

DEFUSE NEWS

A weekly update of relevant issues



Online Safety Bill - will new laws to keep children safe, stop racial hate and protect democracy online actually work?

Digital secretary Oliver Dowden was quoted as saying: Today the UK shows global leadership with our groundbreaking laws to usher in a new age of accountability for tech. We will protect children on the internet, crack down on racist abuse on social media and through new measures safeguard our liberties, creating a truly democratic digital age. The question is, will this piece of legislation have the desired impact? I'm not convinced. The legislation seeks to tackle everything from counter terrorism, child sexual exploitation and trolls spreading abuse. Much of what is demanded of the social media companies such as their complaints processes, will fail, mainly because they will say that they already comply. Equally, I don't believe that the UK government will really impose the fines they have suggested. Let's be honest, they struggle to get these giants to pay their fair share of tax. So much of what occurs on social media is context driven. I can talk from personal experience of challenging the major platforms when a black MP was called a 'Coconut'. In the UK, that was a clear racial insult, however the the US platform arbitrators disagreed and by the time we had persuaded them of our case, weeks had passed. The key to tackling online abuse is speed of decision making and identifying those responsible. The Online Safety Bill will slow the process down, enabling those responsible to delete the offending comment and in some cases their profile, and with many of the platforms, once that has happened the investigation is finished. One of the faults with much of the technical solutions currently being promoted is that the solution is to block the offending message, however they will miss much of the context driven and fail to help or even be interested in identifying the culprits, and for Defuse that is a key element.

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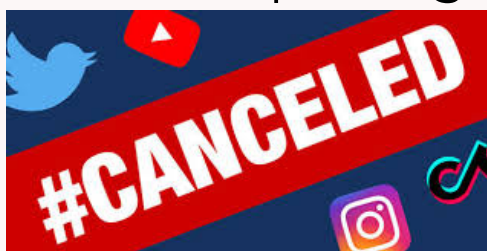
FEEL SAFER IN PUBLIC LIFE

+44 (0) 2072930932

enqs@defuseglobal.com

www.defuseglobal.com

There's no severance package for Cancel Culture



Much has been made this week of the 'Cancel Culture'. In Alan Dershowitz's recent book titled 'Cancel Culture, The Latest Attack on Free Speech and Due Process' he starts by suggesting Cancel Culture is the new McCarthyism of the 'woke' generation which ends careers, destroys legacies, breaks up families and even causes suicides. What is clear is that there is no severance package for the cancel culture. It can be a swift and ruthless end to careers, reputations and lives.

'Cancel Culture' is the removal of support for public figures in response to objections about their behaviours or opinions. This may include boycotting or refusal to promote their work, or purchase products that they promote. The reality is that this may be boycotting a film because a particular actor is appearing in it, boycotting a company because one of their influencers has behaved in a manner that is judged as being unacceptable, or because of their directors may have posted or said something controversial or disagreeable, even if that happened to have been decades ago. Equally, speakers are now regularly being cancelled from speaking at Universities. This happens because their views are misaligned to the often-hard left-wing/socialist views of those unionised members of committees controlling the debates. This not only stifles debate but creates echo chambers in the very institutions that should be promoting the complete opposite.

In 2019 former US President Barack Obama weighed into the debate about cancel culture, saying it was "not activism". "If all you're doing is casting stones, you're probably not going to get that far," he told an audience at an event for the Obama Foundation. He added that he got the sense some young people felt being as "judgmental as possible" was the best way to force change and cautioned them that the world was "messy" and full of "ambiguities".

Much of the acceleration of the cancel culture has been conjoined with populist campaigns where many have fallen foul of the identity politics groups and been accused of being racists, transphobic, sexist or similar. These campaigns, worthwhile and with merit, have often been hijacked by activists who are less interested in truth or debate, but driven by a self righteous path of destruction and judgement.

The counter argument to this is that Cancel Culture is the 'have nots' taking on the 'haves' in an unfair system whereby algorithms prevent their voices and opinions being heard. There is some merit in this, however whilst debate and free speech is encouraged, we all have to tackle the algorithms on social media. I don't consider that the destructive nature of the tactic of cancel culture is a proportionate response.

Two of the key elements of any democracy are freedom of speech and due process, the right to be considered innocent until proven guilty. There are no longer two sides to a story, and freedom of speech becomes selective, in that the freedom only exists if what you are saying is agreeable to those sitting in judgement. Debate and discussion are stifled, opinions no longer encouraged and with that the opportunity to persuade diminished. Due process is now a selective privilege often not afforded to those accused of falling foul of the current campaign of interest. This has been accelerated with the use of social media and the internet where a story can circulate with little or no fact checking nor opportunity for the accused to defend oneself. Allegations of sexual harassment are no longer required to be properly investigated as the damage/justice is instant and because the idea of 'no smoke without fire', the innocent are forever guilty.

In many ways the Cancel Culture causes more problems than it solves. It falsely accuses, implies guilt and is unbalanced and unfair. It has no statute of limitations and provides no platform for a defence, debate or transparency. It can be used maliciously, wreck lives, destroy brands and bankrupt businesses. However, despite that, managed professionally that doesn't have to be the case.

To read the full article including proposed solutions: <https://www.defuseglobal.com/blog/>

For further information or a complimentary 30 minute discovery call please contact Defuse at enqs@defuseglobal.com or phone +44(0)2072930932