

## Confusion



**I WAS DELIGHTED** by the sight of Donald Trump surrounded by young women and girls signing an order banning men from women's sports. On the whole Trump's trouncing of great swathes of nonsense in American government and education was great to see. It was also heartening to witness Vice President J. D. Vance recently dressing down European leaders over threats to free speech. While it is true that some of his examples were decidedly dodgy, the overall case he made was sound.

This reminds me of some acquaintances and former comrades whose political and financial alignment with Hungarian leader, Viktor Orbán, rest firmly on his robust commitment to national sovereignty. (They even boast that Budapest is safer for Jews than anywhere else in Europe.) Unfortunately, the same can not be said for homosexuals; Orbán's 'managed democracy' or

'elective dictatorship' – call it what you will – is hostile to gays and lesbians as Orban's party, Fidesz, sails confidently forward on the slogan "Family First". Some people see a legitimate trade-off here: a commitment to Euroscepticism, national sovereignty, and a good record on antisemitism, in return for a broadly reactionary stance on homosexuality.

Interestingly, this also applies to Orban's attitude to Ukraine – he anticipated Donald Trump's recent actions by many months, when he advocated that the Ukraine War should be ended directly by a negotiated settlement between the United States and Russia. Orban boldly defends Hungary's sovereignty while attacking Ukraine's right to self-determination. This was of a piece with his opposition to arms shipments being sent to Ukraine.

We are evidently confronted by a confusing array of positions: a defence of freedom of speech with implicit support for Vladimir Putin's attacks on Ukraine's independence, followed by defending Hungary's national sovereignty against encroachments by the European Union. Hungarian family policy, with generous benefits for young parents, has to be set against government attacks on gay and lesbian advocates, and positive manifestations of homosexuality on Hungarian streets or in the schools.

We live in troubling and confusing times, from war and social policy, to the regulation of trade across the world. Globalisation has been greeted by simmering disenchantment for years, but it is unclear how making imports more expensive will stimulate domestic production in the United States. Particularly, as Trump's tariffs seem to be imposed and withdrawn, raised and lowered, with surprising speed. The President has been using tariffs, ducking and weaving, striving to get recalcitrant foreigners to submit.

It is unclear how this will aid the American working class with good jobs and good wages. Evidently millions of men and women, of every race and ethnicity, voted for Trump in the hope that he will

do something for them. Striking out against *wokery* is welcome and cheap. However, shrinking the state will both help and hinder in a manner that will cancel out any resulting benefit. Lower taxes will not improve healthcare or the job prospects of millions of Americans at the back of the queue.

Positive moves to stop uncontrolled immigration, policing the borders properly will do much for the poor and low paid in America. But bringing Vladimir Putin in from the cold, ending his isolation, and suspending sanctions, will damage the interests of working people everywhere – because we *all* always need democracy – we all need billionaire potentates and oligarchs kept in line by the rule of law and popular sovereignty.

We can accept that Trump's managed unpredictability has advantages; his scatter-gun diplomacy on tariffs and Ukraine will produce all sorts of unexpected results, but it remains clear that his determination to undermine the legitimacy of Volodymyr Zelensky's government by absurdly accusing it of "starting the war" is intended to favour the Russian dictator.

This is of a piece with Putin's denunciation of the Kiev government as a bunch of Nazis and drug addicts. Trump and Putin appear, on the face of it, to be inhabiting the same loony-tunes animation. Ukraine started the war by refusing to cede Donbas to Russia, or accept the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and then intensified the conflict eight years later by fighting tooth and nail against Russia's attempt at a full-scale invasion of the country. Trump even believes that Kiev's declaration of martial law and the suspension of elections in Ukraine in response to the invasion, makes Zelensky a dictator. According to Trump he has surrendered all legitimacy, and has lost the support of his people.

Trump's allegations about Ukraine's President sound distinctly barmy given that he is supporting Vladimir Putin, who *The Donald* must surely know, is an 'elective dictator', and an opponent of free speech who speedily poisons and crushes all opposition to his

rule the moment it appears.

These apparent contradictions are at the heart of our confusions. Donald Trump and J. D. Vance are, like Viktor Orban, doing some fine things, they are also doing some appalling things. Consequently, we must as quickly as possible, disentangle them one from the other.

It is imperative that those of us who are fighting for 'enlightenment values' (or traditional liberalism if you prefer), need to ensure that we are not swept into untimely alliances, which violate everything that we stand for. Respect for material reality and the scientific method, defence of national sovereignty, free speech, civil equality for all, religious freedom, the rule of law, and democratic arrangements for the election and removal of governments, are the ground upon which we stand. We cannot shilly-shally or compromise on any of these objectives or principles.

In 1944 and 1945 democratic leaders, Roosevelt, Truman, Churchill, and Attlee, were faced with Joseph Stalin's dictatorship which presented them with a terrible choice, which was in fact no choice at all: either consign Poland to Stalinist dictatorship or open armed conflict with their erstwhile ally, the Red Army. In the mid-forties war with the Soviet Union to liberate Poland was simply impossible, a tragic betrayal was inevitable.

There is no such reason today for betraying Ukraine. There is no such reason for democratic leaders in the UK, Europe, Japan, Australasia, and North America, to surrender Ukraine's sovereignty to the dictators in Moscow, Tehran, Pyongyang, or Beijing.

Everything must be done to bolster Zelensky's efforts to negotiate a cease fire, which gives as little as possible away, and is guaranteed by Europe's soldiers manning an *armistice line* that preserves the sovereignty and independence of the government in Kiev.