six year olds, is really, that certitude is a function of the censorship that they live under. And which they impose on others in which they, the forcefield, they put around themselves, because they're so terrified of being exposed as talking Muslims. And the danger, you know, so that's bad for them. censorship makes you stupid, but that's what it does, it turns you into a child, because you constantly believe that you need to be protected from idea. So censorship makes you stupid, but it has an even worse effect on society more broadly, which is it really dulls intellectual experimentation. And it really undermines the conditions in which new ideas might be discovered in which new things might be discovered in which a general sense of discovery might be able to flourish. You know, George Bernard Shaw made this point I quote it often, all great truths begin as blasphemies. And that is so true. And it's so important. I mean, if you think about all the wonderful things we now take for granted, the right of women to vote, for example, or the right of the man to have sexual relations with another man, or the idea that black and white people should have equal rights, or the idea of, you know, the earth goes around the sun. All these things that we now take for granted, when people first said those things they were treated as forms of blasphemy was unspeakable in polite society to express such awful ideas. And it was only through persevering and it was only through daring. And it was only through people being brave enough to raise these possibilities in a world which was not really open to those possibilities. It was only by doing that, that we managed to turn these blasphemies into truths. Because at some level, the conditions existed for people to express those ideas, you know, they could hand out pamphlets they could stand on soap boxes, they could stand up in universities and and assert the non existence of God which Shelley did at Oxford, in the 1800s and he was expelled. He wrote a pamphlet on the necessity of atheism and he was expelled from Oxford for doing so. These days you could be expelled from Oxford for publishing, I don't know, a sexist pamphlet or a transphobic pamphlet or something else. So at some level, the conditions existed in which people could experiment intellectually and express blasphemous ideas which they believe to be progressive and interesting. I think the conditions for doing that have have rarely been as

**Brendan O'Neill** 1:05:27

undermined as they are right now. It is very difficult now for people to stick their head above the parapet. If you look at what happens to trans skeptical feminists on campuses, they are hounded they are harassed, they are sent death threats. If you look at what happened to someone like Maryam namazi, the Iranian secularist, who is very critical of extremist Islam, she's often hounded on campus, she's told that she is Islamophobic she's told to shut the hell up. Or if you look at what happens to people who who question climate change, alarmism, not climate change, but climate change alarmism, they will be called deniers, they will be called heretics. People have suggested setting up international criminal tribunals because they say that these people's words will contribute to the warming of the planet and the death of humanity. So we live in deeply censorious times. And the reason that's a problem is because some of these blasphemies that people are expressing will turn out to be correct, and will turn out to be of enormous benefit to mankind, if we allow them to be expressed. And if we allow other people to respond to them, discuss them and work out whether they're right or wrong.

**Bret** 1:06:39

Yeah, you have to leave the fringe ideas. In a form they can be expressed, because even though most of them are wrong, the ones that move us forward are amongst them. And this is always I mean, this is well understood, frankly. But it's well understood by people who are quickly losing their ability to steer the ship in favor of allowing children to do it on the basis of a tantrum that they're throwing, which is, I must say, just shocking. So let me ask you a couple things. We are obviously facing an election here in the US in the context of this most remarkable auto immune reaction to reason. And our election. Looks like I think no other in history. We have two candidates who are feeble, for different reasons. I mean, there's one shared reason which has to do with age, and they both appear to show signs of decline, although Biden much more so than Trump at this point. But nonetheless, it is a remarkable fact. And I think not unrelated to the the tantrum being thrown in our streets, that the same system that delivered us a choice between two leaders who are completely unacceptable that that same system also caused an incoherent reaction to what is the, I think, correct understanding that the system is rigged. This is all one puzzle. But nonetheless, it's going to unfold somehow. And I guess the question is, I'm fascinated by the viewpoint of my friends who don't live here, who are seeing this from afar. And you know, I Get Genuine alarm from people in the English speaking world, outside of the US, because there's some, I think, deep understanding that the US even if Americans lose sight of what's important, we're not really allowed to disassemble our own society because of what it will do to the world. And, you know, I feel this, I feel that the world has a stake in the United States remaining coherent, and that in some sense, it is going to be exposed to tremendous danger as a result of our collapse. If that's what's coming. How does it look to you from the UK?

