



Episode 833: Libertarians in a World Gone Mad: Trump's Early Days and the Leftist Response

Guest: Jeff Deist

WOODS: This is one of these episodes where I don't know where it's going, I don't know what we're going to say, I only vaguely know what we're going to talk about, but I've got Jeff Deist on the show, and I feel like I can't go wrong – not that I want to put too much pressure on you. But there it is. If this isn't any good, it's on you, pretty much is what I'm saying.

DEIST: Okay.

WOODS: I want to just talk to somebody about events of the past week or so. I just want to talk to somebody about this, because I feel like the whole world has gone mental. I don't know where I fit. I don't fit anywhere in this. There's a big, big chunk of me that absolutely loathes the left and their stupid protests that they couldn't have bothered to be doing while Obama was helping to starve Yemen for all of 2016. They couldn't be bothered to take five minutes out of their schedules for that. But they have to have Madonna and Lady Gaga and Miley Cyrus lecture us on the dignity of women. I mean, are we going to be spared nothing?

But at the same time, there is still this cult of the presidency around Trump that I don't like, so I don't really have a home. But while I'm homeless, I am nevertheless cheering for people who are as fed up and disgusted with the left as I am.

So let's start there. I mean, I guess we could say something about his inauguration speech, but let's just start with your overall impression. I mean, doesn't it feel to you like things have really accelerated in the past year or so in terms of the divisions in the country? They were always there, but it's palpable and overwhelming now.

DEIST: Yeah, they have accelerated. We deserve it because this is what you get when you politicize things that shouldn't be politicized, which is 90% of what government does. It's extra-constitutional, even if you're a fan of that document. But more importantly, the left mostly but now the right to an extent has politicized whole areas of human life that ought not to be political, like sex and sexuality and family life and work life, what happens at your workplace.

So we deserve this, and I think Trump is a symptom. He's a symptom of the imperial presidency. Progressives have cheered this for decades. They've sought to have executive control over environmental issues, over health and safety issues, labor

issues, women's issues, abortion. They cheered an activist Supreme Court, which they're now terrified to think they might not control. They cheered an imperial executive. They're now terrified of Trump.

And I think that really this march the other day encapsulates the whole thing perfectly. I mean, these are political people who claim to love democracy and voting as the means to organize society. Well, we had a vote, and lots and lots of women voted for Trump, more than voted for Hillary, at least among the white women. So they go and have a white woman march nonetheless in Washington, and they do so in a way that says we don't respect the outcome of this vote. I don't respect the outcome of any vote, so I don't really care. I'm agnostic. But for people who claim they do care, the guy's been in office a day and they're walking around in pink pussy hats, and we're supposed to take them seriously and we're supposed to say that these are good people because they're making their voice heard. Well, you guys are the Democrats; you're the ones who say you make your voice heard by voting. Well, we had a vote.

So look, this whole thing is an absolute farce. Politics is devolving into nasty tribalism, and the left has wanted this. The left has wanted this for decades. They talk about how fractured we are. Who do I blame? I blame both sides, but the question for us is how do we react, how do we respond as libertarians, and I think the answer is going to make a lot of our libertarian friends unhappy, because they don't want to face the plain and obvious truth in front of us, which is that we need to depoliticize society and we need to break it up. We need some form of secession, localism, subsidiarity to deal with these intractable social issues that have arisen because of government, because of government dividing us.

It's the only solution to this, Tom, short of civil war, and I hate people who talk glibly about civil war, as though this can ever be a good thing and this is ever something that's going to actually happen. It's a terrible thing, and we should never even talk about it happening. So the only solution short of that is some kind of decentralized political rulemaking. And I would like to see no political rulemaking. That's unlikely. So given that it's unlikely, hey, let's go our separate ways. And of course our Beltway libertarian friends, they don't want to hear this. They're the libertarian centralizers. Well, gee whiz, we've got to have abortion legal across the land. We can't have these rednecks in the South banning it, or whatever it is that they think.

