

As an older Australian who loves my country deeply, the federal government's Misinformation and Disinformation Bill shocked me more than almost any other proposed legislation since I began seriously considering the behaviour of our politicians years ago.

Why is that so? Why did this proposal shock me so greatly?

I note that in the preamble to the invitation for submissions, several issues are presented for our consideration. I do not intend to debate these because they basically beg the question. They make the assumption that if these questions could be satisfactorily answered the Bill could be a plausible and useful piece of legislation. This is not the case because the Bill is fundamentally antipathetic to the principles of democracy and subsequently has no place in a country such as Australia.

Throughout my life I have celebrated the relatively unique nature of Australia as "the land of the free." I have enjoyed freedom as a citizen of this land which is virtually unparalleled in the world. Australians have celebrated the liberty to express their individuality, and in particular the freedom to be outrageous, to say exactly what they think without fear of reprisals. Hence we speak about Australians as "ockers", as "knockers" and "larrikins". This Bill strikes directly at this unique Aussie 'freedom'. It strikes against the very spirit of what it is to be Australian.

More broadly, the Bill attacks the very essence of democracy, where the intention is to allow people, as far as possible, the freedom to think, act, assemble and speak as they choose. This is the BASIC principle of democracy, and this Bill betrays this priority. It works against the fundamental principle of a democratic government, that THE PEOPLE RULE. It says that the government rules, and can arbitrarily curtail our freedoms instead of focusing on preserving them as a TOP PRIORITY. Obviously the exercise of freedom must still come under laws, but the point I make is that this Bill betrays the MOST FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE of democratic government by imposing a crude blanket of censorship over our right to express our ideas.

The second reason why this Bill is so egregious is that it gives the right to decide what is fact and what is "misinformation" to an elite group, who assume that they are the arbiters of truth on whatever issues they select, wherever they wish their viewpoint to prevail. Blind Freddy could tell you that this is a recipe for disaster. Two assumptions are made here that are completely childish: the first is that the 'elites', whoever they may be, are competent to decide what is fact on all these issues, and secondly that human beings are so good that they won't abuse the system to get their own way and their own perks out of it.

The most likely and by far the worst case scenario is that the 'elites' will be dominated by politicians and the rich and powerful. We have only to look at the success of recent federal and state governments in deciding what is 'misinformation' in recent years to know how disastrous this would be. In our world the work of powerful corporate, political and media organisations to promote certain narratives and silence dissenting voices has been rife. It has been revealed recently that over 4000 social media posts were secretly censored by our own then federal government during the height of the Covid 19 pandemic because they expressed views which were deemed to be 'misinformation', but which have subsequently been proved to be factually correct. One post which said that "Covid-19 vaccine does not prevent Covid 19 infection or Covid 19 transmission" was deemed by the Home Affairs Department to have breached Instagram's community guidelines because it was "potentially harmful information" that was "explicitly prohibited" by the program. However the recent publication of Pfizer documents from the time when tests on the vaccine were completed reveal that the company itself made the same comments about the ineffectiveness of the vaccine. Posts about the ineffectiveness of the mask mandates and lockdowns, and the source of the

virus being from the Wuhan Institute, were likewise censored as 'misinformation': now they are considered most likely to be true. State governments have also passed laws denying Australians the right to express concern about gender therapy practices because such thinking is morally bad and is, in effect, based on misinformation about the issue of sexual identity. However, there is an increasing number of people emerging, not just in places overseas like the UK with its Tavistock Institute closure, but also here in our own country, who have undergone sex change surgery and are now seeking legal redress because they see their lives as ruined by the system which encouraged them to do so.

The worst aspect of this is that in today's world of situational ethics, and great scientific controversy over so many issues, when true debate and the preservation of people's freedom to say what they believe is so desperately needed, more perhaps than ever before, the government is seeking to stifle debate. It may seem hackneyed to say that this is how Hitler made his fatal way in Germany, Stalin in Russia and Mao Tse Tung in China, but this does not make it any the less pertinent or true. Self styled arbiters of truth who deny people the freedom to hear alternative views or to speak their views have no place in our land.

The fact is that Australians have a low opinion of the trustworthiness of their politicians overall, and the elites who exercise power along with them. I would not comment except to say that these power brokers are human beings, and anyone who thinks human beings will use such powers as are proposed fairly and wisely, even most of the time, is making a massively optimistic assumption about those who become the arbiters of truth. And furthermore, these arbiters only have to be wrong about one critical issue, as I think we have already seen, to put at risk the welfare of the world we live in.

To be honest, this Bill is so bad that I have to question the motives of those promoting it. It is imperilling the very fabric of the way our precious nation operates, and I oppose it vehemently.

Keith Gillam