
A sea of frothing, swears, often pompous, intolerance

By Tim Black, Spiked Online, 29 August 2015

That extraordinary shift in intolerance is something all liberals, like me, should be worried about. Gay marriage is not a liberal issue; it has a deeply illiberal streak.'

So said *spiked's* editor Brendan O'Neill when he appeared on Australia's leading political discussion show *Q&A* last week. He didn't need to provide an example of this illiberal streak. His fellow panellists proceeded to do that for him. How else to describe the response of Labor Senator Sam Dastyari to the claim of anti-gay-marriage campaigner Katy Faust that, in America, her home country, '[opponents of gay marriage] felt like they could not speak up': 'The politician in me tells me that I should be saying that while I disagree with your views, I wholeheartedly respect them but I find that very hard... This American evangelical claptrap is the last thing we need in the debate.' He didn't argue with her. He didn't tolerate her beliefs. He dismissed them. And he called for their expulsion from public debate.

The clash over gay marriage

The clash over gay marriage, and O'Neill's contention that its advocacy is fuelled by something profoundly intolerant, certainly caused a stir, with the [Australian](#), [ABC News](#) and the [Daily Mail](#), among others, all reporting on it.

But Dastyari's attack on Faust, his bald suggestion that some people, some views, do not deserve to be heard, merely reflected the wider political- and media-class response to the oh-so-shocking deviations from the 'gay marriage is great' script. The [Sydney Morning Herald](#), for instance, called Faust and O'Neill 'the tin-foil hat brigade', as if questioning gay marriage is akin to the belief that The Communists are using radio waves to control our brains. And O'Neill himself was waved away, with barely a nod to what he actually said, as 'a defender of the heterosexual sponge industry'. The *SMH* piece went on: 'O'Neill, a British writer whose ability to get on your nerves is so pronounced that mosquitoes must find him annoying... like being taken hostage by an opinionated dentist... schtick... prancing shock value... ability to talk under water... he had a lesson for the ladies... a pat on the head only implied...' As columnist Andrew Bolt said: 'That's not a review. It's not an argument. It's just a great blast of abuse to drown out an opposing view.'

The doubt-free complacency of the so-called progressives

Elsewhere, the [Guardian](#) said O'Neill was 'playing the contrarian'. Because no one could seriously be criticising gay marriage, could they? Such a comment said nothing about O'Neill,

who, as *spiked* readers will know, is passionately serious in his politics. But the doubt-free complacency of the so-called progressive set simply cannot imagine anyone wanting to dissent from their views. Such is the blindness of the smug.

Their views ought to be silenced

Twitter, the official echo chamber for progressive intolerance, was likewise predictably outraged. ‘Brendan O’Neill – just another extremist that would be better keeping his mouth shut’, read one tweet. ‘The sooner we [send] Brendan O’Neill and Katy Faust packing out of our country the better’, read another. Tweeters’ language ranged from the pulpit to the gutter, but the sentiment was the same: people who criticise gay marriage should be shut up, excommunicated, booted out. Their views ought to be unsayable, their beliefs heretical, their arguments silenced.

Some commentators did notice what O’Neill called this ‘illiberal streak’ to the gay-marriage debate. At the *Sunshine Coast Daily*, one opined, ‘the intolerance shown by those supporting marriage equality towards those with a contrary view is often uglier than the prejudice they protest’. At the *Australian Financial Review* another *remarked*, ‘when did we become such a nation of oversensitive, reactive whingers?’. Defending O’Neill and other commentators who have got into trouble in Oz recently, she said: ‘How beige our culture would be without the scandal-chasers and the shock-jocks and the cads.’ But these commentators were islands of reasonableness in a sea of frothing, swears, often pompous, intolerance.

This reaction is deeply troubling

What this reaction to a contrary opinion on gay marriage captures is deeply troubling: a militant conformism. The parameters of public debate, the areas in which ideas and opinions can do battle, are shrinking before our eyes. A few years ago, arguing that the institution of marriage is a heterosexual institution would have been considered an unremarkable, and perfectly legitimate, view. But now this view is being pushed beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, of what is appropriate. To defend traditional marriage today is to ask for the tweet-happy to brand ‘bigot’ across your face, turn you into a mocking meme, or just shame you back under the supposed rock from whence you crawled. Criticism of gay marriage is called hateful, discriminatory, backward. In the garb of progress, a virulent illiberalism is taking over public life, delineating what views are permissible and what views are not, what views aid the progressive cause, and what views are to be silenced.

‘Purge the bigots’

Australia is not a trailblazer here. Throughout the Western world, the drive to institutionalise gay marriage has been shot through with authoritarianism. In France two years ago, thousands of protesters against gay marriage were *dispersed* by tear-gas-deploying riot police. In

America, opposition to gay marriage often prompts a public ‘outing’, vilification, and sometimes job loss, as Mozilla’s co-founder Brendan Eich found to his cost in April last year – ‘purge the bigots’, [urged one commentator](#). And in the UK, as [Tim Farron](#), the new Lib Dem leader, and Christian, discovered, supporting gay marriage is a passport into polite political society, one which is withheld until you affirm your loyalty to the rainbow flag.

Nor is gay marriage the only issue around which strict orthodoxies are calcifying. Climate change, multiculturalism and feminism are all issues on which there is only one correct view. To be sceptical of the impact of climate change, or to challenge the censoriousness of feminism, is to incur the wrath of the right-thinking. Not that critics of the new orthodoxies are challenged on their views. Rather, they are branded – as deniers, as misogynists, indeed, as bigots. By their labels, they shall be known – and shamed.

Colonisation by an elite strata of society

As *spiked*’s editor himself put it in the [Australian](#): ‘The response to *Q&A* shows that gay marriage is not a liberal issue. Rather, what we have here is the further colonisation of public life by an elite strata of society – the chattering class – and the vigorous expulsion of all those who do not genuflect to their orthodoxies.’ The right-thinking and progressive might not realise it yet, but they are at the vanguard of a new Dark Ages.

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