

You Can't Say That!

Freedom of Speech and the Invisible Muzzle

Contributors

Janet Albrechtsen
James Allan
Thilo Sarrazin
Brendan O'Neill

THE CENTRE FOR
INDEPENDENT
STUDIES

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This collection of essays is based on the speeches presented at
the annual CIS Big Ideas Forum held on 1 August 2011
at the Sydney Masonic Centre.

CIS Occasional Paper 124



2012

Published January 2012
by The Centre for Independent Studies Limited
PO Box 92, St Leonards, NSW, 1590
Email: cis@cis.org.au
Website: www.cis.org.au

Views expressed in the publications of The Centre for Independent Studies are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Centre's staff, advisers, directors, or officers.

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication Data:

You can't say that! : freedom of speech and the invisible muzzle /
Janet Albrechsten ... [et al.].

ISBN: 9781864321630 (pbk.)

CIS occasional papers ; 124.

Freedom of speech.
Political correctness.

Other Authors/Contributors:
Albrechsten, Janet.
Centre for Independent Studies (Australia)

323.443

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Cover design by Ryan Acosta
Copy edited by Mangai Pitchai
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Contributors

Janet Albrechsten

Janet Albrechtsen writes a weekly column for *The Australian*. She has also written for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, the *Australian Financial Review*, *Quadrant*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *Canada's National Post*, *Vancouver Sun*, and the *Calgary Herald*.

After receiving her LLB (Hons) from the University of Adelaide, Janet worked as a solicitor at Freehills in Sydney. After deciding to switch from commerce to academia, she acquired a doctorate in law from the University of Sydney Law School, and also taught there.

Janet became a weekly contributor to *The Australian* in 2002. She was a member of the Foreign Affairs Council from 2004–07. In 2005, she was appointed Director of the Board of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation for a five-year term.

James Allan

James Allan is the Garrick Professor of Law at the University of Queensland. A native-born Canadian, James has practised law in a large Toronto law firm and then at the Bar in London. He has taught law in Hong Kong, New Zealand, Canada and Australia.

He has a doctorate from the University of Hong Kong and degrees from the London School of Economics and the Queen's University, Canada. James was active in the successful efforts to oppose and prevent a national bill of rights in Australia. Indeed, he is delighted to have moved to a country without a national bill of rights. But he laments the enervated state of federalism in this country. James has also published widely on constitutional law and legal and moral philosophy. Allan's latest book is *The Vantage of Law* (2011), a monograph for the Ashgate Applied Legal Philosophy series.

He writes regularly for *The Australian*, *Spectator Australia*, and *Quadrant*.

Brendan O'Neill

As well as being the editor of UK online publication *spiked*, Brendan O'Neill writes on war, terrorism and politics for *spiked*. He is also a regular contributor to the *Christian Science Monitor*.

Brendan has been widely published in the *Spectator*, *The Guardian*, the *New Statesman*, the *Sunday Times*, BBC Online, *Reason* magazine, and *American Prospect*. He also founded the online journalism course at the Surrey Institute of Art and Design in Surrey, England.

Thilo Sarrazin

Thilo Sarrazin studied economics at the University of Bonn. He served in various roles in the Federal Ministries of Labour and of Finance, was undersecretary in the Ministry of Finance in the State of Rheinland-Pfalz, and was board member and CEO in two public companies.

From 2002 to 2009, he was senator of finance in the state of Berlin. There he managed to change the deficit of €5.2 billion (or 25% of the budget) to the first surplus in the post-War history of Berlin. In May 2009, he became a board member of the Deutsche Bundesbank.

Thilo stepped down from this office in September 2010, when his book *Deutschland Schafft Sich Ab (Germany Does Away with Itself)* caused heated public discussion. The book was international success, with 1.3 million copies sold.

Introduction

We are at a strange juncture in the history of Western civilisation. Never before has there been greater freedom of movement, greater freedom of information, greater general prosperity—or greater restrictions on free speech.

Not only are there extreme anti-vilification and hate speech laws—witness the Andrew Bolt court case here in Australia or the Jean-Paul Gautier trial in Paris—but, perhaps far more insidiously, Western society is *self-censoring* its own conversations. There is shock, horror and outrage when a liberal voice dares to express a non-mainstream or controversial opinion, leading at best to self-righteous tut-tutting and moral indignation, or at worst, ostracism if not criminal charges.

Ostensibly a tool for civility and respect, political correctness effectively muzzles the foundation of a free society: open and robust debate in a free exchange of ideas. The Centre for Independent Studies' Annual Big Ideas Forum was held in Sydney on 1 August 2011. The event, titled 'You Can't Say That! Freedom of Speech and the Invisible Muzzle,' brought together four outspoken individuals who were not afraid to break the muzzle of political correctness that is so often cloaked under a guise of fairness, tolerance and inclusiveness.