But the bottom line is that the only way forward is to ratchet back politics. The only way to do that is to be more localized. We're seeing this in Europe, and I think we're on the cusp of seeing it in America. Anybody who doesn't want to do this is basically saying one of two things. Either they want to impose upon vast, vast millions of people by government force, a particular viewpoint that those vast millions do not accept. Or they want them to simply die off demographically. I mean, those are the two choices, because the right says this too. The right says we can't live with the left; the left says we can't live with the right.

So when Tom Woods says, as you did in Houston a couple of years ago, let's get a divorce, everyone freaks out and calls you the bad guy. This is just absolutely intolerable, and this is why I really object to this movement among libertarians to make this a cultural identity movement, and there was some criticism of Ron Paul for talking about states' rights. Look, states' rights or some version thereof is the only way

any of us are going to have any slight movement towards a more libertarian society in our lifetimes or maybe ten lifetimes. In other words, you can get a group of a million or two million libertarianish people together. You can't get 320 million libertarianish people together, not in this current social-political-economic rubric that we're suffering under. I'm really tired of airy-fairy, third-way, tech-addled libertarianism. I think the way forward is for us to be good neighbors, to love one another, and to go our separate ways.

And that doesn't necessarily mean geographically any more. Secession of some kind doesn't necessarily mean that you physically move. We have a digital world now. There's no reason you can't have private retirement insurance, and your neighbor can opt in to social security and fed gov. There's no technical reason or no logistical reason that we all have to move and segregate physically to live under a different political structure, but nonetheless it may be at least in the short term favorable for people to start doing that. And people are doing that. People are moving with their feet and they're leaving blue states because no matter what they say and no matter how they vote, they actually hate taxes and regulations when it affects them personally. And they hate overcrowding and they hate super expensive housing prices and all of these things that government does.

So that's the way forward. It's not happy. It's not necessarily fun. It is a version of the Benedict Option, what Rod Dreher talks about, but not for Catholics, for libertarians. And it's the way we have to be thinking. I think libertarians are guilty of becoming universalists, globalists in the worst sense of the word, not in the sense that Mises meant globalism, which is free trade between countries — because real globalism, Tom, is based on differences between countries, not similarities. Differences result in comparative advantage and specialization. That's what creates favorable trade. But universalist globalism that a lot of libertarians now promote — "Well, it's our job to have Saudi Arabia become *Elle* magazine" — it's just not going to work. And I would submit that the impulse to have universalism amongst libertarians is as bad as the impulse to have it amongst progressives.

WOODS: Well, that's interesting. I'm glad to hear you say that. I've always just — I don't know why; I've always been a little creeped out by some libertarian efforts to bring certain books all over the world. I mean, you know, great. Books are great. I want people to read books. But man, do we have a lot of work to do here, where these ideas have — the soil is much more fertile for these ideas. What the heck are we doing in far-flung continents around the world, for goodness sake? What, are we just so happy — ? I can think of somebody who actually goes to these third world countries or recently liberated communist countries or whatever, and brings copies of the U.S. Constitution. This is a libertarian. As if the U.S. Constitution has been such an obvious success that everyone should want to emulate that.

On the secession question, I would have thought even a year ago that the idea that secession was one day inevitable was a joke. Of course it's not. We might like to talk about it because it's an interesting intellectual exercise, but the idea is so toxic in people's minds because of the propaganda they get in the government schools there's no way you'd be able to persuade enough of them to think about it. But I just saw a poll the other day: one in three Californians favor secession. And I think given how drastically different a lot of people in the country are, even the left's normal

inclination to impose its rule on everybody might be overridden by their desire to be away from what they consider rednecks. I think it's quite likely, maybe not in my lifetime, but within a hundred years it would shock me if the United States still had the same territory and was the same political body that it is today.

DEIST: Well, I hope so, because let's face it: politics is a form of war. It's war by other means. And that's what we're having now, is war. And it's not as bad as real war. I'm not trying to use hyperbole here, but it is a form of war. So here's what I always say to progressives, which is: you can have so much of what you want right here, right now if you're just willing to accept this principle of subsidiarity. Why can't California – I would venture that 70% of Californians, perhaps, would agree to some sort of single-payer centralized government health care system. Tiny countries like Norway and Sweden manage to do this with just 5, 6, or 8 million people.

