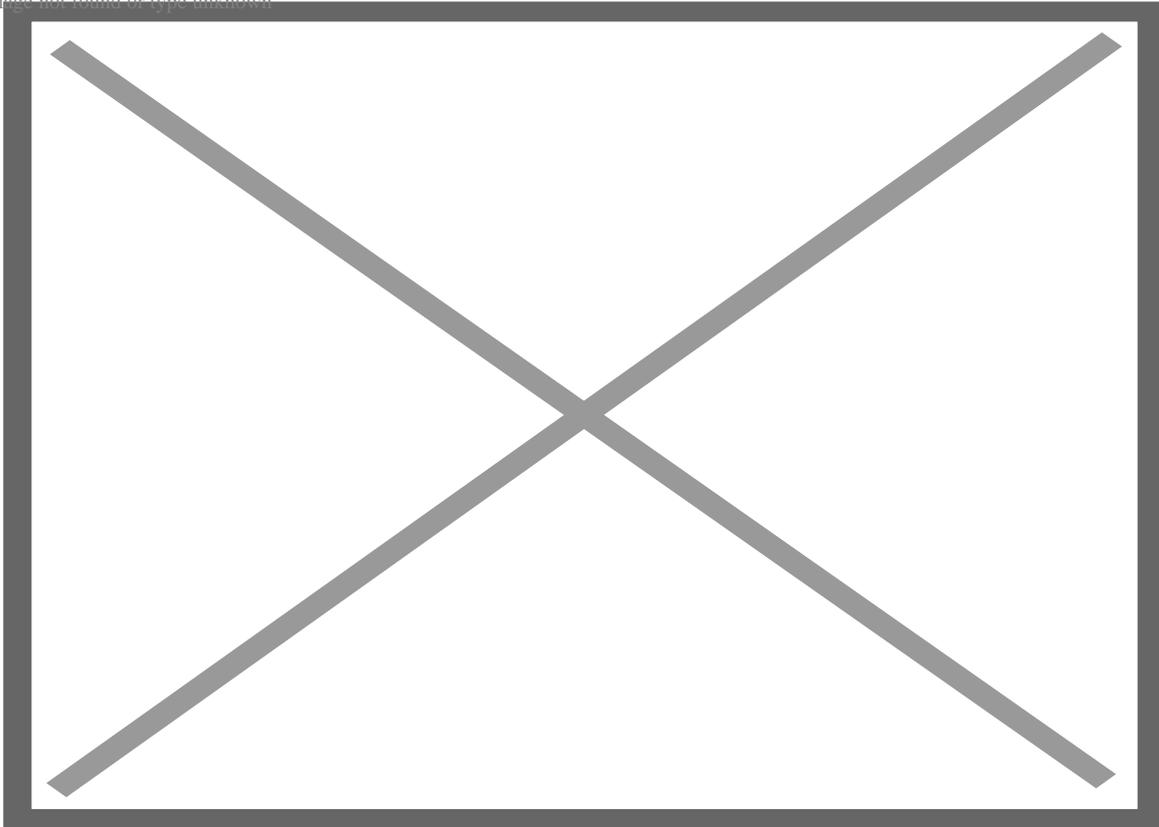


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Why Mark Steyn Matters

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‘Sometimes societies become too stupid to survive’. For me, that’s one of the most important things Mark Steyn said on his tour of Australia with the IPA in February 2016. It’s funny, insightful and sad. As he said during the tour, there are no jokes in North Korea or Iran. And if we can’t joke we can’t speak freely, and if we can’t speak freely we can’t think freely, and if we can’t think freely— we are no longer free. Mark talked about what happened to Neil Phillips, the 44-year-old owner of the ‘Crumbs’ sandwich shop in Rugeley, Staffordshire in England. He posted a joke online. He said:

My PC takes so long to shut down I’ve decided to call it Nelson Mandela

Police came to his home, arrested him, took him to the police station and questioned him for eight hours. The police fingerprinted him, took DNA swabs, and searched his computer. Eventually he was released because according to the police ‘there was insufficient evidence to support a prosecution’.



As Mark said, this didn't happen in communist Czechoslovakia in the 1960s. It happened in England in 2013. Here in Australia, at the Queensland University of Technology in May 2013 a student, Alex Wood, posted on Facebook a comment saying:

Just got kicked out of the unsigned Indigenous computer room. QUT stopping segregation with segregation.

He is currently being sued in the Federal Court for breaching section 18C of the *Racial Discrimination Act*.

There are three key things I took away from what Mark said. The first is that we never lose all our freedoms in one go. They are eroded bit by bit by bit. The second is that we're not going to get back our freedoms all in one go, either.

It is going to be a slow, piece by piece struggle. But eventually—if we're determined enough—we can do it. The best example of this is the story of what happened to section 13 of Canada's Human Rights Act, which was very similar to our own section 18C.

In summary, section 13 made it illegal to do anything 'likely to expose a person or persons to hatred or contempt'. In 2007 Steyn was prosecuted under the section for an article he wrote in *Maclean's* magazine. Ultimately the case was dismissed and the Canadian Human Rights Commission said his article was:

Polemical, colourful and emphatic, and was obviously calculated to excite discussion and even offend readers, Muslim and non-Muslim alike.

Section 13 was enacted in 1977. It was repealed in 2012 by a 153 to 136 vote in the Canadian parliament after the Conservative Party of Canada decided to support its repeal. Section 13 was repealed for precisely the reasons that section 18C in Australia should be repealed. It was an illegitimate restriction on freedom of speech and ultimately, on freedom of thought.

In Canada, it took 35 years of advocacy and argument for freedom of speech for section 13 to be abolished. In Australia, section 18C has existed for 21 years since it was enacted by the Keating government in 1995.

I'm absolutely certain it won't take another 14 years for section 18C to go. Already, 14 Senators in the Commonwealth Parliament have pledged to support its abolition as it currently exists.

The third thing that really inspired me was the notion that *it's up to us*. As Mark said, (and as we know it's true)—politicians follow public opinion, they don't lead it. Mark quoted Milton Friedman on this:

Don't wait to elect the right politician to do the right thing, create the conditions whereby the wrong politicians are forced to do the right thing.



Travelling with Mark around Australia and having had the opportunity to talk with so many IPA members across our great country, I'm more optimistic than ever that with your support we can together make a difference to make Australia an even better place.