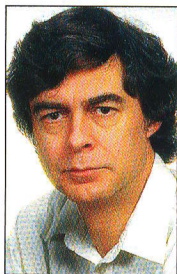


Bill C-250 could be used to gag anyone – including this columnist



PIERRE LEMIEUX

When we don't agree with laws, at least we are free to speak. This is a poor consolation prize, for living as one wants is more important than talking. But even free speech is under attack everywhere.

Executives of companies on the stock exchange have had their freedom of speech curtailed in the name of disclosure requirements. It is strange that business executives deemed to have lied end up in jail, while journalists guilty of the same sin are merely fired (if they are unlucky). When the inconsistency is resolved, it may not be by re-establishing freedom of business speech.

Another insidious constraint on free speech relates to the fact that more and more people have become dependent on the state for their livelihood. I am not only talking about the 20 per cent of the employed who are working for some level of government, but also about the employees of businesses and non-profit organizations whose livelihood is tied to government subsidies. Like welfare recipients, they end up thinking that the state must be very good if it is so kind to them. Many will think twice before biting the hand that feeds them.

The state also silences people through a host of laws not directly related to speech. Consider the example of Juliet O'Neill, the *Ottawa Citizen* journalist whose house, including her lingerie drawer, was searched by federal praetorians looking for information about her sources. Wouldn't she be more careful with what she

writes if she had something prohibited in her house, like a gun in her drawer, pot in her living room or pornography on her hard drive? People who have something to hide are more likely to keep a low profile. With all the laws that tell us how to live, we have more and

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more to hide, and many reasons to fear a search.

As for direct restrictions on free speech, they have recently developed in two main directions. First, there are electoral gag laws, against which the National Citizens Coalition has been gloriously fighting since 1984.

Second, there are Criminal Code prohibitions against "promotion of genocide" and "hatred" against "identifiable groups." The fact that these "crimes" are easily extensible is illustrated by the infamous bill C-250, which the yes-men in the Senate may have ratified by the time this article is published. This bill would add "sexual orientation" to the definition of "identifiable groups," which now reads as "any sec-

tion of the public distinguished by colour, race, religion or ethnic origin." With the amended definition, one could potentially be charged for manly criticism of homosexuals, which is why the bill was introduced by our national jewel, Svend Robinson. (This guy has spent his life stealing our money and destroying our liberties.)

For political-economic, sociobiological, and moral reasons, I believe that an individual should be free to satisfy any sexual preference he has, however offensive to others, provided only that nobody is coerced into sharing his fantasies. However, this does not imply that criticism should be criminalized. On the contrary. I am ready to fight for Robinson's right to do what he wants with what he has between his legs, but this assumes that he is willing to defend my own liberty to do what I want with what I have between my ears.

I don't approve of the witch-hunt against pedophiles, because it is about prohibiting images and thoughts much more than about protecting identifiable children from actual coercion. But the fact that bill C-250 could be used against pedophile-bashers should alert everyone to the tyranny of this sort of law.

Will the next step be to add "political orientation" to the definition of identifiable groups? This would be a great way to protect politicians and bureaucrats, whom 19th century individualist anarchist Lysander Spooner called a "band of robbers and murderers." **WS**

Pierre Lemieux is a writer and professor based in Montreal.

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