

Since When Is Free Speech a 'Right-Wing' Idea?

It's not uncommon that certain ideals will have a political bias attached to them. The immigration debate, for instance, has long taken a left-vs-right structure, as has the gun debate. You can usually make an educated guess at someone's political leanings based on the positions they take on certain issues.

But today, many seem to think this applies to one of the most fundamental pillars of democratic society; the right to free speech. Not only has the freedom to express oneself somehow become a controversial issue, but some people now see taking a pro-freedom stance on speech as evidence that one is somehow a right-winger.

This perception is both false and problematic. Why, then, has free speech suddenly become a facet of the right?

Free Speech \neq Hate Speech

A great deal of this viewpoint seems to be stoked by a fear of "offensive" speech. While many on the left seek to "[de-platform](#)" anything which may cause hurt feelings or damaged worldviews, some on the right have begun acting like vanguards of free expression. Neither of these positions do the free speech cause much good.

To illustrate my point, let's take a look at a recent example from the UK; YouTuber Count Dankula (real name Mark Meehan) was [found guilty of a hate crime](#) and fined £800 (\$1,100) for teaching his girlfriend's pug to raise its paw in a faux-Nazi salute. Being a YouTube comedian, this was of course done for

the sake of the joke.

Funny or not, I'm sure many on both sides of the political spectrum take issue with such a heavy-handed approach to a bad joke—something evidenced by [Meechan's GoFundMe page](#), which raised over £150,000 (just over \$200,000) in just 6 days.

Although enough people clearly sympathize with the cause enough to donate money, the right have been far more vocal in support for Meechan. [The likes of](#) Alex Jones and Paul Joseph Watson of Infowars, as well as English journalist Tommy Robinson (ex-English Defense League member) are just some names from the right of the spectrum to come out in support of Meechan.

This itself isn't an issue; someone's ideological background shouldn't really matter all that much if the cause itself is just, which the fight to preserve free speech absolutely is. The issue is rather that, through association, free speech has been [unjustly labeled a right-wing belief](#).

Je ne suis pas Charlie

Interestingly, this strange view that only right-wingers can defend free speech seems rather new. Only three years ago in 2015, '[Je Suis Charlie](#)' became a massive movement in defense of French satire magazine Charlie Hebdo, whose offices were attacked after printing an image of the Muslim prophet Muhammad.

The Je Suis Charlie movement, unlike today's protests for free speech, had no political leaning attached to it. Rather than an ideological battle, it was a joint protest to protect a fundamental right.

Had the protest happened today, however, the movement likely

would have looked far different. Rather than a shout for free expression, #JeSuisCharlie may have been seen as a badge of the alt-right. The left may have been more vocal in criticizing Charlie Hebdo for its offensive content, rather than defending its right to publish without threat of violence.

As the famed 19th century atheist and political activist Charles Bradlaugh said, free speech is intricately intertwined with the human quest for truth.

“Without free speech no search for Truth is possible; without free speech no discovery of Truth is useful; without free speech progress is checked, and the nations no longer march forward towards the nobler life which the future holds for man,” Bradlaugh said during a famous speech at the Hall of Science in 1880. “Better a thousandfold abuse of free speech than denial of free speech. The abuse dies in a day; the denial slays the life of the people and entombs the hope of the race.”

It's time the right-wing label was taken off of free speech, and that we bring back the spirit of 2015. Rather than quarreling over context, we should go back to viewing humor for what it is; subjective, personal, and ultimately harmless. The left and right need to come together on free expression and say *Je suis toujours Charlie*.

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