



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE:
TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS

Media

SPEECH

Thursday, 14 March 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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Questioner
Speaker Brandis, Sen George

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Senator BRANDIS (Queensland—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (15:04): I move:

That the Senate take note of the answers given by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (Senator Conroy) to questions without notice asked by Senators Sinodinos and Birmingham today relating to proposed media legislation.

Yesterday morning, the Sydney Daily Telegraph—a famous and very popular Australian newspaper—published what will, no doubt, be one of the great front pages in the history of Australian journalism. It compared Senator Stephen Conroy to six odious dictators—one of them, Joseph Stalin. This morning, on page 2, the Sydney Daily Telegraph published an apology, not to Senator Stephen Conroy but to Joseph Stalin, because, as the scribe who wrote that apology pointed out, at least when Stalin sought to muzzle the media, he was not so two-faced, hypocritical and mealy-mouth as to pretend to believe in freedom of the press—but such was the performance of Senator Stephen Conroy in question time both yesterday and today.

Madam Acting Deputy President, you might think that what the editorial writers of the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* essayed yesterday and today was a piece of frivolous fun, unless you were to actually study the Finkelstein report, which is the fons et origo of what the government proposes to do to the Australian media. If one turns to page 46 of the Finkelstein report this is what we read:

... the intellectual climate of the 20th century was radically different from that of the 17th and 18th centuries when Libertarian ideals flourished. The new intellectual climate placed higher store in collectivist ... values and less on individualistic values.

Mr Finkelstein went on to express the view in the balance of chapter 2 of his report that the 'new intellectual climate', which favours collectivist values over individualist values was the way of the future and ought to be providing the intellectual grounding of the model for press regulation, which his appalling report recommended and which this government has, at least in part, adopted. I might be old-fashioned, but I believe in the old intellectual climate which favoured libertarian and liberal intellectual values rather than the collectivist values of which Mr Finkelstein and the Labor Party are so enamoured. In being enamoured of those collectivist values of the 'new intellectual climate' enamoured by Mr Finkelstein, the Labor Party shares company with Stalin and with all of the odious dictators and the odious customers who disfigured the 20th century with their collectivist values. Yet here we have an Australian government in the early days of the 21st century embracing as its model for the regulation of the Australian media a collectivist notion, a collectivist philosophy.

As my friend Senator Birmingham pointed out yesterday, this will be the first time that an Australian peacetime government sought to regulate the content of the newsprint media since Governor Darling sought to license newspapers in the colony of New South Wales in 1827.

Senator Wong interjecting—

Senator BRANDIS: Senator Penny Wong, I know you have a bit of a taste for authoritarianism yourself—you would not be a member of the left wing of the Australian Labor Party if you did not—but let me say that the way to deal with the press is to begin and end by respecting its freedom: its freedom to criticise, its freedom to condemn, its freedom to ridicule both government and opposition. Frankly, Senator Penny Wong, if people on my side could put up with the ABC and the Fairfax press then people on your side ought to be able to put up with the occasional jibe from the News Limited press. But you cannot, because one of the fundamental philosophical differences between my side of politics and Senator Stephen Conroy's side of politics is we understand that in a robust democracy you have to be able to take it on the chin and respect the freedom of others. (*Time expired*)