

## 21st-century Left waging new war on free speech

By Jennifer Oriel, The Australian, 15 August 2015

Free speech was forged as a right through centuries of bloody wars. Western history brims with the names of martyrs who sacrificed their lives so the children of enlightenment — you and I — would be liberated from the yoke of censors to discern the truth and state it openly. The 21st-century Left is waging new war on free speech by eroding its legal protections and degrading its cultural value. There is no better way to devalue freedom than to publicly disesteem its most potent defenders. But after years of sustained attacks, illustrator Bill Leak and columnist Andrew Bolt are still standing.

Like the censors of old, Australia's censorial class is brimming with mediocrities who perceive Leak's unfettered talent as a threat to their illegitimate power.

Despite being fattened on taxpayer funds and surrounded by fawning dullards, the PC censors proscribing our right to reason are demonstrably incapable of beating Leak or Bolt in a battle of wits. So they incite the mob to bully freethinkers out of public life. Race Discrimination Commissioner Tim Soutphommasane has urged people to complain about Leak's latest thought crime: a politically incorrect cartoon.

Aren't jihadists waging war on the West? Wasn't Leak forced to move house after Islamists threatened to kill him? Apparently, what concerned the Australian Human Rights Commission more was the unfolding drama of cartoon capers. After Leak's cartoon was published, grown men got outraged. Caps lock felt the burn all over Twitter. Then the ABC reported on Twitter. Then Twitter reported on the ABC reporting on Twitter. Then right-on dudes tapped out super aggro letters about Leak'n'stuff to 4realz social justice warriors @postcode #2000. OMG. Trigger warning!

Meanwhile, children are being beaten, abused and neglected every day in Australia. And some of them are Aboriginal children neglected by drunken Aboriginal men — the subject of Leak's cartoon. People who neglect and abuse children should be held up for public scrutiny whatever their skin colour, culture or sex. And artists who reveal that abuse should not be censored for offending those offended by truth.

There should be no get-off-scot-free card because you are born female, or black, or haven't migrated from the land of your forebears. None of those facts makes you a better human being than your fellow citizen, or deserving of superior protections and privileges under law.

The idea that made the free world free and the world's most humanising principle is that we are each born free and equal, endowed with reason. Under the regime of minority privileges enshrined in the Racial Discrimination Act, however, we are once again unequal and endowed with emotion. I feel therefore I am has replaced reason in the minority Left rule book. I'm offended therefore you're wrong is the revelation bequeathed by the PC Left.

In a speech last Friday, Tony Abbott conceded that as prime minister, he failed Australia on free speech because his government did not repeal section 18c of the Racial Discrimination Act. The notorious section prohibits speech deemed offensive or insulting by state-designated racial minorities. It was introduced by the Labor Party under Paul Keating. The most infamous 18c case was brought against Bolt. Justice Bromberg's ruling on the Bolt case makes for fascinating reading. In particular, the broadening of the legal definition of race to include religious groups deserves more critical review.

Soutphommasane recently produced his own interpretation of race and religion in an article on racism: "Some believe something is only truly racist if it involves a belief in racial superiority ... Anti-Muslim hostility, meanwhile, is frequently excused on the grounds that 'Islam is not a race' ... As for Islam not being a race? That's a clever trick — one that ignores how anti-Muslim feeling can involve a mingling of ideas about race, culture and religion."

I have never read a more confused analysis of racism. But there is a much clearer pattern of persecution emerging in Australia. And it seems not to trouble human rights commissioners, the Press Council, or other taxpayer-funded organisations such as the ABC. It is the persecution of Australian artists and writers by Islamists.

In 2015, Leak was forced to move house after Islamists threatened to kill him because he drew a cartoon featuring Mohammed in response to the jihadist slaughter of Charlie Hebdo artists. A year and a half later in a safer house, there are five emergency alert cards affixed permanently to his computer in case jihadists find their way to him. How many of the outraged Twits and commissioners attacking Leak put their lives on the line each day in defence of free expression?

In 2015, a Muslim also threatened the life of Bolt. In 2016, there has been another jihadist threat on his life and this time, he had to move his family from their home while police investigated.

Where is the outrage from the ABC, Human Rights Commission and Press Council and about Islamists threatening to kill our artists and writers? Or is free speech only protected in Australia if it's left wing?

Liberal senators who champion free speech have joined with Derryn Hinch and Pauline Hanson in a renewed push to amend or repeal s18c. In response, the minority Left and Labor Party have reverted to the strategy that thwarted the Abbott government's attempt to restore free speech. Opposition legal affairs spokesman Mark Dreyfus has suggested that critics of 18c support "race hate speech". Dreyfus appointed Soutphommasane to the Human Rights Commission in 2013.

The coming battle over free speech and the Racial Discrimination Act will test the Liberal coalition's commitment to freedom. This time, however, the tactic of using race as a political tool to browbeat dissenters into submission is well known.

We need a more muscular liberalism to defeat PC censors, their culture of codified bigotry and their determination to destroy the hard-won freedoms that distinguish the West from the rest. We will not let another freethinker fall while 18c stands.