In his speech, Professor James Allan, constitutional scholar and Garrick Professor of Law at the University of Queensland, analysed political correctness in its many forms, the motives behind it, and the need to fight its insidious reach into our lives and society. Political correctness is making people censor themselves. By curbing freedom of speech and the contest of ideas, political correctness is chipping away at the very foundations of Western civilisation and democratic society.

Dr Thilo Sarrazin, former Director of Bundesbank, became controversial in 2010 for his honest diagnosis of the socio-economic problems facing Germany in his radical book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (*Germany Abolishes Itself*). Dr Sarrazin spoke about the

vilification he faced from the political class and the Left for violating every conceivable strand of political correctness, but he finds hope for Germany in the enormous support from the public for his realistic assessment of his country.

Dr Janet Albrechsten, respected columnist for *The Australian*, believes that the subliminal message of political correctness is seeping into society without us even realising it. Dr Albrechsten posits that the Left's tactics to curb free speech and stifle independent thinking can be challenged only by eternal vigilance.

Brendan O'Neill, journalist and editor of *spiked* online, UK, stringently opposes the hysteria of political correctness. In his speech, he argued for a more confident moral system that can tolerate deviance. While we need to fight the PC lobby, made up of the chattering classes obsessed with language and what they deem offensive ideas, O'Neill also warned liberal critics of political correctness of the dangers of playing the victim card.

We bring together this collection of the four speeches in the hope that you too will speak up about the right to speak freely—however unpopular the ideas being expressed may be.

After all, an invisible muzzle is a muzzle nonetheless.

Meegan Cornforth

Events Manager

The Centre for Independent Studies

December 2011

The All-Pervasive Disease of Political Correctness

James Allan

Let me start by thanking Greg Lindsay and the CIS for inviting me to speak at Big Ideas.

I hope to do three things today. First off, I want to outline what I consider to be the main types of political correctness—the sorts of sins that attract this pejorative label (the PC label is used to cover more than one sin). Second, I want to speculate on the motives for being politically correct in its different guises. Third, I want to tell you why fighting back against political correctness matters.

Type I

The first, and by far the most dangerous, type of political correctness has been defined as follows:

Political correctness refers to the resistance from descriptions of reality because of the way they may be perceived by groups to whom our elites have decided to be hyper-sympathetic.

— Andy McCarthy, US commentator

Certain well-placed elites in society take particular subjects off the table and then limit what is seen to be acceptable to say in polite company. The topics that get taken off the table are ones that involve a hyper-sensitivity to the feelings of particular groups in society. Not all groups. For instance, you can say what you like about Christians or exhibit paintings mocking Christ. But different rules apply to other religions, or at least Islam. What is acceptable there is much more constrained.

This first type of political correctness is about a *group right not to be offended*—but only for a select and favoured few groups, not to everyone and not to all groups. Andrew Bolt gets taken to court for voicing an opinion on *which* Aboriginal individuals ought to receive what amount of affirmative action perks. He gets taken to court because he's hurt the feelings of a small group of Aboriginal people. But none of the supporters of hate speech legislation and court action would dream of supporting a similar court action over 'hurt feelings' of Texans who were outraged by the burning of the US flag. If that sort of American wanted to take people to court because of *his* hurt feelings, I daresay you'd have a different reaction from many of those who are supporting the hurt feelings of the Aborigines in the Bolt case.

In this sort of political correctness, with its corollary of a group right not to be offended, everyone outside the favoured circle has to have a thick skin and take offensive words on the chin. In fact, political correctness can lead to people censoring themselves when it comes to these 'sensitive' groups and matters.

Such political correctness gnaws away at free speech. The only type of free speech that matters is the kind that protects offensive speech, speech that some people and groups find hurtful and offensive. The right to say what everyone wants to hear—the sitting around in circles, holding hands, and singing 'Kumbaya' concept of free speech—is worthless. It's only when speech that offends is free and protected that it has any value to society. And it's precisely that sort of free speech that the first strand of political correctness undermines and constrains.

There are plenty of egregious examples of political correctness restricting speech, often driven by disgraceful hate speech laws.

- Andrew Bolt in Australia
- Mark Steyn and Ezra Levant in Canada (and Guy Earle, the professional stand-up comedian who was taken to court—and successfully fined—for responding to heckling during his act by two lesbians. Apparently in Canada you can't mock lesbians who pay to come to your show and heckle you. I'm tempted to say that's considered too distasteful.)

- Geert Wilders in Holland; Lars Hedegaard in Denmark; Elisabeth Sabaditsch-Wolff in Austria; and so on.

What drives these prosecutions is the perceived insult; usually, the defendant is barred from proving the truth of the statement, as with Mark Steyn. Truth is NOT a defence. [We can only hope a future government in Australia will repeal section 18C of the *Racial Discrimination Act*.]

