

Jailing for words has begun in Australia



UNITED AUSTRALIA PARTY

The 12-month jailing of Brandan Koschel for mouthing off in a 40 second speech at a rally is being hailed as a triumph of virtue.

In reality, it's Exhibit A in the case for scrapping hate speech laws altogether. Because once the state starts policing words don't be surprised when it begins auditing your thoughts.

Koschel has been sentenced to a year in prison for declaring to a Sydney crowd that Jews are "the greatest enemy." It was ugly, the sort of thing usually confined to the darker corners of the internet. Was it distasteful? Yes. Should it be illegal? That's a far more dangerous question.

If Koschel gets jail for declaring Jews the enemy, then consistency demands we start measuring everyone else's rhetorical excesses with the same ruler.

Does Pauline Hanson get a cell for suggesting there are no good Muslims? Do I start packing a toothbrush for suggesting Islam has ideological problems? Should half of social media be marched off in cuffs before lunchtime?

You cannot empower the state to jail people for "hate" and then act shocked when the definition of hate turns out to be elastic, political, and exquisitely selective.

And here is the line that matters, in a free society people must be allowed to speak, even crudely, even offensively, so long as they are not calling for direct violence. The moment speech becomes a criminal offence simply because it is unpleasant or unpopular, freedom becomes a privilege granted by government rather than a right possessed by citizens.

Hate speech law isn't a scalpel it's a vibe. What counts as "harm"? Who decides? Today it's an individual shouting nonsense into a microphone, tomorrow it's someone questioning gender ideology or climate science.

And what about Grace Tame leading chants of "From Gadigal to Gaza, globalise the intifada"? Or Greens Senator Mehreen Faruqi declaring, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free"? Why are they free to walk around while Koschel is not?

This isn't a defence of Koschel, he sounds like a fool. But in a free society fools are not sent to prison. We should let foolish people say foolish things, and then criticise them mercilessly.

The real danger isn't that a moron said something moronic, it's that the state now claims the authority to decide which morons are permissible and which are prosecutable. Once you hand the government power to criminalise speech, don't be surprised when the category of "criminal speech" expands with remarkable creativity.

Democracy requires free speech, especially the kind that makes you uncomfortable. If you won't defend that principle now, don't be shocked when the law turns on you later.

These hate speech laws must all be repealed.

Senator Ralph Babet

United Australia Party Senator for Victoria