**Brendan O'Neill** 1:09:17

Yeah, it doesn't look good. That's the that's my main contribution to this discussion. I mean, sometimes it looks quite shocking. Because it does raise questions more broadly, not only for the US, but for other parts of the world, about what has happened to political life. What has happened to public life, when seemingly, the two best candidates for the presidential election in the most powerful country on Earth are Donald Trump and Joe Biden. I'm struck by the age thing and the decline thing I say this as someone who is adamantly opposed to ageism, and this that Of which I think there is a great deal at the moment, the anti Boomer sentiment that exists among some of the regressive groups we've been talking about and their tendency to understand everything as a generational warfare rather than in in any kind of more complicated sense. So I'm against ageism. However, if you look at someone like Joe Biden, I'm actually quite shocked at how quickly it has become a bad thing to do if you raise questions about his mental faculties, and people who do that will often be accused of being you know, Alt right, or, or engaging in right wing talking points and raising things that you should not raise and, but to anyone who watches his performances, it's quite obvious that he's not fully in control of his mind in the way that he presumably would have been 20 or 30 years ago. So that in itself, I think, is quite a good metaphor for the decay of American politics more broadly. And the fact that these two old blokes seem to be the best two options for the people to choose between. And then you have someone like Kamala Harris, who I just find, actually a little bit creepy. And she's people in the UK. So speaking about other parts of the English speaking world, I think people in the UK often find even her accent quite strange. It's one of those kind of nasal American accents, which is just smacks of a certain form of privileged existence. And I often don't understand what she's saying, I know, commenting on her accent is not particularly profound. But I think it is quite interesting that she has this very strange, distinctive West Coast accent. But what strikes me most about Biden and Harris, the Biden Harris ticket, is that they only seem capable of defining themselves as not Trump. There's so they're not.

**Brendan O'Neill** 1:12:00

They're not whipping up any enthusiasm. They don't have a huge set of ideas. They don't seem to have much of a program that they don't have any particularly inspiring agenda. But they're not Trump. And I think that's going to backfire on them because what it will look like to many people, it will look like the revenge of the old establishment because even though I am a Trump skeptic, I perfectly understand why so many people voted for him. It's because they were tired of the old, liberal technocratic establishment as personified by people like Hillary Clinton, and who obviously obviously won a majority of the popular vote. But people, especially in more working class areas were tired of that were not interested in that. And they opted for the man who posed as an anti establishment figure who posed as someone who would stir up political life who pose to someone who would actually listen to them, which politicians had not been doing. And in fact, both east coast and West Coast culture in recent years seems to become singularly obsessed with mocking Middle America mocking rednecks, mocking people with their guns in their Bibles and our backward beliefs and really sneering at the average Joe, as you know, unenlightened and stupid and backward and everything else. So the vote for Trump made sense in that context. If the democrats are now going to go into this election, saying, We're not Trump, I don't think that's going to work. So the choice, I think it's possibly even worse than you've just outlined there very well, because it's now an election that is completely and utterly revolves around Trump. Your choice is Trump or not Trump, your choice is not really even Trump or Biden, because who knows what Biden is fundamentally or what he what he represents, is quite changeable in his views, he, he will often ditch views if he if he thinks they're not working particularly well. Or if you look at the way Kamala Harris justified the fact that she could roast Biden in public a few months ago and now be his running partner. She said, Well, it was just a debate. That's what you do in a debate, you say controversial, shocking things. In other words, she didn't mean it. She didn't believe that she was posing. It's so incredibly shallow. So there's nothing of substance in the end, the Biden Harris ticket, this really is a choice between Trump and mock Trump. And that is really, the American people deserve so much more than that. So the question of how to rejuvenate American political life, I think is of huge importance to Americans and the world. And I'm not sure how that can be done other than pushing the kind of ideas that people like you have been pushing which is calling for a return And increased valuation of freedom and reason and equality, and focus. I think all those things, I think it's important not to see the push back against wokeness as a discrete project, I think it's actually something that can tap into and bring back to life, the broader public sphere, and re engage people in a politics of purpose and a politics of vision, which at the moment is sorely lacking in America.

