

Australia's Victoria State goes 1984

By Janet Albrechtsen, *The Australian*, 11 August 2017

"We're destroying words — scores of them, hundreds of them, every day. We're cutting the language down to the bone ..."

"Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it."

My son is studying George Orwell and we chatted about *Nineteen Eighty-Four* over breakfast this week. If he chooses to look, this book is jumping to life all around him. Books are cleansed of words that must not be said. Books by Enid Blyton, mind you. And Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, too.

Speaking at university has become dangerous if you don't repeat orthodox thinking. Comics have given up playing to snowflake student audiences. Words such as sexual assault and sexual harassment are being defined down to include the telling of a bad joke. At his school, boys were told not to use the word moist because it could offend girls. The cleansing of language and ideas has become disturbingly quotidian.

And this week's live-streaming of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* comes to us from Australia's biggest social laboratory where the Andrews Labor government has a tighter grip on thought crimes than on it does on marauding South Sudanese gangs. On Thursday, Victorian Minister for Transport (and censorship) Jacinta Allan banned Sky News from television screens at Metro Trains stations because one host conducted one interview with far-right ratbag Blair Cottrell last Sunday. Sky News apologised and leading Sky names such as David Speers rightly condemned giving a platform to a moron who likes Hitler. But the Labor government banned an entire news organisation so that train commuters "can see something they may be a bit more comfortable with", to quote Allan, who maybe hasn't spent much time perusing her portfolio platforms. The Cottrell interview was not part of the Sky News feed that plays at train station screens.

Allan has snookered herself with her hysterical over-reaction. The Transport Minister can't switch platform TVs to an ABC news feed or the Seven Network or Ten because all of them have aired or tried to air Cottrell. Perhaps a 24-hour stream of *E! News* and Kimmy K will keep commuters "comfortable". When the state decides to censor for comfortable ideas, we have reached a deeper level of trouble for our liberty.

Victoria's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* moment a week earlier involved the state's Department of Health and Human Services telling public servants what pronouns to use, with the first Wednesday of each month set aside as "They Day".

A video for public servants made by public servants features enforcement officer Naomi Shimoda and others talking about the need for inclusive gender-neutral pronouns. It allows people to "self-define" and to "make space so their pronouns are legitimate and respected."

Some will say that people should be able to choose whatever pronoun they want and that it is only polite that others respect that choice. Others will say "blah, blah, blah" and wave the

kerfuffle away as just another episode of nutty political correctness by busybody social activists. The sceptics know to be beware of the blah, blah, blah because the battle over gender-neutral pronouns in other countries is a hint of where we may be headed. Not for nothing, the self-appointed pronoun police behind the “They Day” video included an enforcement officer. Silly-sounding nonsense has a habit of attracting enforcers, be they vigilante-style citizens or bureaucrats and legislators, who tell us what we are allowed to say, read, watch, even laugh at. And inevitably, what we are allowed to think. It is the death of liberty by a thousand cuts.

Language police in the ACT Labor caucus want to do away with references to Mr, Miss, Mrs or Ms in the ACT parliament. No more Madam Speaker. And it is Member Smith instead of Mr Smith. The Bolsheviks wanted to do away with gender too, so why not just call him Comrade Smith, source some bleak-coloured Bolshevik uniforms and declare victory?

Labor’s proposals are not about respecting diversity. This is an agenda to force the same grey and genderless linguistic uniform on everyone. Cleansing gender from pronouns is about killing difference. Being polite is one thing; but political correctness moved beyond civility long ago, if that was ever the aim. When the cleansing of language is backed by directives, regulations or laws, it compels us to speak in one particular way. By stopping us from speaking freely, the aim is to stop us thinking freely. And that is antithetical to freedom in a liberal society.

An obscure Canadian psychologist became a cultural rock star because he explained, in a calm and reasoned manner, why he would not be forced to use speech prescribed by the state. Nor would he stop using words proscribed by the state. Less than two years ago, Jordan Peterson took a stand against Canada’s proposed Bill C-16, which effectively compels the use of gender-neutral pronouns by adding legal protection to “gender identity” and “gender expression”.