Type II

The second type of political correctness has to do with regulatory overkill in health and safety rules and an over-obsession with equality.

Think of the over-the-top government regulations in school playgrounds; risk assessment forms for any and all activities that involve even a scintilla of danger; warning signs about the hazards of hot coffee; police directives in the United Kingdom about ‘how to eat your lunch’; a myriad tort law driven idiocies in the United States; and my own experience moving to Australia six years ago from New Zealand: road construction works went from being Kiwi-style with no one directing traffic and three orange cones placed in front of actual jack-hammering workers to what happens here—an Iraq war style army of traffic controllers, temporary lights, closed lanes, onsite IR consultants ...

Then there’s the over-obsession with all things even remotely linked to equality or anti-discrimination. This includes the recent European Court of Justice’s ruling—alas, one binding on the United Kingdom—that teenage girls have to pay the same for car insurance as teenage boys (the facts of life, or at least who drives better, being irrelevant and prompting one critic to note that these judges and lawyers are so infatuated with the concept of anti-discrimination *in the abstract* that they can’t distinguish between Nazis and actuaries).

In fact, this type of political correctness attracts the pejorative label ‘politically correct.’ It’s bad, but not as bad as Type 1.

Type III

The third type of political correctness, which I will call the rise of the humourless gits, or po-faced neo-prudes—Involves people who can't laugh at anything and don't want others to, either. These are the latter-day puritans. We see them in Parliament, in the newspapers, and throughout the ABC. These are today's version of Cromwell's Roundheads.

Let me tell you a brief story, a true story, of something that happened two or three years back at my son's independent school in Brisbane, a good one, and something that could never have happened in far more PC Canada. I had picked up my son from his cricket practice (I don't want to brag, but I reckon I'm the only Canadian alive who can score a cricket game). As we were driving home, my then Year 10 son asked me if I knew what a stereotype was. 'Yes, I think so,' I replied. My son then asked, 'How do you know it's an Asian thief who broke into your house? Because you go home and your homework is done, the dog is missing, and the thief is still trying to back out of the driveway.'

Now if you think about it, that's a pretty good way to introduce a very useful discussion about stereotypes (why they develop, why they've always been around, and how they can be misleading), not least because having teenagers stop and think about why it's funny (and it is) seems better than droning on about latter day Puritanical certitudes from on high. But this would never happen in any school in Canada.

So humour can be a victim of political correctness too. Indeed, it already is. Imagine going to an ABC editorial meeting and mentioning the latest joke about Osama bin Laden—that bars in Queensland are now serving a new drink called 'the Osama': two shots and a splash of water.

From the three main types of political correctness to the various motives for succumbing to it.

Let's start with the speech stifling hyper-sensitivity to particular favoured groups variety, what English comedian Rowan Atkinson (Mr Bean) condemns as the ridiculous right not to be offended, when what is needed is the vastly more important right to offend

(especially in today's Western world where some people seem to regard being offended as their life's work).

I put this down to two main causes, and I emphasise 'main,' not 'sole.'

- First one = poseur moralism (a sort of bumper sticker moralising where you try to exhibit your supposed superior moral sentiments and shut down anyone who wants to say more than what can fit on a bumper sticker)
- Second one = fear

(The second one matters more than people think. Take the Danish cartoon fracas and the spineless response of most media outlets that was driven overwhelmingly by fear. They knew that a small segment of Muslim extremists sometimes delivers on its threats to blow themselves and others, and to commit murderous mayhem. So the newspapers took the path of least resistance. In my view, and I confess to being the product of a state school education in Toronto, the proper response to bullying and threats is an 'in your face,' 'do your worst,' 'go down fighting' rejoinder. In the face of the threats, and because of those threats, every paper that would never have dreamed of publishing those cartoons to begin with ought to have put them on the front page. All the papers. That would have been the end of such threats.

So although a sort of poseur moralism motivates much of Type I PCness, sometimes fear does too.

Meanwhile the Type II over-obsession with personal safety is, I think, partially influenced by a reluctance to undertake hard-nosed cost-benefit analyses. Many seem to believe it's better to dwell in warm, fuzzy moral abstractions like 'personal safety' rather than ask hard questions such as whether it is a good idea to mandate bike helmets. They won't even ask the questions. There's an effete lack of hard-headedness about the world that pretends it can be made danger free and that the costs of trying are never outweighed by other unintended costs.

As for the Type III strand constraining what we can laugh about, I reckon some people are just born puritans and prudes and

humourless Roundheads. And when they see the winds blowing in their direction, they are happy to jump on each and every perceived transgression by all the cavaliers.