**Bret** 1:15:30

Yeah, you're exactly right. And you know, the distaste for Trump is strong in many circles. But the Democratic Party has somehow created a world in which the argument to vote against Trump is no longer a straightforward one, because for one thing, Biden's decrepitude is so severe, that there is at least an argument that it isn't safe to have somebody in that condition in the White House. Also, there's the question of what the Democratic Party is partnering with, because it's partnering with this woke mob, it isn't obvious that the Trump scenario is more frightening than the empowering of this woke madness. And so, you know, lots of people I believe, are going to vote for Trump, because there's some hope that if, you know, the city's descend into madness, Trump will do something to stop it. And you know, as somebody who lives in a city, I get it, right. It's It's frightening to be in a situation where suddenly we're being told that, you know, policing is itself racist, and you know, in which the city governments are actually going through the exercise of dismantling police departments, even though like I said before, I don't think there's any evidence at all that this is a popular idea. It's just a very forcefully delivered idea from some tiny number of people who are obviously crazy. So. So anyway, yes, we've got a an appalling situation. You're right about Kamala Harris, she is essentially the DNC incarnate. And Biden is not much different. Frankly, I think there is an awareness that Biden can't go the distance, and I will be a bit surprised if he is actually the person who is who runs. In other words, I think there's a strong chance that Camila is actually to be the nominee, and that they will swap her into that role at the point that the danger of democracy breaking out in the Democratic Convention is passed. But But in any case, right, this is, you know, whatever you're detecting about common law, be it her accent, or the fact that what she says is empty, or the fact that the ticket itself has no ideas that anybody can name, there's no enthusiasm about it, the only thing it is is an alternative to Trump. And the objection to Trump is based very strongly in distaste for him. There's no acknowledgement that he was portrayed as hitlerian. And he didn't turn out to be hitlerian. And there was no rethinking of anything. They just without skipping a beat continued down this path. So yeah, it's a very, it's a very frightening situation. Now, I don't know if you're aware, but I have advanced a alternative plan for our election to elect somebody different. And it's interesting how difficult it is to reach Americans with the very simple idea that when both parties have effectively declared war on leadership, and a commitment to politicizing everything that extends right up into the willingness to destroy the nation over symbolism, that we have some obligation to try something else. People are so used to living in a world that is divided red and blue, that they have difficulty imagining any other possibility.

**Brendan O'Neill** 1:19:16

Yeah, I think that's true. And and I think Trump, you're right, to see that to say that Trump was seen by many people as the other possibility. Sure, some of them still think that because the democrats have not improved much, and in some ways have got worse over the past four years. And I'm sure some people no longer believe that but probably still see Trump as a better choice than than the Democrats. I think the the point you make there about the democrats going down, it's kind of woke root. That's really important because this is a common theme in social democratic parties. across the west, what's happened is that they have transformed radically over The past couple of decades they or longer, in fact, you know, they've shifted away from their working class base. This is happening in Europe, this is happening in Germany where the Social Democratic Party got its worst ever election result a couple of years ago, it's happening in other European countries is happening in the UK where the Labour Party, which is our Social Democratic Party, has been completely and utterly conquered by woke nonsense, and has utterly alienated its traditional working class base, the people that was founded to represent, which is why so many working class voters voted for Boris Johnson in the December general election, an unprecedented victory for the Conservative Party, which now represents working class people in this country, which is, you know, historically unprecedented. And there's a similar dynamic in the US, although, of course, it takes a different form because it's a different country. But what you have there is the democrats quite openly shifting away from their traditional voters and embracing new constituencies. You know, Joel kotkin writes very well about this, and so do other writers about the the creation of these new constituencies of the urban upper middle classes.

