

Free speech inimical to Left's stifling orthodoxies

By Janet Albrechtsen, *The Australian*, 21 September 2016

Perhaps it was the delirium of pneumonia that allowed Hillary Clinton to speak so freely, putting half of Donald Trump's supporters in what she called the "basket of deplorables". Like the *in vino veritas* that sets in after a few drinks, Clinton's honesty was refreshing.

They are "racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic — you name it", said Clinton of the Deplorables. In one fell swoop the unplugged Democratic presidential candidate lifted the lid on the neo-fascist Left.

Clinton's moment of ill-discipline reduced the fraud of so-called progressive politics to a simple illiberal equation: if you disagree with me on race matters, you are a racist. If you disagree with me over lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex politics, you are a homophobe. Disagree with my position on Islam, you are an Islamophobe. If you disagree with me on immigration, you are a xenophobe. Rather than engaging in debate, too many on the Left would rather portray disagreement on totemic issues as grounds for a mental disorder with the sole aim of shutting down any challenge to leftist orthodoxy.

The same politics of deriding deplorables is endemic in Australia, especially in the same-sex marriage debate. The Greens and LGBTI activists claim that allowing Australians to decide whether marriage should be redefined would fuel harmful hate speech from same-sex marriage opponents. Worse, the leaders of Australia's alternative government succumbed to the lowest of low-rent politics. A plebiscite would lead to suicides, Bill Shorten said. Deputy leader Tanya Plibersek used a young boy named Eddie, the son of a same-sex couple, for political purposes. The aim is clear: shut down debate about same-sex marriage. Agree or shut up is the staple of neo-fascists. Never mind that we are debating an institution, not the sexuality of individuals.

Malcolm Turnbull exposed Labor's thought police during question time last Wednesday. "Was Julia Gillard a homophobe when she opposed same-sex marriage? Was Penny Wong a homophobe when she opposed same-sex marriage? Of course not. The reality is, if people who opposed same-sex marriage then are not homophobes, then they are not homophobes now. The Labor Party has to stop preaching this hatred," the Prime Minister said.

Alas, same-sex marriage activists chose hatred last Friday when they learnt that Christian groups planned to meet at the Mercure Sydney Airport hotel to prepare for the no campaign. The threats of violence, feral social media posts, including "are your children safe at Mercure" and nasty phone calls to staff showed the disdain for debate among same-sex marriage activists. Hotel management cancelled the event to protect staff. Did left-wingers in favour of same-sex marriage condemn the hate-filled campaign from their own side? No.

Whatever you may say about rigid Christian doctrinal teaching, the churches understand they operate in a liberal democracy where the marketplace of ideas will necessarily challenge their beliefs. Not so the gay-marriage zealots whose fanaticism seeks to suppress open debate and reason.

The critical question is why have so many on the Left taken this illiberal path? Whereas radical leftists in the 1960s were at the vanguard of libertarianism, challenging oppressive customs and canons, too many are now enforcers of their own stifling orthodoxies. The end of liberalism for many on the Left started more than 40 years ago when, by embracing identity politics, they untethered human rights from classical notions of freedom. Sex, sexuality, race and other forms

of personal identification trumped Enlightenment freedoms and the very notion of universal, libertarian rights.

Soon enough, identity politics fuelled victimhood claims in a confected marketplace of outrage with feelings now the measurement of human rights. The right not to be offended, not to have one's feelings hurt, marked the downward spiral of the liberal Left. Instead, a paternalistic Left set itself up as the arbiter of rights and freedoms based on repressive adherence to its feelings-based moral code rather than the universal rights of mankind.

There are few more defining moments in the Left's long, illiberal demise than its response when Muslim fundamentalists slapped a fatwa on Salman Rushdie for writing *The Satanic Verses*, demanding his death, burning his novel and marching in London to suppress words.

By choosing silence at this pivotal moment, left-wing elites sided with Muslim fundamentalists who understood that free speech threatened their grip on power.

Now it's the same with the Western Left. They understand that free speech is the enemy of their illiberal, stifling orthodoxies. It explains why so many on the Left refuse to countenance any change to section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act, even while three students from the Queensland University of Technology are dragged through a three-year legal rigmarole of racial discrimination claims for posting innocuous comments on Facebook. The silence from most on the Left attests to the neo-fascist transformation of their politics. To speak up would expose the illiberal project that the Left has undertaken for four decades.

Those who call out the Left's dangerous regression deserve kudos. British writer Nick Cohen marched against Margaret Thatcher and denounced New Labour's embrace of corporate capitalism. Cohen tendered his resignation from the Left a year ago: "Slowly, too slowly, I am ashamed to say, I began to notice that left-wing politics had turned rancid."

In Australia, Guy Rundle recently lamented the Left's enthusiasm for the ever-encroaching state and how the aim of anti-discrimination laws "is to make the censor 'go inside', so that you ultimately second-guess your own impulse to challenge, to express, to be outrageous or genuinely on the edge".

At the weekend, former minister in the Hawke and Keating governments Peter Baldwin traced the sad demise of the Left from a rational movement committed to equality of people, regardless of race, gender and class, to one of moral depravity where so-called progressive intellectuals denounce Ayaan Hirsi Ali as an "Enlightenment fundamentalist". Hirsi Ali was born a Muslim, was subjected to female genital mutilation and escaped an arranged marriage. Shouldn't we pay tribute to a woman who chooses Western freedoms over Islamic restraints?

We need more people like Baldwin who are honest about the Left's conversion into loathers of freedom. Half-hearted analyses don't cut it. When former NSW Labor premier Bob Carr scolded members of the Left for intolerance in the free speech debate, he refused to acknowledge that section 18C cements intolerance in our polity. It's like saying you support democratic nations but not the sole beacon of democracy in the Middle East, Israel. It makes no sense.

Equally absurd, the Greens can walk out on Pauline Hanson but to denounce a duly elected senator as having no place in a democracy is more offensive than anything Hanson says. It is the antithesis of democracy. We've tiptoed around calling out the neo-fascist mindset of many on the Left for too long. What is more deplorably neo-fascist: the clumsy words of the often

ill-informed Hanson who believes in free speech or the slippery sorts on the illiberal Left who cannot stomach open debate?

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