Which takes us to why we need to fight all this. The fact that some people oppose the Ground Zero Community Centre, or object to limp-wristed border control policies, or differ over gay marriage, or doubt the wisdom of shutting down a few coal-fired power stations in Australia is NOT because people on one side of such disputes are mentally ill or evil. The demands of political correctness are such that that becomes the default explanation for such disagreements, one side being on the side of the angels with a pipeline to God and the other being uninformed, racist and evil.

So fighting political correctness matters—not just because it involves standing up for free speech but because it values what flows from the vigorous and unimpeded exchange of ideas and points of view, even those you dislike. This sort of free-flowing back-and-forth contest of ideas—where some aren’t ruled inadmissible or beyond the pale in advance—is crucial not only to having a successful democracy and good policymaking (nothing being worse than being surrounded by sycophants who give you only one point of view) but also to making ideas and arguments that can withstand critical attack. In short, the near-on unconstrained contest of ideas of the sort political correctness detests is more likely to deliver us an efficient, productive and democratic society.

Now I could have mentioned the Larry Summers debacle at Harvard, the Top Gear run-in about Mexicans, the fuss about profiling at airports and the pretence that 80-year-old grandmothers pose the same risk as 20-year-old Arab males, Hugh Grant’s calls to censor the tabloids, the foolhardy desire by some to extend privacy entitlements, or the thorough-going and God-awful PCness that pervades our universities.

But I leave those for question time and thank CIS and Greg again for inviting me to speak on political correctness.

The Language of Denial: Freedom of Speech in an Age of Political Correctness

Thilo Sarrazin

Until 2008, I did not concern myself very much with political correctness. In my career as a civil servant, board member, and later on, as a politician, I had a reputation for being outspoken. But that reputation was mostly limited to my professional field and generally accepted.

Everything changed with an interview I gave in September 2009 about the socio-economic problems of Berlin and their roots, and with a book I published in August 2010 under the title *Deutschland schafft sich ab (Germany Abolishes Itself)*.

Its main conclusions are:

- Germany as a nation is doomed by its demography. The low and stable birth rate means that every generation is 35 percent smaller than the one before.
- The brightest people have the fewest children. And for this reason, intellectual capacities and educational achievements in Germany will shrink even faster than the population. This is not a danger in the far future—the process is already in full swing.
- The kind of immigration we have in Germany, mostly from Islamic countries in Africa and the Middle East, does not solve the problems. It aggravates them. Reasons for this are the Islamic cultural background and the poor average educational performance of these groups, which is far below the European average, even in the second and third generation.

These conclusions are of course controversial—as they were intended to be. In matters of society, there is no such thing as an absolute truth. And I am the first to admit this.

I had expected a controversial discussion. But nothing had prepared me for the public storm that broke loose upon the publication of my book. I was accused of advocating biological determinism and labelled a social Darwinist, a racist, and an enemy of the people and social justice.

I survived morally and politically because of the enthusiastic support from large parts of the general public and the new online media. Because of this, the traditional print and broadcast media lost their monopoly of interpretation, and it was plain for everybody to see. Realising this, many politicians started a tactical withdrawal from the debate.

Subsequently, I stepped down as a board member of the Deutsche Bundesbank—but not before I had been formally cleared of all allegations of misconduct.

In the following months, I thought a lot about the controversial reactions to my book. My theory is as follows:

The code of conduct in a society which is not laid down by law changes over time. It is to a large degree implicit and not subject to formal—or even openly discussed—rules. But those members who do not observe the code run the risk of being excluded from ‘the good society.’

Having and expressing the ‘right’ set of opinions about certain scientific, social and political questions is an important part of this code of conduct. Most people want to observe the prevailing code of conduct, but being busy with jobs and families they have no informed opinion of their own on most matters. So they think and believe what the media say they should think and believe. Politicians, on the other hand, read public opinion solely based on media opinions. Most politicians sincerely believe that voters think what the media write or say.

Media are made of people, and media people recruit themselves in a process of self-selection, much as lawyers, doctors or engineers do. Polls show that media people mainly listen to other media people. Endorsed by this self-selection, media people on the whole have a set of opinions that tend to be on the left of mainstream society. I don’t say this is a bad thing, but it partly explains the mindset of political correctness.

Most people shy away from saying or even thinking anything that is perceived to be politically incorrect. So the mechanics of political correctness prevent the expression of dissenting opinions, notwithstanding the formal freedom of speech. It even stops the generation of incorrect thoughts.

The prevailing themes of political correctness are deeply ingrained in the (to some degree unconscious) mindset of the political class and the media. Reflecting on the reaction to my book, I identified 13 themes that constitute the main body of political correctness in Germany.

My book violated every single one of them.

