



Australian Citizens Party

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MEDIA RELEASE

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‘Christchurch Call’ establishes dangerous pretext for state censorship

Unbeknownst to most Australians, our country in recent years has been leading the world in the adoption of Stasi-like surveillance and spying laws which threaten basic human freedoms. Now, an entirely new level of social control is being planned in response to the 15 March Christchurch terrorist attack, which New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and French President Emmanuel Macron launched on 15 May in their “Christchurch Call” for internet censorship. Behind the ostensible goal of suppressing “terrorist and violent extremist content” online, the pair have recruited the world’s biggest social media and internet platforms to an agenda, which predates Christchurch, to give intelligence agencies broad powers to censor what they define as “disinformation”.

Most of the social media platforms had been reluctant to cooperate prior to the Christchurch shock, but have now fallen into line. While the USA expressed support for the Christchurch Call, it declined to sign on out of concern that it conflicts with the guarantee of freedom of speech enshrined in the First Amendment to the US Constitution.

Just in the last year, Australia has already implemented:

- Foreign interference laws, passed in June 2018, which limit freedom of speech, association and political communication. In the name of intervening to stop “hostile state actors” broader powers than ever are being accepted across the globe, and can be used at the discretion of authorities under the cover of secrecy with very little oversight or chance of redress, as is the case with all the laws listed here.
- The *Telecommunications and Other Legislation Amendment (Assistance and Access) Act 2018*, or the encryption laws, passed the Australian Parliament in December 2018, [providing unprecedented spying and hacking powers to Australia’s intelligence agencies](#), and the power to compel Australian citizens to assist them. This law is a copy of Britain’s November 2016 *Investigatory Powers Act*, a.k.a. the “Snoopers’ Charter”.
- Twenty days after the March 2019 Christchurch attack, parliament [passed new internet censorship legislation](#) in complete secrecy. The legislation, which experts warn could suppress whistleblowers and censor media content, made Australia the first country in the world where companies can be fined millions of dollars and their executives jailed for not complying with the *Criminal Code Amendment (Sharing of Abhorrent Violent Material) Act 2019*, rushed through parliament on 4 April.
- Also proposed is a [powerful federal anti-corruption agency](#) which would target the broadly-worded “misleading, deceptive and damaging breaches of editorial control by media organisations, especially open-source or social media”, among other forms of “corruption”, according to its proponents at Griffith University and Transparency International, which has a record of using corruption as a Trojan horse to impose international financial diktats on nations.

Two of these laws—the encryption and internet censorship bills—only passed due to the support of the Labor Party, which waved them through despite acknowledging serious concerns about their implications. In a typical Labor compromise, they justified not fighting the government on these concerns by promising to amend the worst aspects of the laws *when* they won government at the impending election—which didn’t happen!

Whose ‘disinformation’?

The global agenda for what former MI5 officer and whistleblower Annie Machon has [described as “techno-Stasi” police state laws](#), has been set by the Five Eyes spying alliance which comprises the intelligence agencies of the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The August 2018 Five Eyes Ministerial gathering on Queensland’s Gold Coast took aim at “faster identification and removal of illicit content”, and limiting “coercive acts of interference and disinformation”. Identifying and removing illicit content featuring acts of terrorism, child sexual abuse and extremist violence is one thing, but who decides what constitutes “disinformation”?

Notably, the final statement issued at that summit had expressed regret that “senior digital industry leaders did not accept our invitation to engage on critical issues regarding the illicit use of online spaces”. Now, with Facebook, Google, Twitter, Microsoft, Amazon, Dailymotion, Qwant and YouTube all

signing onto the Christchurch call, that roadblock has been overcome. As Ardern expressed it: “Never before have countries and tech companies come together in the wake of a horrific attack to commit to an action plan that will deliver collaboratively work in new technology built to make our communities ultimately safer.”

As the CEC has repeatedly questioned: [Why did the Five Eyes, which have unparalleled spying powers, not pick up on Christchurch killer Brenton Tarrant's well-advertised plans?](#) In all of the terrorist attacks in Australia and the UK in recent years, the attackers were well known to intelligence agencies; in some cases, such as the June 2017 London Bridge attack, they were closely associated with actual agents of the intelligence agencies and were under heavy surveillance. Was this the case with the Christchurch attacker? Given that the major New Zealand media have signed an agreement to censor coverage of Tarrant's trial—also supposedly to deny the killer “a platform”—will the public ever know the answer to this question? New Zealand's chief censor has already banned possession or distribution of the killer's manifesto, examination of which provides crucial clues about his motivation and broader agenda.

The Five Eyes advocates a “transnational model of security”, effectively [a global police state](#), which objective was reinforced at the CYBERUK 2019 summit in Glasgow, Scotland on 24-25 April. Director of Britain's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) Jeremy Fleming said the UK will “pioneer a new form of security”, and project its power globally as “part of a wide Cyber Power framework”. A growing public-private partnership, he declared, is “taking a bold, interventionist approach to involve a wider set of stakeholders”, with the “Five Eyes partners” at its “core”.

It is impossible to separate this censorship agenda from the state of the domestic and global economy, which is sinking further into crisis. As the financial establishment resorts to more extreme measures to prop up the financial system, such as austerity and “bail-in” laws that will seize the savings of ordinary people, there is a growing danger that the population will revolt against ruling institutions, as the French Yellow Vest protests and anti-European Union voting patterns in Europe demonstrate. Terrorism and foreign interference provide a pretext to implement police-state controls that will be used to protect establishment interests.