So why not have California establish this at the state level and do it? Go forward. Prove us wrong. If government can centrally manage health care, let California be the laboratory, the experiment that proves it, at least in the U.S. Let them do it. I'm all for this. Now, I understand that there are some good libertarians in California who would be harmed by this and might have to consider leaving. They'd say, Well, Jeff, what are you doing? But given the range of available choices before us, I would say that's fine. Let California do that.

Let's start creating – look at the Second Amendment. There are people who are just absolutely unhinged at the thought of guns in America. I don't understand that mentality. I'm a gun owner. I like to shoot. To me it's part and parcel of just sensible life to have a shotgun or something at home because there's bad people out there. But there are millions upon millions of Americans who believe with religious fervor that guns are an absolute abomination. They like to have them in cops and Secret Service people and the Army, but they don't want anybody else having them.

Okay, well, isn't there a private property regime that could permit this? How hard would it be to have huge groups of communities – let's say what we think of as Los Angeles is actually dotted by many, many smaller cities. Is there not some way under the California constitution to allow those cities to on some level become privatized communities that had some sort of covenant or some kind of document that you signed and say that as a covenant – call it a giant HOA rule – we're going to have no guns. We're not going to have private firearms, and you can be fined if you're caught with one or something like that.

Well, a lot of people again are going to say, Jeff, I'm in California, and the Second Amendment supersedes any kind of agreement California could come up with, and I want to have a gun. I understand that. I do. But I mean, wouldn't that be better, wouldn't that be a way for the left to have their gun-free zones?

It just seems to me that we've reached a point where the obvious solution is staring us in the face, which is to ratchet this thing back. Stop deciding everything in Washington, D.C. Stop having these almost unbelievable amounts of psychological torment every four years at the thought of this binary, winner-takes-all president coming in and ruining everyone's lives. It's an American system that, no matter what

everybody says, not too many people believe in anymore. That's the truth. That's the honest truth, and we're seeing that.

That Women's March, that's the truth of it, is they don't see this vote as legitimate, which means they don't see democracy as legitimate, the Electoral College or any of it. And that doesn't matter who got 3 million more votes. Even if Trump had won by 10 million, including the popular vote, do you think that would have changed anything in that march? Come on.

And let's say Hillary did get 3 million more votes. I mean, that's a little questionable. That's not necessarily a matter of fact. But let's say that's true. And let's say the Electoral College is what it is, which is an anti-democratic mechanism designed to aid and assist in federalism. Let's say that's bad and wrong. Okay, so in a country of 320-odd million people, 3.2 million – call it 1 in 100 – should tip the balance between agony and ecstasy psychologically for this deeply entrenched 45% on each side? I mean, come on. It can't go on, and it's not – Look, if the EU can't stay together, boy, you've got to wonder about us.

WOODS: I'm looking right now at the text of the inaugural address. I didn't see it live, but I'm looking at the text of it now. And I've been reading left libertarians all over the place saying it's the worst inaugural address ever. So I thought, wow, this must be just appalling to an unbelievable degree. I mean, there must be a huge exponent up there compared to how unbelievably bad most inaugural addresses, how messianic they are. So gosh, what could this be?

So I looked at it, and yeah, obviously it has Trumpian nationalism in it. Well, duh. You weren't expecting that? So he's saying that free trade has caused us problems and we've been spending too much money overseas and we want to try and make America first. And so it's really an America speech, that we have our way of life, and we're not going to impose it on anybody, and we understand that every nation has a right to pursue its own interests first. Okay, well, that's not the way I would speak, but that's obviously not like the worst statement in the history of mankind.