**Brendan O'Neill** 1:21:22

highly educated women, highly educated sections of the black community, people who live in on the East Coast or the west coast. You know, people who watch Saturday Night Live and share memes mocking Donald Trump, I mean, these are the targets now of the Democratic Party, whereas they look upon their traditional voters as racist, homophobic. Well, the basket of deplorables is Hillary Clinton memorably put it that is really how they see these people. So we're witnessing an incredibly important realignment of political life, where you have left wing parties, aligning themselves with the kind of bourgeois sections of society, the well educated sections of society and looking down their noses at ordinary people. And then you have sections of the right and i think Donald Trump has done this relatively successfully, who are real realigning themselves with the working man, the working woman, and saying that they will represent their interests against the elites. I think that's it's such an interesting shift. And it will be so fascinating to see how it plays out in the us this time, because I think that will impact globally. I thought the point you made about, I thought the exact same thing about the way in which Trump was referred to as Hitler. And then there was no reckoning with the fact that that wasn't true. I actually think that's a that's an incredibly serious matter. We have the exact same thing in the UK, there were protests against Trump. I went to them to observe them. Every other placard had Trump with a Hitler mustache, telling us that the 1930s were coming back. And none of them have apologized for doing that or reassessed the situation or admitted that they were being hysterical. They've just let it slide into history. And I think that's unforgivable. Firstly, because it describes Trump in an inaccurate way, he's not Hitler, the people who voted for him are not right wing fascist. So they were lying about Trump, and they were lying about Trump's support base. But also, it is part of this process of Holocaust relativism, which I think is a really worrying phenomenon. Because the more that you compare ordinary, relatively ordinary political events in the present, the more that you compare those things to what happened in the 1930s, the more you make the 1930s seem ordinary and mundane. And it chips away at the uniqueness of the Holocaust. And it chips away at the seriousness of that moment. And the fact that this was the greatest crime in human history, and contributes to the broader belief that the Holocaust was not particularly a big deal. The Nazis were bad people in the same way that Trump is a bad person. And that, again, is another example of just historical ignorance and historical illiteracy and, and the terrible consequences that can have for people's understanding of the past and for their understanding of what certain groups of people experienced in the 20th century. I think, your idea of creating the possibility of another candidate, someone who's not Trump, and who's not, not Trump, which is what Biden and Harris are. I think that's really interesting. And I my view of political life at the moment is anything that can be done to open the door to a new possibility is worth pursuing. This is why I'm quite interested in the rise of populist parties in Europe. Now some of these populist parties are bad, they have awful beliefs, some are good. Some are far right. Some are far left. You know, they're all sorts of parties. But what I think is fascinating and important and quite encouraging about them is that they are trying to create another possibility, something that isn't the conservative right wing section of society and something which isn't the kind of collapsing social democratic wing of society and they're trying to open the door to something else. All forms of political experimentation, if they are driven by a desire to democratize public life and to, to reintroduce reason, and freedom and equality to the heart of public debate. Anything that does that I think should be welcomed and encouraged.

**Bret** 1:25:54

Yeah, I agree it must be and the basis for it being incredibly vibrant is there, but it is going to be shouted out of existence before it gets a chance to, to actually flourish. Now, I agree with your analysis about the 1930s. And the the real hidden danger here is that we have robbed the very special and important claim that something is hit Larian of all meaning, so that as it returns, we can no longer invoke it and have it resonate. And I must say, I feel this, you know, both, as you know, an analytically focused person who recognizes that That must be the case. But also as a Jew, who knows that, you know, I'm beginning to hear a kind of commonplace anti semitism in this woke ideology that is so familiar from what I read about and heard about as a young person that I know the danger isn't where we were told it is, and it is exactly in the hands of those who are shouting Nazi this Nazi that which, you know, I guess, maybe it doesn't rank given the level of irony that seems to be attained on a regular basis these days, but it certainly would be up there under ordinary circumstances. So I don't know. Suppose the US does come apart? What happens in Europe?