Here is the list of political correctness in Germany. I think it describes the truth, but it takes some irony or humour to fully appreciate the list. The problem lies not in any single item on this list but in their combination and rigid application to political thinking:

1. Inequality is bad, equality is good.
2. Secondary virtues like industriousness, precision and punctuality are of no particular value. Competition is morally questionable (except in sports) because it promotes inequality.
3. The rich should feel guilty. Exception: Rich people who have earned their money as athletes or pop stars.
4. Different conditions of life have nothing to do with people's choices but with the circumstances they are in.
5. All cultures are of equal rank and value. Especially, the values and ways of life of the Christian occident and Western industrialised nations should not enjoy any preference. Those who think differently are provincial and xenophobic.
6. Islam is a religion of peace. Those who see any problems with immigration from Islamic countries are guilty of Islamophobia. This is nearly as bad as anti-Semitism.
7. Western industrialised nations carry the main responsibility for poverty and backwardness in other parts of the world.
8. Men and women have no natural differences, except for the physical signs of their sex.

9. Human abilities depend mainly on training and education; inherited differences hardly play any role.
10. There are no differences between peoples and races, except for their physical appearance.
11. The nation-state is an outdated model. National identities and peculiarities have no particular value. The national element as such is rather bad; it is at any rate not worth preserving. The future belongs to the global society.
12. All people in the world not only have equal rights, they are in fact equal. They should at least all be eligible for the benefits of the German welfare state.
13. Children are an entirely private affair. Immigration takes care of the labour market and of any other demographic problems.

That's the list. In this condensed form, it sounds like a joke. But it's not a joke. These are the hidden axioms of political correctness in Germany (and probably elsewhere) as I see them.

Every item on the list has a high emotional value for those who believe in it.

The core of the problem is that partly moral und partly ideological attitudes are taken at face value and mixed with reality.

It is a permanent task, I am afraid, to sort that out.

It makes me faintly optimistic though, that after all the turmoil, I am still morally alive and not, as a person and an author, ignominiously buried and forgotten. That had certainly been the intention of the vast majority of the political and the media class. But, for once, the general public publicly disagreed.

This, in itself, is a matter of satisfaction not only for me but for many people in Germany.

'It's a Free/Unfree Thing'

Janet Albrechtsen

Sometimes I wonder whether the world is run by smart people who are putting us on or by imbeciles who really mean it.

— Mark Twain

It's tempting to assume that the PC-crowd is having us on. How else can we explain the Seattle school's decision in 2010 to rename Easter eggs as 'spring spheres,' worrying that a chocolate egg might remind, or even worse, offend kids by alluding to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Sesame Street has been sanitised too: episodes made between 1969 and 1974 are screened with an adults-only warning. Enid Blyton has not been spared either. To appease the 'don't smack children' lobby, Dame Slap is now Dame Snap. Feminists have been accommodated: Julian and Dick are now required to share household chores with the female characters. The gay lobby has not been forgotten either: the word 'gay' has been replaced with 'happy.' Bessie has been renamed Beth to avoid any connotations to slavery. Blyton's golliwogs have been banished. And *The Lion King* has been decreed full of racist and homophobic messages. According to Carolyn Newberger of Harvard University, those good-for-nothing hyenas are urban blacks who speak in gay clichés.

Surely, they're having us on with this PC stuff.

But, of course, we know they are not having us on. And they are not imbeciles. They are smart people who really mean it. Smart because the PC virus has infected so much of what we do, what we read, how we live, how we think.

It's the thinking part that should trouble us the most.

Earlier this year, Alan Gribben, an English professor at Auburn University in Alabama, published a new edition of Mark Twain's classic *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The word 'nigger,' which appears more than 200 times in the book, has been replaced with 'slave.' The professor worried that the word would offend too many students and turn them off from reading the book.

What the good professor doesn't seem to know is that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* satirises Southern prejudices of the time. It is an anti-racist book. If you mess with the power of Twain's words, you mess with the power of Twain's message. If school children are to really think about American history and the Deep South, they need to read about 'niggers.' The history and the language are confronting.

Great literature unsettles us. It forces us to think about our reactions. If we're offended, we think about why we're offended.

By denying us the ability to think, political correctness is a heresy for those who are truly committed to liberalism. Political correctness tells people what to think. And it seeps into society, so often without us even paying attention to the subliminal message.

Because the purveyors of PC are not imbeciles but smart people armed with clever tricks, we need to pay attention.

The Left in Australia are claiming that those who raise questions about multiculturalism, immigration and the relationship between Islam and modernity have blood on our hands. I say 'our hands' because I have been named as someone who bears some responsibility for what happened in Oslo. Others complicit in the mass murder include Keith Windschuttle, Andrew Bolt, and Geoffrey Blainey.

Here, murder is used as a muzzle to close down free speech. And this is just the latest addition to what is a growing list of tactics to curb free speech, and even worse, to stifle genuine enquiry and independent thinking.

Here are some of their tricks.

