

To whom it may concern,

Find below a letter written by the Melbourne branch of PEN, protesting against the new anti-terror laws...this email is to voice my own views, which, like those in PEN, recognise these new laws as a stifling of free speech, democracy and civil liberties, in all realms including the media, arts and street-level activism.

I urge you - and all those concerned with the introduction of these laws - to oppose them at any and every stage possible. The most fundamental thing to remember about them is that Australia HAS NOT BEEN CONSULTED IN ANY WAY regarding their nature and implementation. Is this the democracy that you want?

Please read letter below, and take any action possible

Ashley

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Statement on the proposed Federal Anti-Terrorism Legislation,
November 4, 2005

One of the key elements of the International Pen Charter is the principle of free, open transmission of thought within each nation and between nations. In joining PEN, members affirm:

"PEN stands for the principle of unhampered transmission of thought within each nation and between all nations, and members pledge themselves to oppose any form of suppression of freedom of expression [including] free criticism of governments, administrations and institutions."

With this pledge in mind, Melbourne PEN voices its strong opposition to the unnecessary, dangerous, and unfair sedition provisions in the Anti-Terrorism Bill 2005. We are proud to support the condemnation already issued by the Australian Society of Authors.

Melbourne PEN is concerned that:

- under the pretext of defending Australians from the most unacceptable forms of terrorism, the Federal Government is legislating to acquire powers which can easily be abused because those powers will no longer be subject to the rule of law;
- this legislation silences debate and open criticism, whereas within an open and democratic society the Government must remain open to analysis, review and open criticism, including in the media.

Under the legislation, urging disaffection with the Government is to attract the draconian penalty of up to seven years' jail.

Does that mean

- that Australian people's strong disaffection with the Federal Government's inhuman treatment of asylum seekers and refugees on Temporary Protection Visas will be considered sedition?

- that the Four Corners programme on Monday, October 31, 2005 focusing on the alleged abuse of David Hicks at Guantanamo Bay will be considered as sedition?

Who will define the boundaries by which such criticism will be considered as sedition or otherwise? The government which is developing the legislation. There is no objectivity and no transparency.

A presumption of guilt, obnoxious to our legal system, will apply to those accused of provoking sedition. They will need to prove their innocence - almost impossible under the proposed legislation. Journalists or civilians who organise to report, and especially to support the accused, will themselves be subject to control orders silencing them.

Belonging to an international organisation that promotes freedom of speech, members of Melbourne PEN strongly condemn the Federal Government's sedition laws within its proposed Anti-terrorist legislation.

Yours sincerely

Arnold Zable - President
Judith Rodriguez and Judith Buckrich - Vice-Presidents
Jackie Mansourian - Secretary

on behalf of Melbourne PEN

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