**Brendan O'Neill** 1:27:31

Well, that's a good question. I think the question is what happens in the world? I mean, it's, you know, the ripple effect would be enormous, I think. I mean, my view is, I don't think America will come apart. But at the moment, I am genuinely shocked at how divided America is. I mean, we really are going through. I mean, people compare it to 1968, when there was lots of street disturbances and an election and all sorts of things were going on at the same time. I think it is like that, but it's, but it's even more in incoherent. Because at least in 68, you knew what people were doing right? You could agree with them or disagree with them. But you knew why people were on the streets. You knew what they were protesting about. Some of them are good protests. Some of them were bad protest, but it all fitted within a broader framework of political life. And the question of how to pursue certain interests, and what would what what was the best method for doing that it made sense. You people could make sense of it, even if they no doubt found it quite disorientating. I think at the moment, the framework is missing. And it's just there's such a sense of incoherence. And a lot of the protests are nationalistic. They are targeted at abstract symbols or symbols of American more broadly, you know, the footage of people tearing down statues of Columbus, for example, and stamping on his head and rolling them into a river or whatever else. You know, that's, that's a terrifying image, because this is, it's like Philip Roth's book, American pastoral, you know, it's like, the upper middle classes have gone insane. And there's very little sense to this. And I think what's most interesting about it, quite a few writers have made this observation, which is that this is not a radical protest. This is almost the revenge of the bourgeoisie. This is the sons and daughters of privilege, who are horrified by the way in which politics has gone particularly over the past four years, and are taking their revenge by raging against America raging against ordinary people raging against things they don't like. So it's very strange, it's very incoherent. It's very worrying. So I think I think America will just about managed to hold it together. But what I think is really clear about this election. Is that whatever happens, it won't stop these problems, because neither ticket has the capacity to quell this dissent, or to give Americans a sense of vision or a sense of collectivity, or a sense of purpose, Trump said he would. But he's failed in numerous ways. And he hasn't lived up to the promises he made to middle America and to working class people. Biden, and Harris, I think, are only interested in appealing to a particular section of society and promoting a particular form of white politics. So if anything, I think you were right earlier to raise the interplay between the Democratic establishment and the and the disturbances on the streets. And I think the democrats are playing with fire in relation to that, if they think that by implicitly encouraging these disturbances, that it will work to their benefit. I think they're probably in for a rude awakening. But neither camp will be capable of weaving a new, purposeful narrative for America. So I think that task is ongoing, regardless of what happens in the election in a few months time. That cannot, I don't think it's possible to

**Brendan O'Neill** 1:31:18

overstate the importance of carrying on that discussion about what America is for, what the West is for, what values are important, what values we have to rescue from the savages of campus life and elsewhere. That discussion is so crucial to the broader discussion of how to improve political life. And in some ways, it's prior to that. I think it's the kind of work that people like you and others are doing, I think, is actually prior to the rejuvenation, rejuvenation of public life. Because it's only by defending those foundational principles and those foundational values. And the idea that America is a pretty good experimental Republic, which has done a lot of good stuff for people. It's only by defending those values, that we then might get to a position where we can inject public life more broadly with a sense of purpose. So I see that I think two things are going on at the moment, you have mainstream political life, which is a complete mess. And there's no inspiring figures at all. And then you have this other battle, these culture wars, this clash between regressive, regressive, suppose lefties and ordinary people who are probably very skeptical of their regressive leftism. And I think at some point, those two different strands of American life will come together. But whether that will happen in the election or after it, I think remains to be seen.

**Bret** 1:32:50

Yeah, well, that's a very good question. And if it plays out, as you say, I only see these patterns getting worse over the course of the next four years. And there's a question about how long we can hold out as they do get worse because they've gotten bad at an incredible rate. Yeah. Yeah. All right. Well, Brendon, this is as always been a fascinating discussion. I hope it is the first of many people should find you at the Brendan O'Neill show and on spiked anywhere else.

**Brendan O'Neill** 1:33:26

Those are the main places Yeah.

**Bret** 1:33:27

Are you still the last person on earth with no Twitter account?

**Brendan O'Neill** 1:33:31

I don't use Twitter, but I do use Instagram. So you do

**Bret** 1:33:35

use Instagram. Alright. Cool. Um, how do people find you on Instagram?

**Brendan O'Neill** 1:33:39

My name is burnt oak boy. That's b, u r and t. a KBOY.

**Bret** 1:33:48

Excellent. Well, thank you so much for visiting the Dark Horse podcast and I guess we'll stay tuned and see what happens in the election. Thanks, bro. All right. Be well, Brandon.