The emotional hoax

The Left are armed with a range of emotionally charged tools to immediately close down discussion about immigration or border

control. Call your opponents racists and point to xenophobia in the community. Opponents are not just wrong, they're evil. Their views should not be aired in a civilised society.

John Howard copped this for years. When the Prime Minister Gillard called for an open debate about these issues, she was accused of whipping up the racists within Australia.

But remember this: the stifling political correctness that rejected an open debate about immigration in the early 1990s fuelled the emergence and popularity of Pauline Hanson.

The victim game

The victim game has been fuelled by two recent developments. We now live in an age when 'feelings' are treated as a measurement of moral values, so you measure your feelings against the feelings of others to determine morality. Hence, we live in what author Monica Ali calls 'the marketplace of outrage,' where groups vie for victimhood status, each claiming their feelings have been hurt more than others.

Secondly, the focus on vulnerability is used to justify curbing Enlightenment values such as freedom of expression. The minority simply have to utter the word 'phobia' to silence all debate.

Over the last few years, we have witnessed a familiar opera of Muslim oppression.

Act I starts with something simple. Perhaps it's a book called *The Satanic Verses*. Or a silly Danish cartoon. Or a film called *Submission*. Or a cheeky episode of *South Park* stating that Mohammad is the only guy free from ridicule.

Then the libretto comes: Muslims scream about hurt feelings. The drama builds in Act II: death threats are issued, flags and effigies are burnt, maybe even a few boycotts are imposed, and then we hear that great aria of all accusations—Islamophobia.

Act III is the most depressing. The West capitulates, preferring the path of least resistance to launching a staunch defence of freedom of expression.

Hence then US President George H. Bush declared both Salman Rushdie's book and the fatwa against Rushdie as equally offensive.

Hence, 20 years later, newspapers across the globe chose not to publish the Danish cartoons and Western politicians muttered about protecting hurt feelings.

Hence, last year, Comedy Central, the channel that broadcasts *South Park*, inserted audio bleeps and large blocks of black that read CENSORED at the very mention or image of Mohammad to prevent more hurt feelings.

And it was, as the clever guys at *South Park* lamented, 'like, we lost.'

And we, too, may lose. If we don't even recognise the tactics, let alone the consequences, we are left with a new norm of anticipatory surrender and self-censorship.

The legal route

The victim game works so well because it is augmented by laws: the apparatus of the state is used to censor free speech. The prosecutions are mounting: politician Geert Wilders in Holland, writers Mark Steyn and Ezra Levant in Canada. And in Australia, *Herald Sun* columnist Andrew Bolt is defending a claim by a group of Aborigines that he 'offended, insulted and humiliated' them in breach of the *Racial Discrimination Act*. The PC crowd is clever and they're not having us on. They know that there are no useful legal tests about hurt feelings and inciting hate. They enact nice-sounding laws, build bureaucracies, and wait for them to blossom and bludgeon free speech. They have effectively co-opted Islamic style oppression to prohibit debate, be it about Islam or anything else they wish to fence off from free speech.

Death by silence

The other trick is to quietly exclude certain people from the national discourse. It is best summed up by the German word *totschweigtaktik*.

To be 'totsched' is to be subjected to death by silence—books, ideas, people that challenge the status quo are simply ignored.

Shelly Gare wrote about it in *Quadrant*. Those who are totsched find 'their efforts left to expire soundlessly like a butterfly in a jar.'

It happened to Orwell when he wrote his 1938 classic *Homage to Catalonia*, which addressed Stalinist Russia's involvement in the Spanish Civil War. The left-wing literati simply ignored it. By the time Orwell died in 1950, barely 1,500 copies had been sold.

The same death by silence was used to ignore Australian writers such as Chris Kenny, who challenged the secret women's business behind the Hindmarsh Island affair. It was used when author Kate Jennings aimed her fire at the sisterhood, post-modernism, and women's studies.

It's used by those who tell us that climate change will destroy us all if we do not act immediately. The sceptics are being totsched. Opposing views? What opposing views?

The bipartisanship racket

Governments have their own tactics. In recent times in Australia, those with poor ideas and even worse policies have resorted to what is best described as the bipartisanship racket to fence themselves off from criticism on a range of topics.

The former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd called for bipartisanship on Indigenous policies. It soon became clear that what he meant was supine obedience to his agenda. There could be no disagreement with the roll-back of the NT intervention. If you dared to disagree, you were immediately charged with politicising the issue. Imagine if these kinds of calls from those defending the status quo had managed to shut out the ideas of people like Noel Pearson.

The Rudd government tried the bipartisanship scam again with climate change and immigration. Each time the aim was the same: to place limits on free debate, to get opponents to rubber-stamp rather than question government policy.

No, the very last thing we want is bipartisanship when it is used so blatantly to stifle dissent and vest moral authority in one voice.

