

## Australia's thought police are destroying freedom of speech

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First the defenders of 18C came for Andrew Bolt. As Bolt was widely portrayed as a right-winger, too polemical to be taken seriously, people turned their eyes away and preferred not to take a stand. Heaven forbid, the man wrote for a tabloid after all. And hadn't the judge in his case said that he didn't like Bolt's tone? So not enough people did anything to push the politicians and our egregious hate speech law stayed on the statute books.

Then they came for some law students at the Queensland University of Technology. Forced out of an empty computer room for not having any indigenous ancestry (or for not self-identifying as such), the 18C brigade went after these students for comments such as "they're fighting segregation with segregation". That's it.

That's what gets our Human Rights Commission into action and brings the whole force of a multi-million-dollar bureaucracy and the edifice of the law down on a few uni students.

Some of them choose to pay \$5000 just to make the whole thing go away, so afraid of being labelled racists are they. Others choose to fight this patent injustice, even though they're being sued for hundreds of thousands of dollars. This is ruining their lives, and even an ultimate victory in the courts is a loss. The process is the punishment, as author Mark Steyn endlessly reminds us.

Yet still most people look the other way. The politicians, too, turn a blind eye. Heck the Liberals, the party supposedly with John Stuart Mill in its DNA, can't even bring themselves to indemnify the QUT students' costs, as the Attorney-General could do any time he wishes. This is the political party that has gone from wanting to repeal this awful law to saying it's too busy and not lifting a finger to support these students.

Can't even be bothered to try to change the law. No votes in it, they must figure. Certainly not a single cabinet minister stepped down in protest when the party did its U-turn and opted not to try to amend section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act. Again, not enough people spoke out and so our "hate speech" law stayed in place.

Now the speech-stifling zealots are using 18C to come after (wait for it) a prominent cartoonist who works for this country's pre-eminent daily newspaper. I know, it sounds like something out of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or something that would happen in Russia, not in one of the leading and oldest democracies.

You might think the millions who emoted "Je suis Charlie" for some French cartoonists might summon up the gumption to yell "Je suis Bill Leak" for a man who simply drew a cartoon of the plight of Aboriginal children with one Aboriginal ne'er-do-well and one Aboriginal policeman. No, "that offends me," cried the zealots as they invoked 18C and brought Leak under the aegis of this abomination of a law.

Of course, before that happened the HRC's Race Discrimination Commissioner, Tim Soutphommasane, had gone on Facebook more or less urging people to make an 18C complaint.

Surprise, surprise, when one did the HRC accepted the complaint and is proceeding to conciliation. And did you know that Soutphommasane joined the Labor Party at 15 and worked at one time for Bob Carr (speechwriter) and then Kevin Rudd (research officer) before being appointed to the HRC for five years by Labor just before Abbott won office in 2013? (I mention that, you understand, not to offend or insult the good commissar, nor with any sort of tone Justice Bromberg might dislike, but simply to lay the facts on the table.)

Soutphommasane used to write the Ask the Philosopher column in this very newspaper, so I have a question for him. How is anyone supposed to take the man who effectively solicits complaints remotely seriously as an impartial conciliator or arbiter in all of this?

Since the departure of Tim Wilson I don't see a single human rights commissioner who seems to care at all for freedom; they are much of a muchness with the same sort of uniform outlook of the international law brigade, as I would characterise it.

And that includes Wilson's replacement, who unbelievably was appointed by our Liberal Attorney-General George Brandis. You'd be hard-pressed to say that Brandis has been a stalwart in the service of free speech. Or former prime minister Tomy Abbott. Or incumbent Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

So now that the thought police have disgracefully come for cartoonist Leak, are enough people going to stand up and fight for the core Western liberal value of free speech, or not? Because now is the time, before it's too late.

This abomination of a law has to be repealed, as was Canada's equivalent national hate speech law only a couple of years ago, and without the slightest trace of an effect on their multicultural liberal society.

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