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LETTERS & COMMENTARY

LIBERAL INTERNET BILL UNDERMINES FREE EXPRESSION: READER

With the support of the New Democratic Party, the Bloc Québécois and the Green party, the House of Commons passed the Trudeau Liberal government's Bill C-10, an act to amend the Broadcasting Act.

In simple terms, the bill puts the internet under the regulatory discretion of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Council (CRTC). This bill is laughable, concerning, meddling, ill-conceived, confusing, pointless and unprecedented all at the same time.

Where to begin? Bill C-10 sets up CRTC bureaucrats with free discretion to regulate and impose Canadian content restrictions on the internet, even though the internet knows no national borders! What regulations will be imposed on which websites? Your guess is as good as that of the Liberal government's own guess. The unelected CRTC will decide for itself how much to apply its powers and where. Liberals even voted at committee to remove exemptions for user-generated platforms from CRTC oversight, so who knows how your Facebook account will be impacted. The CRTC will become the ultimate decider.

The sheer unpredictability of Bill C-10 likely accounts for the lack of public

outrage to date in response: everyone knows what the problems of the internet are; no one knows what specific new problems the bill will introduce. Except that we can be certain that whoever will be affected will be punished with reduced freedom of expression. That is the clear warning of Michael Geist, Canada research chair in internet and e-commerce law at the University of Ottawa, and the advocacy organization Open-Media; both were previously also outspoken against the prior Conservative government's own careless intrusions into internet privacy.

Bill C-10 may yet die if a federal election is called before the senate can potentially pass it.

But whether the bill passes or dies in the senate, or whether parties campaign for it in a potential upcoming election, one thing is for certain: advocates for net neutrality and free expression online have a fight on their hands, a fight that the opposing advocates of simple non-solutions will fervently take up.

STEFAN KLIETSCH RENFREW
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