Consensus con

Another trick emerged from Canberra from the cloistered offices of the federal Treasury. Treasury boss Ken Henry demanded a supporting consensus from academic economists on major policy issues such as the emissions trading system and the equally ill-fated super profits tax on mining companies.

In one breath, Henry said that he supported the ‘contest of ideas’ *and* that there were ‘occasions on which economists might, at least for a period, put down their weapons and join a consensus.’

It sends shudders up your spine. A senior bureaucrat—who crafts a policy that, according to many, threatened to undermine Australia’s economy—demands obedience from economists. Henry lost that debate. And that’s the point of free debate. Ideas are not finessed through consensus or bipartisanship. Debate is the single most effective mechanism for disposing of bad ideas.

Why vigilance?

The aim of political correctness is to tell people what to think and stop them from thinking for themselves. If we are serious about defending free speech, vigilance demands that we look out for the tricks and test the trickery against first principles. The alternative means more moral disorientation and a death wish for the West. The principles are clear enough: free speech is not a Left/Right thing, as Mark Steyn said. It’s a free/unfree thing. You don’t get to cry in favour of free speech just to defend those with whom you agree. And free speech must include the right to offend. If we prosecute offensive opinions, we encourage ever more ridiculous claims to protection. We fuel that marketplace of outrage. And we end up shutting down the true genius of modern Western civilisation—the contest of ideas.

But, of course, free speech and the real value of debate depend on one more important principle: people genuinely listening to each other.

The Language of Political Correctness

Brendan O'Neil

My favourite example of political correctness involves the American Navy. In October 2001, after America had invaded Afghanistan, some of its navy personnel were preparing missiles to be fired at Al Qaeda and Taliban strongholds. One of the personnel decided to write a message on the side of his missile. A message to express his anger about 9/11. So in reference to the 9/11 hijacking, he wrote the following message on his missile: 'Hijack this, you faggots.'

Little did he know that even though the American military had rather a lot on its mind at the time, his message would still cause a massive controversy. The upper echelons of the navy were outraged when they heard about this transgression. They expressed official disapproval of this homophobic message and issued a warning that military personnel should more closely edit their spontaneous acts of penmanship. They even issued some unofficial guidelines covering what could and could not be written on the side of post 9/11 missiles. Nothing offensive, the guidelines said. So it was ok to say 'I love New York' but not to use words like faggot.

That is my favourite story about political correctness for two reasons. First, it sums up how psychotically obsessed the PC lobby is with language. It is ok to kill people but not to offend them. It is ok to drop a missile on someone's house or cave as long as that missile doesn't have anything inappropriate written on its side. Heaven forbid that the last thing a Talib should see before having his head blown off is a word reminding him of the existence of homosexuality. This really captures the warped morality inherent in political correctness—where one becomes so myopically focused on speech and representation that everything else, including matters of life and death, becomes subordinate to that.

The second reason it is my favourite example of political correctness is because it captures a truth about political correctness that is far too often overlooked: Political correctness is not actually the handiwork of small groups of cultural Marxists or liberal malcontents. The rise of political correctness is simply down to the activism and agitation of unrepresented sections of the chattering classes who detest vulgar language and what they consider to be offensive ideas. Otherwise, how can we explain the actions of the American Navy? Why would one of the most powerful, well-armed institutions on Earth buckle under pressure from the PC police, from people who read *The Guardian* and *The Age*?

No. Political correctness represents something far more profound. The victory of political correctness is built upon the demise and decay of traditional forms of authority and morality. It is parasitical on the crisis of conservative thought. In fact, I would argue that the power of political correctness is directly proportionate to the weakness of the old, ‘taken for granted’ forms of morality. It is tempting to see political correctness as the imposition of a framework by small groups of illiberal liberals. To see it as a conscious project pushed through by these rather irritating sections of society. Two striking aspects of political correctness seem to bolster this view—the creation of a cabal of grumpy, misanthropic feminists and environmentalists.

First, political correctness came to the fore at a time when conservative governments enjoyed strong electoral support in the West. It really exploded in America and Britain in the 1980s when Reagan and Thatcher were in power. So the masses were largely supportive of conservative regimes. But political correctness was born at the same time and became more and more widespread, boosting the idea that the cultural elite sat down one day and drew up some rules for everyday life.

And second, political correctness does tend to be most vociferously promoted by the media and sections of academia, by those rather rarefied, aloof institutions with more than their fair share of worldly people. But to look at PC in that way only, to see

it as a kind of conscious project of illiberal liberals with its list of 13 rules, as Thilo Sarrazin mentioned, is to miss the foundation stone of political correctness. The ground upon which political correctness is built is the inability of the traditional moralists to justify themselves and to defend their way of life and their moral system. That inability creates a moral vacuum, which gets rather feverishly filled up by new forms of intolerant morality. Because when you have a profound crisis of traditional and conservative morality that had governed society for so long, previously normal and unquestioned ways of behaviour are called into question. Nothing can be taken for granted anymore. From everyday speech to interpersonal relations, even nursery rhymes and fairy tales, all that was a given in the past 200 to 300 years falls apart. And political correctness fills that hole. It's a tentative takeover by a new kind of modern day moralist. The result is undoubtedly tyrannical and profoundly illiberal and antagonistic to individual autonomy.