So I'm just not getting this. I understand the problems with Trump, the perils of Trump, but the idea that that was the worst speech in the world shows, first of all, how tone-deaf these people are – utterly tone-deaf. The point of the speech was not to lay out policy. The point of the speech, of an inaugural address, is to set the tone. Normally the tone is some banal, boring piece of nothingness about hope and "we'll all get together." And of course we're not going to all unite. We don't agree with each other. So forget that. So he didn't bother with any of that nonsense. What he did say was the establishment – in other words, the people seated right behind me" – the establishment has screwed you, and I'm not going to take dictation from the establishment. That was the tone.

And all you look at an inaugural address for is the tone. I'm not looking for the substance. If I get that tone and I say, well, if I compare it to other inaugural addresses, it's vastly better. It's certainly better than any inaugural address FDR ever gave. What, do you mean FDR's inaugural addresses were better than that? Are you kidding me? What is wrong with these people? That was a rhetorical question, but feel free to answer.

DEIST: Well, did you watch it live, or did you just read the transcript?

WOODS: No, I just read the transcript.

DEIST: Yeah, I've got to tell you, I watched it live. I was a little shocked, even for Trump. There was an absolute lack of any conciliatory tone. None whatsoever. There wasn't an inch given. There was no overture made toward the people sitting behind him on the stage, which included some – you know, poor Bob Dole was back there with his wife way in the back, and Dan Quayle was there. The people they have to drag out for these things is absolutely hilarious, like this somehow shows that we're all together.

But look, when he says "America first," we expect the left to go ballistic, we expect neocons to go ballistic, but it's funny when some libertarians don't like that, because what they're basically saying is that we agree with this impulse that that has dark overtures. No, it doesn't. I mean, Gerald Ford was a member of the America First Committee. They make it sound like it was some radical or renegade thing. It actually was, from about the Civil War up until really World War II, the American foreign policy impulse, which was America first; let's not meddle too much in other people's affairs. And of course one big war, call it World War I and World War II, sort of changed all of that psychologically for us. So there's nothing nefarious about that.

WOODS: Walt Disney supported America First, you know? Frank Lloyd Wright supported America First. Sinclair Lewis – I mean, this is classic Americana. And if you're going to besmirch that, then great, you stand exposed for who you really are, and I'm glad you did it. Unfortunately most Americans are not educated enough to know anything about this, and they think America First Committee was Nazis. The America First Committee went out of its way to make sure Nazis were not involved. Any historian of the subject knows this, which means nobody writing about it today knows it.

DEIST: Yeah, it's true. And what are you going to say? If you don't like America first, then that makes it sound like, "Well, then, who first?"

WOODS: Right, or what number do we assign to America?

DEIST: America, what? Second?

WOODS: On Twitter I was saying, "What, 28th?"

DEIST: Yeah.

WOODS: How about that? Yeah, 30th? Well, what number would you be satisfied with? Because Bill Kristol had this tweet out there talking about how unbelievably – I kid you not – how unbelievably vulgar it was to hear a president say "America first." And I thought, "You are why he won. You are exactly why he won." Any leftist in the world could have uttered those words.

DEIST: Well, the reason some libertarians don't like this is they think it sounds isolationist. I'm all for isolating the U.S. government. I don't want the American state

involved, in terms of trade or militarism, overseas. Let's limit it. Let's not impose our misery on anyone else. So it's not isolationist. America does just fine on the global stage in terms of business and travel and communications and trade and culture. My God, we export our culture everywhere. So isolationism is not the big danger. I think the rest of the world has heard of Google and eBay and Tesla. I don't think we have to worry about a blackout of what's happening in America anytime soon overseas.

What we have to worry about is an absolutely insane resurrection of the Cold War, which Hillary absolutely wanted, and which a lot of people on the left are so unhinged that they would prefer a new cold war to having Trump in office. If that was their choice — they hate Trump's guts so much — and Trump voters so much, I might add — that they'd rather resurrect the Cold War.

