

Submission

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I strongly disagree with the introduction of The Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023.

As an Australian, I have always been very grateful that we have been able to speak freely and debate openly on all matters. We have a history of fairness and have been able to openly disagree with others, including not just people, but companies, processes, and political situations. We have been able to voice our opinion openly, be it privately or publicly, without censorship. It seems that is about to change.

News broadcasts regularly show how censorship and oppression is occurring in other countries, like China, where citizens are not allowed to voice any opinion other than what the government allows. It seems that this legislation is a step in that direction and is simply a way for the government to block information or ideas it does not want made public; a way for the government to silence its opposition.

The Communications Legislation Amendment (Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2023, that the current government would like to introduce will severely curtail the ability of all Australians to speak openly and allow for healthy debate on social media platforms. I fail to see how free speech causes a risk to health and safety.

Misinformation and disinformation is very subjective as has been demonstrated very recently during Covid pandemic. Information given out by our government bodies as being true, has been shown to have been the exact opposite. Despite being told to the contrary, Covid vaccinations did not stop the spread of the disease. We were also told that the virus originated in a market. When information arose to the contrary, it was deemed a "Conspiracy Theory". It was soon proven otherwise. People's Facebook and other social media posts were cancelled because they mentioned ideas and issues that were not supported by the government at the time.

I can't help but wonder who or what organisation is pushing for this legislation, as it seems to be popping its ugly head up in the USA and several other countries. Even banks are starting to carry out this horrendous form of censorship, by cancelling bank accounts of those that disagree with the government script. This was evidenced in Canada, where supporters of a truckers protest had their bank accounts frozen by the government. Several more outspoken social commentators have also experienced this in USA and the UK. Will Australians be next?

This Bill is extremely dangerous to our democracy, which relies on inclusion of differing ideas and the ability of citizens to be free to express their opinions, as it will stop valuable free speech. It will also interrupt the ability of like minded people to connect with each other. It is up to individuals to decide what they choose believe in or not, and being presented with varying ideas allow for individuals to make up their own minds. It is not for the government of the day to decide.

Reading through the ED Bill proposal, I can't help being alarmed with Schedule 1, 21 (1) regarding self incrimination, that states:

"An individual is not excused from giving information or evidence or producing a document or a copy of a document under this Division on the ground that giving the information or evidence or producing the document or copy might tend to incriminate the individual in relation to an offence." This goes against common law in Australia, where the accused has a right to silence.

The cost to the government and social media platforms, of implementing and policing this Bill will be enormous, as will legal costs for enforcement and prosecution. This money could be used for great benefit elsewhere.

I strongly urge that this ED Bill not be supported.

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Sent from my iPad