

# Top class! Free speech is a fundamental right ... but only for the ruling Right

By John Passant

23 March 2017



*Slightly corrected version of the gloating NewsCorpse broadsheet  
(Image via @TheFinnigans)*

**Any debate about free speech in our society is really about [free speech for the ruling class](#).**

Capitalism is built and maintained on the denial of free speech to the working class, among other things.

US citizen [Rupert Murdoch](#) has more free speech than the ten million Australian workers combined. His minions get to spew their Rupert endorsed shit every day to reinforce the exploitative system that is capitalism. This would not change, by the way, if wrinkly Rupert were an Australian.

For these journalists, it is self-censorship basically to keep their jobs — or even worse, they actually *believe* the shit they write.

This social reproduction of capitalism through the media involves not just a steady diet of stories from both major outlets that [dominate the print media](#), NewsCorpse and Fairfax, about the wonderful workings of the market (like buying exported Australian gas [cheaper from Japan](#) than from here, eh?) and the need for fiscal responsibility — that is, the need to cut workers' living standards. It includes ruling class debates (Coalition versus Labor) over the way forward for capitalism.

However, it also involves [othering](#) to distract workers' attention away from the attacks on them. We might be white trash but we are better than those [almost sub-human] others. Racism is one of the key mechanisms at the heart of this othering and of Australian capitalism. Depending on which period of time in the history of Australian capitalism this strategy has involved othering of Aboriginal people, the Irish, Catholics, the Chinese, the Russians, the Reds, Jews, Southern Europeans, Asians, Muslims, among many other minorities.

For Australian capitalism, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders are the [eternal other](#). The system was founded and can only continue to exist on the ongoing [destruction of First Nations society](#) and Indigenous people.

In times of economic crisis or uncertainty there is a rise in top down government, and media driven racism and reaction, and a consequent rise in racism — both verbal and physical — from some working class people and others. In Australia, this is further enhanced by the institutional racism against Aboriginal people (their imprisonment, the Northern Territory Intervention, the theft of their kids, for

example), and, in today's climate, the dehumanisation and imprisonment of asylum seekers, as well as rampant [Islamophobia](#).

Couple the shift of the Labor Party to the economic, political and often social right, with economic uncertainty for both workers and small businesses, longer working hours, lower pay, precarious employment, and the lack of a radical left that has implanted itself in the working class, and this has sown the seeds for the rise of the reactionary right, both within and outside the Liberal and National Parties. Pauline Hanson's [One Nation](#) is the most obvious example of what is a global phenomenon.

[Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act](#) has been a very slight impediment to the unbridled chorus of racist reaction that sections of the ruling class have unleashed. The finding that Andrew Bolt, the pin up boy of the hard right, had acted unlawfully and breached section 18C and was not saved by section 18D, was a rallying point for the cheer squads of reaction. The fact that Bill Leak's racist cartoon would have been ["protected" by section 18D](#) is irrelevant to them.

So successful has this fake festival of free speech been that the Prime Minister, captured willingly by his right wing, praised the cartoonist at his memorial and said his racist anti-Aboriginal cartoon ["united Australians"](#). Not this Australian, Mr Turnbull. The racist cartoon might have united the dwindling band of NewsCorpse readers at the [loss making](#) *The Australian* in their Titanic celebrations. It horrifies many of us.

These decadents have wrapped their talk about section 18C in the language of [free speech](#). As I explained above this is really about free speech for the 1 per cent and their parrots. That is not free speech. It is exclusion disguised as freedom and part of the ideological infrastructure that enslaves the working class.

The [Racial Discrimination Act does not stop racism](#) and othering more generally. Racism is driven by the ruling class and accepted by sections of the working class, especially those in less unionised areas. It is systemic.

However, the dividing line at the moment is section 18C, a section Malcolm Turnbull [promised before](#) the 2 July 2016 election he would not change. Because that section is the terrain on which we find ourselves fighting the right and their desire to unleash an increased torrent of abuse against Black people, Muslims, Jews, and Asians, to name a few, this is where we on the left have to join the battle.

We have to join with those fighting against the watering down of section 18C, including [ethnic councils, Aboriginal, Muslim, and Jewish groups](#), and others who know and are feeling the lash of racism and other abuse already.

Malcolm Turnbull has capitulated to the extreme right wing of his party over this. He knows he is on a parliamentary loser. That is why the bill to water down section 18C will, unusually, originate in the Senate.

It will be defeated there; the Greens (nine senators) and Labor (26 senators) will vote against it and [look like being joined by the Nick Xenophon Team \(three senators\) and Jacqui Lambie](#). That gives them 39 votes against any amendments to 18C — a clear majority in the 76 seat Senate.

If the bill is rejected in the Senate, it cannot be sent to the House for consideration. That will save the Turnbull Government from very possibly being defeated in the House of Representatives, where up to [five Liberals might have crossed the floor to vote against any changes to 18C](#).

This potential forthcoming parliamentary defeat of Turnbull's attempts to water down the already weak section 18C won't stop racism. Neither will it stop the reactionaries and their media cronies unleashing a thunderstorm of racism and abuse of the other.

Together we can stop them, if we mobilise large numbers of people. That means appealing to workers, not just on the issue of racism and pointing out the divisions that creates among workers, but explaining that capitalism is the reason why they are suffering wage cuts, job precarity, unemployment

and underemployment.

Blaming others won't change that. Only we ordinary people united can change the system for the better, and defeat racism once and for all.

[John Passant](#) *is a former Assistant Commissioner of Taxation. Read more by John on his website [En Passant](#) or follow him on Twitter [@JohnPassant](#).*

*Signed copies of John Passant's first book of poetry, [Songs for the Band Unformed](#) (Ginninderra Press 2016) are available for purchase from the IA store [HERE](#).*

Me in Independent Australia and this cult of Bill [@deemadigan](https://t.co/dMi9vVhnnB)

— John Passant (@JohnPassant) [March 14, 2017](#)

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<https://t.co/7cQRHTrsyF>

— Mr Onthemoon (@firstdogonmoon) [March 22, 2017](#)