Here's what matters: not having a cold war with Russia — a country that is shrinking. Its borders are being imposed upon every day as its population shrinks — not putting any boots on the ground in Syria — in fact, getting the hell out of Syria — finding a way to get the hell out of Iraq and Afghanistan. And then we can start criticizing Trump for, Oh, gee, but there were provisions in the TPP that were going to reduce some tariff 5% somewhere or something — which we don't even know. So let's get to basics first. Justin Raimondo points this out: the fact that he is the first one to actually challenge the post-World War II — call it Cold War, call it neocon domination of foreign policy — is a huge thing, and we shouldn't sleep on the fact that it's huge.

WOODS: Let's see; what else do I want to hit here? Now, since then, there is some weird sabre rattling going on with China, and then I'm told — I don't know if this happened, because I haven't had time to check — but here was talk of moving — and it may have already been done, or the process started — moving the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, which is something that even George W. Bush didn't do, because it's a very controversial move, because you're staking a position on a contested issue. On the other hand, Jeff, it has to be acknowledged that there's that.

DEIST: Yeah, there's no question. Trump didn't win by alarming AIPAC. He didn't win by saying that we're going to radically change our tone and tenor with respect to Israel. He's not Jimmy Carter Part II. So there's no question about that. He played to the Israel lobby. And I heard Sean Spicer yesterday backtracking already on that Jerusalem gambit, I might add. I think that is actually fraught with the kind of complexity and ambiguity that Donald Trump is not known for handling too well.

So look, so far from what I've heard, he's going to be a zealous pro-Israel guy. I don't know what else to say. I haven't heard him say anything that sounds like he's going to ratchet that back. I'm not sure anybody at this point can be elected president in the U.S. without being sufficiently open to what the Israeli lobby wants. Look at what Rand Paul had to do. He had to go genuflect at the wall just to prove that he wasn't his father, that he wasn't some crazy isolationist like his father. This is the world we live in.

WOODS: Yeah, I mean, I understand that, and that was what people said about Rand, and that's what they say about everybody. But when you're a guy whose whole claim was, "I'm not owned by anybody or anything, because I'm a billionaire so I can chart my own course," it just seems like an odd course to chart.

DEIST: Yeah, he's a billionaire, but he's not as powerful as we might imagine. And thankfully so. I think in a lot of ways presidents are not as powerful as we imagine, and I think his adversaries are going to prove that very shortly. And the other thing here that we're missing is that intelligence communities have been challenged before by presidents, and very bad things have happened all around them as a result.

I recently finished – I think I've read it twice – Truman's memoirs. Now, he didn't do a biography. He sat down with somebody and sort of talked about his memoirs. And there's some disagreement over what he actually said about his regrets in creating the CIA. He's purportedly said – and it's written in this book – that, well, I didn't realize it would become this agency unto itself. And originally I was taking these briefings from all of these different military agencies and the State Department and consolidating them and combining them into one briefing for the president, and I thought that would be a good thing every day. And I never realized what a monster I created, and if I could do it over again I wouldn't have done it. That's sort of one version of history. Another version is that Truman himself later on said, Well, that's not exactly what I said, and that wasn't transcribed completely correctly.

But I'll tell you what, I'll bet you about 15 presidents since him wished to hell he'd never created it, because it's just unbelievable, their reach, what they can reach out and touch. They can touch the media, they can touch your family, they can touch an event across the globe that creates a ripple effect. So I'll tell you what, 90% of the intelligence people don't come and go with a new administration. He'd better be very, very careful if he's smart.

WOODS: Well, let's see. We've covered – okay, let's end with this then. We've talked a bit about where libertarians fit into all this, and I know it's a legitimate concern that I could get so hung up on wanting to smash the left because they're such enemies of civilization, that maybe – I'll be honest, maybe I become blind to problems on the other side. So how do you recommend I maintain my sanity and my proper balance? I mean, you understand, when you see these crazy marches with signs that make no sense – My favorite was the – I said this on the episode the other day – the sign about, "As a woman, I just hope one day to have as many rights as a gun." You idiot, you realize all the restrictions placed on guns? You'd be like a woman in Saudi Arabia if you had the rights of guns. What are you talking about? The whole thing is so stupid and inane.

