



## Libs In Name Only Cancel Christensen's Dissent

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It's hard to know what will remain of the Liberal Party at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. As an organisation it will continue on, it will have representatives in the Commonwealth and state parliaments, and the Liberal-National Coalition might even win the next federal election. However, whether the Liberals will exist in anything more than name is uncertain.

Under Scott Morrison, the Liberals have given up any pretence to fiscal responsibility. The government has made great play that in a crisis "pragmatism trumps ideology", as if there was no alternative. But equally, a different conclusion could be reached, namely that in a crisis the principles that guide action and decide choices between alternatives become more important than ever.

More fundamentally, though, than the problem of the Liberals' new approach to economics, is their relationship to the concept of freedom. It's now difficult to argue the words "Liberal" and "freedom" – a tenuous link at best – can go together in a sentence.

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And now there is the story of what has happened to the Queensland Liberal National MP, George Christensen.

On Tuesday in the chamber of the House of Representatives immediately before Question Time, Christensen made a short 200-word statement about COVID-19. He began by asking “when will the madness end?” and then said “masks do not work”, “lockdowns don’t work” and “domestic vaccine passports are a form of discrimination”.Advertisement

He went on: “Our posturing politicians – many over there – the sensationalist media elite and the dictatorial medical bureaucrats need to recognise the facts and stop spreading fear. COVID-19 is going to be with us forever, just like the flu. And, just like the flu, we will have to live with it, not in constant fear of it.”

Neither Morrison nor Albanese have contemplated the irony that for Australians “to get their freedoms back” any dissent will be condemned.

As if deliberately attempting to prove the accuracy of Christensen’s description, SBS promptly reported his remarks as an “anti-lockdown rant”.

Predictably, Labor leader Anthony Albanese was outraged. After all, the ALP’s policies on the management of the pandemic are basically whatever the “IStandWithDan” Twitter mob think they should be.

Labor moved a motion to “condemn” Christensen’s comments that “spread misinformation and undermine the actions of Australians to defeat COVID-19?”.

The motion was of no practical effect, it was a Labor stunt merely to play to the crowd. After a speech from Morrison in which he said, “My government does not support misinformation in any way, shape or form”, both the [Liberal and Nationals agreed to the ALP motion](#).

It’s been subsequently reported the Labor Party was as surprised as many Liberal backbench MPs that Morrison agreed to the motion. Apparently, the Prime Minister decided on such a strategy to avoid a debate about Christensen’s comments.

Not a single Liberal MP – not a “moderate”, “conservative” nor “modern Liberal” – spoke in support of the principle of freedom of speech and against the dangerous precedent being established by the Parliament. Maybe Liberals MPs didn’t speak up because in private many agree with Christensen, but they won’t jeopardise their ministerial careers to say so in public.

Any Liberal MP could have said “I disagree” or “I think Christensen is wrong but the principle of free debate in Parliament is sacrosanct” – but not one did.

The Liberals, at the urging of Labor adopted the language and tactics of authoritarianism to condemn and cancel anyone who challenges the official orthodoxy. “Misinformation” is close to



becoming the label applied to anything that dissents from what the government says.

A fundamental point neither Morrison nor Albanese answered in their speeches on the motion was the question of what in a crisis is allowed to be questioned.

It's unclear whether they would have condemned Christensen if he'd said it's ridiculous the [400,000 residents of the ACT](#) should be locked in their home for a week because of one case of COVID-19, or that it is ludicrous South Australian Olympians returning from Tokyo are required to quarantine in Sydney for 14 days and then another 14 days in their home state.

It appears neither Morrison nor Albanese have contemplated the irony of the claim that for Australians "to get their freedoms back" any dissent from the edict of government will be condemned.

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