

Mr Nicholas Robinson
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7th July 2023

Director, Governance Sector
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication and the Arts
GPO Box 594
Canberra WA 2601

Dear Sir / Madam

Reference: Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023

I am writing to oppose the introduction of this proposed bill into Australian law and to provide the ACMA with powers to “develop a code of practice covering measures to combat misinformation and disinformation on digital platforms, which the ACMA could register and enforce.”

Throughout all of recorded human history the desire by authoritarian governments and political systems such as Communism to silence the voices of those governed is well documented. It is a fundamental tenant of democratic systems to encourage the expression of free speech, even if such speech is considered distasteful by some.

My great grandfather Brigadier General Duncan John Glasfurd fought in multiple wars, including commanding at Gallipoli, and gave his life and the life of his son in defending Australia to give the right to for all to live in a society free of oppression.

It is with utmost horror I see the current labour government seeking to impose Communist ideals in Australia, following in the footsteps of Stalin, Hitler and Xi Jinping’s dystopian nightmare of surveillance, social credit systems and tracking.

The restriction of discourse to that which “approved” does not and never will result in the utopian ideals of equality and freedom. Human nature is, by design, flawed. No amount of legislation will ever result in voluntary change in human behaviour to the better. Such change can only be wrought by the use of open and frank discourse, where those of dissenting views have the opportunity to observe, reflect and respond to the “other”.

In every study done on the interactions of people on mainstream social media platforms, such as Facebook, show that they create echo chambers and information silos where people of similar worldview congregate and reinforce their own views. Only on platforms where free speech is permitted is it observed that differing viewpoints are considered. (Cinelli, 2021)

Very trendy newspeak labels professing to “combat misinformation and disinformation on digital platforms” are at best Orwellian, especially when backed up with threat of violence from the state in the form of penalties of up to \$2.75 million for corporations, and \$0.55 million against individuals.

The incredibly vague wording “misinformation or disinformation that meets a threshold of being likely to cause or contribute to serious harm” in the act is an open invitation to those in positions of political or executive power, who are so weak minded as to believe that legislating “niceness” will make it so, to enforce their beliefs on others via the threat of financial violence against them. I would

state that such persons are so severely deluded that it would be safer to remove them from any position where they can do any further damage.

In this imaginary universe of pure equality and freedom, who exactly gets to say what is mis or dis information, and what is likely to cause serious harm? Many times, in human history something that was stated as being fact by those in power has been proven incorrect. But at the time with all dissent being crushed, this led to the most unimaginable atrocities. The presence of WMD's in Iraqi being used to authorise the invasion of that country, the German parliament (Reichstag) building being burned down and the Nazi party using it to gain power, to same two examples I can think of immediately.

Without the right to free speech, there can never be freedom. Without free speech the possibility to obstruct tyranny before loss of life, property and happiness occurs is assured to be difficult or even impossible.

Restrictions as to what a person may view or hear unless it is government approved (to quote the proposed act "content authorised by the Australian or a State, Territory or Local Government"), or approved by something that meets the vaguely worded "professional news content" or "or "content produced by or for an accredited education provider."

This text smacks of communist ideals on all levels. Australia is not yet communist, but passing this act would move our society significantly in that direction.

Freedom of speech, meaning ideas from across the ideological and political spectrum, must be permitted to be debated with the hope that morally good arguments that always protect the victim, will win the discourse. Orwellian newspeak words like harm, misinformation, and disinformation are being weaponised to shut down critics instead of exposing their views to the light of discourse. Like pus in a boil, lack of exposure will lead in an unpleasant eruption. It is critical that a diverse range of perspectives enables people to critically analyse mainstream narratives, encouraging a healthy scepticism and a deeper understanding of complex societal matters.

It is my will that for these reasons that I wish the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 to be struck from consideration and that a bill enshrining the right to free speech and discourse in Australia is put in its place.

Yours faithfully

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Nicholas Robinson.

Nicholas Robinson

Cinelli, M. (2021, February 23). *The echo chamber effect on social media*. Retrieved from PNAS: <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2023301118>