Or I think it was Senator Patty Murray who was grilling Betsy DeVos for Education Secretary, and she went on Twitter and said, "I'm just so deeply concerned" – by the way, that's not my woman voice; that's my leftist voice – "I'm so deeply concerned that she supports groups that oppose women's health." Oppose women's health? What, does she support pro-breast cancer groups? What are you talking about? They can't just come out and say abortion. They can't even talk. So it makes you crazy.

DEIST: Well, I think opposing the left is something that libertarians ought to be doing. I don't think it puts you at risk of becoming a closet right-winger. Here's why. Look, we know what our ideology is. We have a very good sense – whether you're sort of all the way down the path into Rothbardian anarchism or whether you're just sort of a Gary Johnson kind of a guy who wants to scale back some federal control over some things, we know what our ideology is. It's anti-state. It's pro-freedom. It's very, very simple.

And we know the ethics behind it, and we know the arguments behind it. That's not what's at issue here. Nobody's going to question Tom Woods' ideology.

What's at question is power. And for all of our concerns about where the right is bad with militarism, with nation building, the left has all the power in this country. Let's not kid ourselves. Progressives run everything. The Trump election doesn't change that. They control media. They control K through 12. They control academia. They control corporate boardrooms in all the meaningful companies. This is not even debatable. This is a progressive-run country.

And when I say "run," that doesn't mean they're the majority. They have power wildly beyond their numbers. I would venture that maybe 20% of Americans are really what we would call dyed-in-the-wool progressives who want to socialize things and kind of view the world as Bernie or Patty Murray does. But they have power wildly beyond that 20%. If libertarians had as much power per capita as progressives, my God — where is the libertarian million-person march on Washington? Can you imagine at the Federal Reserve, at the Eccles Building. I'd love to see that day.

But look, your instinct, your impulse is right. The left is authoritarian. The left is in charge. They had a hiccup. They had a roadblock with Donald Trump getting elected. They don't control some statehouses. I get it, people. Don't accuse me of this. But in the long run, they control things. So what we have to do now is understand Trump as a symptom of a pushback against these hundred years of progressive juggernaut. That's why there's a silver lining. And we have to take that silver lining and hopefully do something with it, to say, look, maybe Europe's disintegration isn't inevitable. Maybe they can go back to being healthy countries with healthy currencies. Maybe America's toxic politics isn't inevitable. Maybe we can go back to some slightly better version of federalism. So no, I don't think you're crazy. I think you're right. I think that the left in this country, right now it's worse than the right in the sense that — not ideologically necessarily, but in the sense that they've got the power.

WOODS: It's interesting, when I wanted to look up a couple of things about the America First Committee, and what I found out interestingly is that because Trump said "America first," now there are websites like *Newsmax* and *Daily Caller* — now, *Daily Caller* does have a variety of voices, but all the same, it's not TomWoods.com. So to see those websites defending the use of the America first slogan, saying, Look at all these harmless people who were in the America First Committee, and they go on to list all of these familiar people: E.E. Cummings and all these people. That wouldn't have happened under George W. Bush or Barack Obama. Anybody mentioning America First would have been driven out of society. But suddenly, since these people want to curry favor, they're actually despite themselves going to do some honest writing. So I thought that was very interesting to see.

DEIST: Yeah, it is amazing. I don't think that they were talking about America First when W. was going into Iraq 15 years ago or whatever. But look, it's a new world and we've got to seize the opportunities where we see them.

WOODS: Well, unfortunately I'm just seeing that the U.S. Defense Secretary has just reassured his I guess British counterpart of the U.S.'s unshakeable commitment to NATO, so — eh, this is what happens when — I think Trump has some okay instincts on

certain things, but because they're not backed by deep learning, they're all over the place, they're unreliable, they change all the time, you don't know which one you're going to get, so, you know, there's more evidence of that.

Well, maybe we should – We've got to talk more. See, you were skeptical about this, but I said, Jeff, I think, at least for my part, I just need to talk this through with somebody, and you were the perfect somebody to talk this through with. I knew you would be. So I appreciate you taking the time to do this with me today. Thanks a lot.

DEIST: Okay, Tom.