



Andrew Bolt and Freedom of Speech

Institute of Public Affairs
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Free people, free society

Michael Kroger, gave this speech at the Institute of Public Affairs in Melbourne as part of a panel discussion on Freedom of Speech in Australia and the controversial Melbourne columnist Andrew Bolt.

Distinguished guests, one and all. President Ronald Reagan once said of the American Conservative William F Buckley Jr., that 'Bill Buckley is perhaps the most influential journalist and intellectual in our era. He changed our country, indeed, our century.' Buckley of course founded the National Review in 1955 and then served as its editor in chief for 35 years.

In Andrew's case, he is just a few years into a critically influential role in the Australian media. Andrew Bolt recovered from an early career set-back when he worked for the Hawke Labor Government. Imagine how bad it would have been Andrew if your CV had read, 'previously worked for the Rudd Labor Government', to establish himself as someone with an unparalleled position of influence within the Australian media.

I must say that I am as I am sure we all are deeply inspired by Andrew Bolt's courage and his passion, his purpose and his honour. A man with an authentic intellect, a fine uncluttered mind, a man of relentless energy, a proud Australian with much to be proud about. It was Hemmingway who described guts as being 'grace under pressure.' Andrew Bolt has guts. It was Andrew Bolt who exposed Lowitja O'Donoghue's fraudulent claims to be a member of the Stolen Generation and it was Andrew Bolt who exposed kooky Tim Flannery's mad claims about the Australian environment, particularly our dams and our rivers. It was Andrew Bolt who challenged Robert Manne to name just 10 members of the Stolen Generation, something Manne has still been unable to achieve.

The Greens, Lowitja, Tim Flannery, Robert Manne and others appear rather paranoid about Andrew Bolt, but as Henry Kissinger once said, 'even paranoid's do have enemies.' We should remember that Andrew is a man with an outstanding understanding of how the modern media works, which is critical to his influence in Australia today.

From 1926, Robert Menzies made his first political speech at the Prahran Town Hall as a member of the group fighting Stanley Bruce's attempts to centralise more arbitration powers in Canberra at the expense of the states. After his speech Menzies asked his uncle who had attended the rally what he thought of the address. Sidney Sampson, who was Menzies uncle, said 'My dear boy, as an argument to the High Court of Australia it was admirable, but as an address to the electors, it was hopeless. The art of political advocacy is the art of judicious and varied repetition, until you learn to repeat yourself with skill, you will never make a politician.' Andrew Bolt has an understanding of the power of repetition that few other possess. He understands the power of reminding us all, on a regular basis of the failing of the policy positions of Manne, Flannery, O'Donoghue, Gillard, Rudd, the Greens and dozens of others. It is a simple, but devastating tactic which has been used by the left for generations, but by the right with scarcity.

In Andrew's writing you also see elements of a belief in Maslow's theory of Human Motivation. In 1943, Maslow said, 'It is quite true that man lives by bread alone, where there is no bread, but what happens to a man's desires when there is plenty of bread and his belly is chronically filled?' As we move up Maslow's pyramid and satisfy our

psychological needs, our need for safety and security, of love, of belonging, of self-respect and then social status we reach the top of his pyramid. What happens then according to Maslow is that man expects to find a new discontent and restlessness. This explains the drug-like addiction, therefore, of the upper-middle classes to issues like global warming, calls for Western nations to wipe out third-world debt, demanding that orderly refugee programs be subverted and ultimately demanding that we live in a society where people are not entitled to be offended, insulted or humiliated, that is to say, a place where freedom is strangled and corrupted by the parliament.

The Sydney Writers' Festival is a perfect example of why forums of thought and ideas, free speech must roam in a democracy. Where else could there be a place where John Howard, four times elected by the Australian people as its Prime Minister, was booed and jeered by the same crowd that gave a standing ovation to convicted terrorism supporter, David Hicks. I've often wondered who attends Sydney Writers' Festivals, but thanks to Paul Keating we now know – sandal wearing, muesli chewing, bike riding pedestrians.

In a free society Larissa Brent should be allowed to tweet that watching bestiality on television was less offensive than watching Bess Price, a prominent Aboriginal leader who has done so much to campaign against violence against Aboriginal women and children. People like Guy Rundle should be allowed, as he did in 2007, to demand that The Australian newspaper dismiss some of its conservative commentators on the basis that they are out of step with the thinking of the newly elected Rudd government. To his shame the ABC's John Faine also joined this chorus.

In 2007, Robert Manne said, 'Twenty years ago Australia didn't have journalists like this in the mainstream press.' He was referring to writers such as Ackerman, Albrechtsen, Bohme, Blair, Bolt, Devine, Duffy, Henderson, McCran, McGuinness, Pearson, Roskam, Sheehan, Tom Switzer and others. Robert Manne in 2007 was lamenting the end of the left's long running summer party of marijuana and cask wine, where they didn't have to put up and tolerate alternative opinions, god forbid.

In a speech to the Republican National Convention in New Orleans in 1989, whilst accepting the Republican nomination for the US presidency, George Bush Senior said that he was often criticised for being a quiet person. In reply, Bush said it allowed him to hear the quiet people that others didn't. In so many ways Andrew Bolt speaks for those that have no voice. He speaks for the quiet people who think, but that also work.

Let us hope that Andrew Bolt continues his campaigns on so many issues of interest to ordinary Australians, so that in the decades ahead we can look back and say of his glorious career, that he changed Australia and changed the way Australians viewed their country. Thank you.