Peterson was on to something long before the rest of us. Within six months of the bill becoming law, Lindsay Shepherd, a teaching assistant at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, was called into a university administrator’s office and condemned by professors for showing a clip that was “threatening” and “transphobic”. Her professorial accusers said it created a “toxic climate” for students and was the equivalent of “neutrally playing a speech by Hitler”. She was accused of breaching C-16 laws. Shepherd’s crime was to show her students — during a tutorial on how language affects society — a televised debate between two people with different views about gender and pronouns. One of the speakers was Peterson.

We know the details because a teary Shepherd recorded the meeting, which could be slotted seamlessly into chapter 5 of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* just before Winston discusses with Syme, a specialist in Newspeak, how the dictionary of approved language is progressing. C-16 has weaponised gender-neutral pronouns in the hands of human rights bureaucrats and complainants, and that is a chilling threat to freedom.

Ten years ago, the Alberta Human Rights Commission investigated a complaint brought against Ezra Levant for publishing the Danish cartoons of the prophet Mohammed. The complaint was dropped, but not before a bureaucrat questioned Levant about his intention in publishing the cartoons. The interrogation reminded Levant of Hannah Arendt’s “banality of evil”.

“No six-foot brown shirt here, no police cell at midnight,” he wrote. “Just Shirlene McGovern, an amiable enough bureaucrat, casually asking me about my political thoughts, on behalf of

the government of Alberta. And she'll write up a report about it, and recommend that the government do this or that to me ... I had half-expected a combative, missionary-style interrogator. I found, instead, a limp clerk who was just punching the clock ... In a way, that's more terrifying."

O Canada! How it has made a mockery of being "The True North, strong and free". A free society is curtailed by stealth when out-of-sight bureaucrats investigate the free expression of words, ideas and cartoons. And freedom lost is not easily reinstated. An Australian law compelling us to use certain pronouns may not be far off because we have followed Canada before. We picked up Canada's gift to the world, multiculturalism. And just as the Canadian Human Rights Commission has gone awry, accused by founder Alan Borovoy for falling into disrepute, our own Australian Human Rights Commission has wrecked its reputation, too. When was the last time the AHRC focused on core human rights such as free speech or property rights? Instead, it is a bloated bureaucracy whose enforcers protect hurt feelings, not human rights.

And dob-in-a-dissident was sanctioned when Race Commissar — oops, Commissioner — Tim Soutphommasane touted for business when *The Australian's* Bill Leak drew a cartoon that threw into sharp relief the complex issues of individual responsibility and the dismal plight of indigenous children. Yet Soutphommasane had nothing to say about a dance performance in Melbourne this year where white people were told to wait in the lobby while the performance began inside the theatre. His departure is a blessing for anyone committed to genuine human rights.

The AHRC's wretched handling of complaints against three Queensland University of Technology students who posted on Facebook about the absurdity of racial segregation only confirmed its role as an anti-human rights bureaucracy. The career epitaph of former commission boss Gillian Triggs should read: "Sadly you can say what you like around the kitchen table at home."

Examples abound of bureaucracies that have run amok when armed with social engineering laws that were once seen as innocuous nonsense. Applauding the recent decision of the US to pull out of the UN Human Rights Council, Liberal MP Julian Leeser has pointed out that this council is not some harmless bureaucracy.

Delivering the 2018 B'nai B'rith Human Rights Address, Leeser said that human rights had often been hijacked and "in the (UN) Human Rights Council we see a blatant attempt by those who oppose liberal democratic ideals to commandeer the apparatus of human rights so that they might hide and obstruct its abuses".

"We read Orwell as a warning; they read Orwell as a textbook," he said. The young MP then took aim at the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, established by Kevin Rudd's Labor government. Leeser, who has served on the committee for two years, called for its abolition on the grounds that it is not really a committee of the parliament.

"It is a bureaucracy that has appropriated the name of the parliament. The committee is about bureaucrats judging parliament, rather than the parliament judging human rights." And just about every report attacks the government's legislative agenda "in the form of rehashed talking points from left-wing and social justice groups that have no connection to 'real' human rights".

In 1994, before he became prime minister, John Howard warned about the rise of cultural McCarthyism in this country. Talk about mission creep. Who could have foreseen their reach and influence? Short of securing legislative wins, social engineers understand that getting, holding and extending their power through unelected bureaucracies is critical to the pursuit of creating public-free zones where real power vests, far away from prying democratic processes. No one knows how the current batch of social experiments will end. But history shows that something that sounds harmless, like a friendly video about gender-neutral pronouns put out by bureaucrats, can end up curtailing our liberty.