To see how political correctness has its origins in the demise of traditionalism, it's instructive to look at the example of the girl guides. For a hundred years or so, Girlguiding UK was a fairly straightforward organisation. It was designed to instil girls with imperial pride. The girl guides had a simple slogan and swore an oath of loyalty to God, Queen and Country. About 15 years ago, Girlguiding UK rewrote their constitution and brought out a new mission statement. They turned one page into about 20 pages. There was no more duty to God; instead, there was a promise to love 'my God' in recognition of the many gods today and that there is not one true God or one true religion. The girls were no longer required to swear loyalty to the Queen or country, only serve them. And they were encouraged to feel sympathy for the Queen because it cannot be easy for her to be photographed everywhere she goes.

The key here is that nobody invaded the girl guides' headquarters and forced them to rewrite their constitution at gunpoint. They did it themselves because those three institutions—God, Queen and Country—are no longer real sources of authority. All three—religion, monarchy and nationalism—have suffered a profound crisis of

legitimacy. And it was the girl guides' instinctive recognition of that which led them to voluntarily rewrite their own rules and outlook.

So, political correctness is not about cultural Marxists storming the citadel and forcing us to obey them. In fact, the citadel has collapsed, and they are in the rubble trying to fashion a new kind of social morality. And that is why political correctness is so hysterical, so shrill, and so intolerant. Not because it is strong but because it is weak and isolated. It has no real roots in society, and it has no real roots in history. It has no popular legitimacy, and it has no public support. It is better seen as a knee-jerk instinctive imposition of a new morality designed to replace the old. So everything must be controlled, no one can be trusted, and no one anymore knows what is right and wrong. It is the moral hole of the heart of society that gives rise to this insatiable desire to implement all kinds of new rules and regulations.

So even nursery rhymes are being rewritten. In Britain, we've recently rewritten 'What should we do with the drunken sailor?' The drunken sailor has been replaced with a grumpy pirate because we don't want children to know about alcohol. The old rhyme used to say, 'stick him in a bag and beat him senseless'; the new one says 'tickle him until he starts to giggle.' This is PC gone mad—crazy feminists in dungarees rewriting nursery rhymes and forcing them on schools. But a more important question to ask is what kind of crazy unhinged society rewrites rhymes that children sing, rhymes that have been around for generations. Only a society that has entirely lost its moral bearing and can no longer take the most basic things for granted would do such a ridiculous, Orwellian thing.

The hysteria of political correctness really speaks to its opportunistic, parasitical nature. A more confident moral system would be able to tolerate deviance. An unconfident and accidental moral system like political correctness can tolerate no deviance at all because it continually fears for its own continued survival. And it's important to bear that in mind because sometimes the critics of political correctness are too quick to play the victim card. Janet described very well, and very accurately, the way in which politically correct people play the victim card—but sometimes

so do un-PC people. Too many right-wing thinkers claim that a conspiratorial cabal of PC lunatics are ruining our lives, which conveniently absolves these right-wing conservative thinkers of having to work out whatever happened to their morality and to their traditions. Where did they go? It is easier to claim that society has been taken over by crazy, lentil-eating, sandal-wearing feminists and annoying greens; it is far harder to account for the demise of a way of life that had existed for hundreds of years. Which is why we should get to grip with these two facts.

First, political correctness is built on the decay of traditional morality. Second, it is weak, it is fragile, and it is probably quite easy to demolish. If we bear that in mind, then we can more successfully fight against this profoundly censorious and suspicious and irrational moral system. And if you feel you are being treated like a heretic, then you should behave like a heretic. And you should pull up your socks and get your guns out.



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You Can't Say That! Freedom of Speech and the Invisible Muzzle

The Centre for Independent Studies' 2011 annual Big Ideas Forum examined the need for vigilance in protecting freedom of speech, focusing on political correctness and its insidious march into Western society. Ostensibly a tool of civility and respect, political correctness is often, on closer inspection, a way of silencing unpopular opinion, and is a serious threat to free speech.

This publication presents speeches by Dr Thilo Sarrazin, a former German central banker and author; Dr Janet Albrechtsen, well-known columnist with *The Australian*; Professor James Allan, a constitutional expert and bills-of-rights scholar; and Brendan O'Neill, a pulls-no-punches journalist and editor of the popular online UK publication.

