

## **Apathy of Youth to sedition**

I've always found the need to form an opinion on every controversial topic. Last week, I went to a forum, "Sedition - defending or subverting ' freedom?" There were two speakers, Simon Bronitt, a law professor, and David Marr, a leading journalist and a former Media Watch presenter. While handing out Civil Liberties Australia pamphlets and encouraging donations to the entering crowds, I noticed those attending were middle-aged professionals. Sedition laws ultimately mean the criminalisation of free speech and yet the majority of the people entering the theatre were not young people who are supposedly so passionate about protesting against the war in Iraq or the Government's policy on this and that.

How often have I walked through the quad at ANU and been hassled by all kinds of groups protesting about this Government? Why didn't I see any of those students at the sedition forum? Is no young person interested in knowing - whether that bumper sticker on their rusty old Commodore - 'Be seditious, at least once a day' - is seditious in that it incites sedition?

The new sedition laws are scary because of what they symbolise. Put simply, if you don't agree with the Government's policies and actions, don't state otherwise. The specific definition, however, leaves much to be desired in relation to its ambiguity. As Marr said sedition laws were vague, were meant to be vague, and the Government was determined to keep them vague.

As long as the laws are ambiguous and allow interpretation, the scary factor to them is already in place. Sedition laws are in place now and they ensure that the communication of controversial topics in times of today (where there is a supposed war on terror) is a crime.

It is a crime and it is vague so as to instill fear of potential imprisonment in people who may otherwise be letting their tongues loose - people who under other laws cannot be prosecuted but nevertheless annoy the Government.

So I come back to my original concern regarding the utter lack of concern of young people in Canberra. So far, my attempt to approach this topic with any young adult who doesn't happen to study law has been met with a blank expression, a hesitation and then a question, 'Sorry, what is sedition?'

For the rest of us, ultimately we have to consider whether sedition offences are truly counter-terrorist, counter-free speech or in fact simply counterproductive, since the only thing they are good for at present is making criminals of those who cannot be held liable for any other offence in relation to terrorism.

*Katja Petraello Kukoc, 21, is a fourth-year. - ANU student with a psychology-arts degree.*

*Article appeared in the Canberra Times on 9 October 2006*