Twitter Thread by Rob Ford



Rob Ford
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Two things can be true at once:
1. There is an issue with hostility some academics have faced on some issues
2. Another academic who himself uses threats of legal action to bully colleagues into silence is not a good faith champion of the free speech cause

> How about Selina Todd, Kathleen Stock, Jo Phoenix, Rachel Ara, Sarah Honeychurch, Michele Moore, Nina Power, Joanna Williams, Jenny Murray, Julia Gasper ...
>
> Or is it only Eric you pop at?
> Are they all making it up too Rob?
> Are they "beyond parody"? https://t.co/drQssTD0OL
>
> — Matt Goodwin (@GoodwinMJ) February 17, 2021

I have kept quiet about Matthew's recent outpourings on here but as my estwhile co-author has now seen fit to portray me as an enabler of oppression I think I have a right to reply. So I will.

I consider Matthew to be a colleague and a friend, and we had a longstanding agreement not to engage in disputes on twitter. I disagree with much in the article @UOzkirimli wrote on his research in @openDemocracy but I strongly support his right to express such critical views

I therefore find it outrageous that Matthew saw fit to bully @openDemocracy with legal threats, seeking it seems to stifle criticism of his own work. Such behaviour is simply wrong, and completely inconsistent with an academic commitment to free speech.

I am not embroiling myself in the various other cases Matt lists because, unlike him, I think attention to the detail matters and I don't have time to research each of these cases in detail.

In the case of Noah Carl, whose research I do know a little, I made the following comments at the time the controversy arose:
https://t.co/fnUEFR6Niq

> Have to say this does look very bad indeed - public attacks on a young academic not in a position to defend himself, with sweeping moralistic claims about his research (but no specifics). Social media witch hunts are not how academia is supposed to work: https://t.co/WCFpdn7HbP
>
> — Rob Ford (@robfordmancs) December 7, 2018

I also agree with the sentiments expressed by @oxsoc here:
https://t.co/9wQwoqnWDp

> Things ain't simple. It's perfectly consistent to believe the following: 1) a government appointed free speech czar is a terrible idea & undesirable 2) many members of academia don't notice or feel any restriction on the free expression of their views 3) some members of academia
>
> — Colin Mills (@OxSoc) February 18, 2021

I oppose the harrassment of researchers for saying what they think. But I also think poorly thought through government intervention will be a disaster. And I think that research used to justify said intervention should take care to get its facts correct.

I criticised Kaufmann's research because (a) it is prominent (b) it is heavily cited in the government's own proposals (c) its flaws are obvious, and a matter of easily checked public record

It is disingenuous of Matt, who also knows all of these things, to portray my criticism as motivated by a desire to suppress debate of free speech on campus. I have never expressed any such desire, and I do not have any such desire

As Daniel Patrick Moynihan once said "Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not their own facts." Insisting that a report making strong claims about no platforming on campus gets its facts right is not a suppression of debate. It is application of basic standards.

The kind of bad faith reasoning involved in the accusations Matthew makes in this tweet do not serve the debate he claims to want and are in fact examples of the kinds of bad faith catastrophising and whataboutery used by those who do try to suppress free speech.

In sum: 1. I strongly support free speech on campus 2. I reject the government's proposals as poorly thought through and probably harmful 3. I strong believe in basic research standards. The Policy Exchange report used by the govt does not meet these

4. I do not believe the free speech debate is well served by self-aggrandizing actors making sweeping, bad faith claims about their own behaviour and treatment, and the behaviour and beliefs of their opponents.

I won't be saying anything further on this. This is not, to pre-empt Matthew's inevitable response, because I am "hiding from debate". It is because I have made the points I want to make, and I have other demands on my time.