

## Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023

This bill must be opposed as undemocratic.

The Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023 seeks to deal with the threat of “Misinformation and disinformation” to “the safety and wellbeing of Australians, as well as our democracy, society and economy.” The bill itself is a threat to free speech and must not be endorsed. Government authority is based on the mandate of the people who elect them. The principle of subsidiarity helps to ensure government is there to serve the people and not for the people to serve the government. The Bill is about greater control of the people by government. While it is claimed that the “Bill includes strong protections for privacy and freedom of speech” It is actually anti-free speech since its aims is to limit what can be said. This is a fundamental flaw in the rationale of the bill and a mistrust of the people. People are inherently good and should be trusted. The Bill implies “code and standard-making powers” be given to those who make those decisions. These powers will be invested in government, but not determined by election. It moves the concept of what is truth from the people to a set of bureaucrats. The Bill does not invest in democracy, but in fact in bureaucracy which fundamentally goes against the freedom of the people.

Let’s take truth itself as an example. Truth is that which accords with reality. But there are many philosophical systems which would deny that, they may claim, “There is no absolute truth”. The problem is that this is a logical contradiction. It asserts this opinion absolutely and so is in logical contradiction with itself. The only logical positions that can be held are “There is absolute truth” or “I don’t know if there is absolute truth.” To hold, “There is no absolute truth” absolutely is untenable, yet relativism practically holds this position which is dominant in our society today. Relativism does not seek truth since there is no absolute truth to be held. Practically it holds to personal opinion which can only be maintained through a power dynamic leading to sectarian power struggles. Truth is lost in this war of words and interest groups. This is the dominant paradigm of the modern world. This bill will weaponize particular groups that hold sway in bureaucracy rather than allowing the people to discover the truth and live in freedom of thought.

Subsidiarity is that larger social structures should serve and foster smaller social structures to make decisions for itself that it is capable of. The people are capable of seeking, living and fostering truth in their own lives. For government to take on this role when relativism is dominant weaponizes interest groups to control through a small group of bureaucrats what should and shouldn’t be thought or believed. This is dystopian. It is based on the lie that people can’t be trusted and are not capable of working out what the truth is for themselves. It prevents the people from having the discussions necessary for those who hold to lies to be convinced of the truth. Let’s take two situations. The Bill empowers government to suppress a lie and the Bill empowers government to suppress a truth.

It might appear good that the Bill will empower the government to suppress a lie. Lies are held by real people with the potential of being convinced that they are wrong. A Bill that forces them to not discuss their opinion, but simply to suppress their opinion publicly means they are not likely to change their opinion and in fact could foster that opinion. If freedom of speech is fostered then through public discourse and discussion they might change their opinion and truth is able to prevail. Legislating truth does not foster truth. Fostering freedom of speech does that and trusting the people to work it out themselves.

There is also the possibility that those making the decisions about what can and can’t be said get it wrong. Where are the checks and balances to that? There are none in this bill. The ultimate check

and balance is the people themselves being able to say what they believe freely. Any bill that limits that, such as this Bill, moves government in the wrong direction and toward a totalitarian government which always ends badly. This Bill must be rejected.