

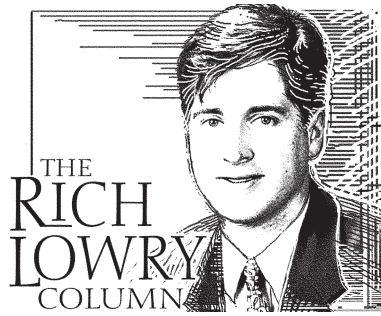
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THE RICH LOWRY COLUMN

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By Rich Lowry



The U.K.'s dumb exclusion of left-wing influencers

The U.K. government banned left-wing influencers Cenk Uygur and Hasan Piker from traveling to the country because they blame everything on the Jews — and, true to form, Uygur and Piker blamed the Jews.

Uygur and Piker were to speak at a South by Southwest conference in London and participate in an event at the Oxford Union when their visas were canceled. They immediately smelled a rat, and, as usual, one emanating from Jerusalem.

“I’ve been banned for criticizing Israel,” Uygur posted on social media. “Are we free anymore? This is oppression of Western citizens by our own governments on behalf of a different country!”

Piker chimed in, “The U.K. has revoked my visa as well. All at the behest of Israel. The West is betraying ‘liberal values’ for a genocidal fascist foreign government. Soon we will all become Israel.”

Like most everything the duo says — Piker is Uygur’s nephew and got his start on his podcast — this is poisonous nonsense, although it doesn’t make the U.K.’s decision any better.

Britain now conducts itself like a nation that has never heard of John Milton, John Stuart Mill or Bertrand Russell, its storied advocates of free speech down through the centuries.

The U.K. routinely excludes controversial figures from traveling to the country from abroad, and actively tries to suppress speech offensive to gays, Muslims, trans people, Jews or others. You can get arrested, as TV writer Graham Linehan found out, for posting pungent opinions about biological males using female locker rooms, or for silently praying outside an abortion clinic.

If we needed a reminder of the wisdom of our Founders writing the First Amendment into the Constitution, the

free-floating illiberalism of the British government trying to enforce faddish norms provides it.

The Home Office, which was responsible for revoking the Uygur and Piker visas, says that their presence in the country might not have been “conducive to the public good” — whatever that means.

Certainly, it would be very bad for Britain if the country were to adopt wholesale the malignant views of Uygur and Piker, but that wasn’t going to come about as a result of, say, one of them having a 40-minute speaking slot at a South by Southwest satellite event.

Traditionally, in free societies, people are allowed to say dumb and hateful things. Either they discredit themselves by doing so, or perhaps they eventually win people over to their views. Regardless, free and robust debate has been considered a good in and of itself, something a country run by a raucous, free-wheeling Parliament should readily understand.

Are the Jews behind the exclusion of Uygur and Piker? Yet, there were Jewish groups who didn’t want them to come, but excluding them was a decision entirely in keeping with the government’s practice of trying to suppress views that it deems extreme. Just a couple of weeks ago, right-wing figures critical of Islam and supportive of Israel saw their visas revoked.

The British government isn’t a tool of the Zionists. It is a left-of-center Labour government. The Home Secretary is a Muslim of Pakistani origin who has attended anti-Israel protests. The government has said it would jail Bibi Netanyahu if he travels to Britain, sanctioned Israeli officials, restricted arms sales to the Jewish state, and recognized a Palestinian state.

If the revocation of the visas is an Israeli op, it’s a profoundly counterproductive one. In authoritarian societies, people can truly be suppressed — if China wants to get rid of a nettlesome figure, it simply disappears him or her. In an open society, in contrast, there are many channels for expression, and official hostility tends to make the targeted voices more famous and interesting, whether it’s James Joyce or the Sex Pistols.

Surely, Cenk Uygur and Hasan Piker are better known in the U.K. now than they were a few days ago, and that’s not, as they say in Britain, conducive to the public good.

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.

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