



(Incorporating Children's Media Watch)

Campaigning for a better media

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LEGISLATIVE CURBS ON PEOPLE WHO TRY TO SHAME, BULLY, HARRASS OR THREATEN TO KILL (ALSO KNOWN AS HATE SPEECH) IS BEING CHECKED (TO SOME SMALL DEGREE) BY THE ON-LINE ANTI-STALKING BILL CRIMES AMENDMENT, CURRENTLY BEFORE OUR PARLIAMENT.

As we all know from observing recent events in the US, the former Capital of the Free World, that its currently being transformed in the image of unelected social media billionaires.

It is not alarmist to signal that so called Free Speech (another name for Hate Speech) whose primary purveyor is unregulated Social Media, is in the process of undermining democracies everywhere.



In this context its important to stress that we don't want unnecessary Government interference in our Media. What this legislation acknowledges, is, however, that the Government plays an indispensable role in Media, and that role is to strengthen and enhance the Democratic discourse and to restrain unlimited online exploitation of the vulnerable and the young.

Surveys by Netsafe, the Broadcasting Standards Authority, Internet NZ, the Law Commission and the University Media Research entities, have all been sounding public alarm with the growth of incidents of Internet harm for some years now. Successive governments and indeed traditional media in this country are sitting on their hands, labouring under the false assumption that Hate Speech is somehow OK because it is evidence of Free Speech.

Understandably, the public is fed up with this, which explains in part the growing migration of Citizen Journalism and ad dollars to the Internet.



In his recently published book *The Future of Democracy*, former Prime Minister Sir Geoffrey Palmer says better techniques need to be devised within Parliament to have meaningful discussions with the public. Public engagement now has a rich and innovative literature. Citizen assemblies should be tried in New Zealand to deal with challenging policy problems, as they have been in Ireland. Phil O'Reilly, a voice for the business community recently wrote (*Sunday Star Times*, 21/10/24) "We need to bring the public more into the game,... then we might all hold our politicians into account more effectively." In similar vein, Max Rashbrooke, a University researcher, wrote (*The Post*, 16/11/24) that "Top down, one-way politics is a 20th Century hangover. We need more opportunities for ordinary people to come together... and play a meaningful part in decision making".

Successive governments and indeed some media are deaf to this. It is convenient for them to listen only to the spokespersons of the various interest groups, like the farming lobby, the trade unions and so on. The Public are elbowed out of their own space put by pollsters, so-called stake-holder groups, so that the former Media Minister Willie Jackson can declare rather petulantly, "We can't listen to every Tom, Dick and Harry".

This attitude is anti-democratic. A major feature on all the networks in the United States is something called "A Town Hall Debate" consisting essentially of a public gathering where the Public gets to air their views about major issues of the day –Let's similarly have the People in this country to be regularly heard on Public media, asking what THEY think on our Public media, especially given the large amounts of the Public's money which goes into Media these days, with the NZ Film Commission, NZ On Air, the B.S.A. et al.

At the moment the only platform for the Public Voice in this country is Social Media, where a sordid mass of misinformation and downright lies prevails, alongside unmitigated violence in the form of shaming, bullying, harassment and threats to kill and maim.

This while, for the most part, the politicians stand idly by, in supposed defence of Free Speech.

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