

I strongly object to the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.

I will quote Mr Bean in the following submission.

The second most precious thing in the world is to express yourself freely.

Insulting shouldn't be criminalised. The clear problem of outlawing of insult is that too many things can be interpreted as such.

Criticism, ridicule, sarcasm, unfavourable comparison, merely stating an alternative point of view from the orthodoxy can easily construed as insult. Because so many things can be interpreted as insult it is hardly surprising that so many things have.

This bill is indicative of a culture that has taken hold of the programmes of successive governments that with the reasonable and well intended ambition to contain obnoxious elements of society has created a society of an extraordinarily authoritarian and controlling nature. It could be called the new intolerance, a new but intense desire to gag uncomfortable voices of dissent. I'm not intolerant say many, I'm just intolerant of intolerance, but you realise quickly that you are replacing one kind of intolerance with another, which doesn't represent any kind of progress at all. The best way to increase society's resistance to insulting or offensive speech is to allow a lot more of it, like childhood diseases, you can better resist those germs by being more exposed to them. President Obama said "laudable efforts to restrict speech can become a tool to silence critics or oppress minorities."

If we want a robust society we need more robust dialogue and that must include the right to insult or to offend. The storms that face Twitter and Facebook have showed how appallingly prickly and intolerant society has become of even the mildest adverse comment. The law should not be aiding and abetting this new intolerance. Free speech can only suffer if the law prevents us from dealing with its consequences.