

Totalitarian-minded citizens challenge our freedom of speech

By Stephen Chavura, The Australian, 6 April 2017

What's the difference between a repressive totalitarian state and a state with liberal democratic laws whose citizens do not respect the freedoms that such laws guarantee? Nothing.

A country can have the most liberal freedom of speech and association laws in the world, but if its citizens are not animated by the spirit of the laws, if they do not believe in them, then these laws are a dead letter.

This is nicely shown in the attempt by Syed Murtaza Hussain, of the Council for the Prevention of Islamophobia Inc, to intimidate Festival Hall in Melbourne into cancelling its booking to host [anti-Islamist speaker and author Ayaan Hirsi Ali this week](#). Hussain threatened Festival Hall that he would disrupt the evening with 5000 protesters.

Hirsi Ali has not engaged in any incitement to violence. She has not engaged in obscene abuse. She has not tried to incite anyone to hatred. Yet there are citizens in Australia — 5000 in Melbourne, according to Hussain — who would thumb their noses at our liberal democracy and try to prevent her from enjoying her right to speak freely.

And that's the distinction on which we need to be clear: between the right to freedom and the ability to enjoy that right. Only politicians can curtail our rights to freedom as embodied in our laws. Yet our fellow citizens can make sure that those rights are more costly to enjoy — so costly that we cannot afford to enjoy them.

That's precisely what is happening in Australia with Hirsi Ali's aborted speaking tour, not to mention pro-traditional marriage conferences across the past 18 months where citizens have tried to intimidate venues into cancelling contracts to host events.

Yes, the right to freedom of speech still exists, but the cost has become too high for speech that falls foul of Muslim and LGBTI identity politics.

This is one of the dangers facing freedom of speech and association in Australia.

Sure, we have section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act and its vague threats against "offensive", "insulting" and "humiliating" speech.

But 18C is merely a symbol of civic decay — a decay brought on by the repressive tolerance of human rights discourse in liberal democracies and thoughtless immigration laws creating communities with a strongly illiberal dynamic.

Human rights discourse is fine within the context of countries with flagrant disregard for human rights. It is sorely needed in African countries, most of the Middle East and much of Asia. But human rights advocates in Australia clearly have found themselves with next to nothing to do. Scrambling for some justification for their existence (and ridiculously high wages) they start human rights ambulance chasing.

Take, for example, Tim Soutphommasane, the Race Discrimination Commissioner, who drummed up business by tacitly encouraging Australians to lodge complaints against the late Bill Leak for his cartoon on troubled indigenous communities.

Now we have Labor MP Anne Aly seeking to widen 18C's net to include anti-Islamic speech.

Similar things can be said against some LGBTI-rights activists who seek to increase the cost of their opponents' freedom of speech and association through trying to imperil their livelihoods by haranguing their employers regarding their extra-vocational associations.

What good are freedom of speech and association laws when our own citizens seek to make them too costly, or inconvenient, or too unsafe to enjoy?

Hirsi Ali's cancelled tour also raises the spectre of an Islamist threat to freedom of speech in Australia. Why would Hussain, an Islamic activist, tell a venue he would mobilise 5000 people on the night of her presentation? To intimidate.

Hussain's actions were not against the law, but they were against the spirit of our laws.

Clearly the spirit of freedom that historically animates Australia's laws — indeed, the West's laws — is increasingly at odds with the spirit of forced conformity that animates the hearts of many human rights activists and Islamic spokespeople.

As the cancellation of Hirsi Ali's tour shows, the most anti-totalitarian laws in the world are helpless against citizens with totalitarian hearts.

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Inside every Progressive there is a totalitarian screaming to get out, Quote by David Horowitz

I think there is a need to continually point out to the so-called Progressives that they are actually debasing democracy.

They want us to become like the other despot nations of the world like Russia, China and North Korea together with nearly every nation in Africa.

If the so-called Progressives want that type of society I suggest they go and live there for a while.

It would cure them pretty quickly and then they would appreciate what we have in Australia.