

## Labor’s reasons for a disinformation law are based on ... disinformation!

By Robert Barwick

After a temporary retreat last year following overwhelming public backlash, the Albanese government has doubled down on pushing a social media mis- and disinformation law, with Communications Minister Michelle Rowland introducing her MAD (Misinformation And Disinformation) bill last Thursday, 12 September.

Even a cursory reading of the bill has shocked people, due to the bill’s very broad definition of “serious harm”, which includes:

“imminent harm to the Australian economy, including harm to *public confidence in the banking system* or financial markets; that has: (g) significant and far reaching consequences for the Australian community or a segment of the Australian community; or (h) severe consequences for an individual in Australia.” (Emphasis added.)

Two of the Senators who led the recent inquiry into bank closures in regional Australia, and witnessed firsthand the appalling behaviour of the banks, quickly commented on this definition.

Inquiry chair Matt Canavan tweeted on 13 September:

“Australia’s proposed misinformation laws protect the banks over the right of Australians to speak freely. If these laws pass you won’t be able to say anything that causes harm to ‘public confidence in the banking system’. So under these laws those who called out the recklessness of mortgage-backed securities before the Global Financial Crisis would have been censored. Why does the Labor party think that our banks have earned the right to be immune from criticism? The misinformation laws are to protect them, not you.”

Senator Gerard Rennick, who instigated the banking inquiry, tweeted:

“This Misinformation Bill is something else. Fancy trying to censor criticism of the banking system and the financial markets. What’s so concerning is how on earth did that clause even get into the bill. Have the private banks and superannuation funds infiltrated the government to such an extent that they are now dictating what people can say?” Rennick added: “Fascism is generally defined as when corporations are more powerful than government, and based on this proposal it would appear that in Australia this is certainly the case. The banks and superannuation funds are even more powerful than I thought! Governments are clearly no longer interested in serving the people.”

### Minister of Truth

The introduction of the bill coincided with the visit to

Australia of Nina Jankowicz, the former Executive Director of the Disinformation Governance Board of the United States, a.k.a. Joe Biden’s Ministry of Truth.

Biden established the Disinformation Governance Board under the Department of Homeland Security in April 2022, with Jankowicz in charge; after a public backlash, however, including over the Board being unconstitutional as it breached the First Amendment’s guarantee of free speech, Jankowicz resigned within a month, and the board was disbanded by August 2022.

Although this US Ministry of Truth lasted only four months, its now ex-Minister of Truth came to Australia to urge the Australian government to do what is illegal in the United States!

In an extraordinary interview with Fran Kelly on ABC Radio National’s Saturday Extra on 14 September, “disinformation expert” Jankowicz pushed hard for the need to censor disinformation, but she did so by resorting to outright disinformation herself!

Jankowicz claimed that in preparation for her visit to Australia, she had learned that in the Aboriginal Voice referendum in 2023, “the Chinese government actually targeted the Voice, with 9,000 Instagram and Facebook accounts that were actually trying to agitate around the progressive No vote and drive division in Australian society. ... And nobody that I talked to in my travels had heard about that, so one of the biggest influence operations that happened here got very little airtime here and abroad.” Fran Kelly replied, “No, that’s true. I mean, I only learned about it in preparation for this interview.”

The reason Fran Kelly, a leading Australian journalist, hadn’t heard of the claim is because it didn’t happen!

Jankowicz’s source for this claim was one of the world’s leading sources of deliberate disinformation—a.k.a. lies—known as the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), which is funded by the US, UK and Japanese governments and the Western world’s biggest weapons dealers to pump out propaganda against China.

On 24 July 2023, ASPI published a report in its publication *The Strategist* titled “China’s cyber interference narrows in on Australian politics and policy”, in which authors Albert Zhang and Danielle Cave claimed:

“ASPI has identified a multi-language network of coordinated inauthentic accounts on US-based platforms including Twitter, YouTube, Facebook (archived), Reddit, Instagram (archived) and blog sites that we assess are likely involved in an ongoing Chinese Communist Party influence and

disinformation campaign targeting Australian domestic and foreign policies, including by *amplifying division over the Indigenous voice referendum*, and *sustained targeting of the Australian parliament, Australian companies (including the big-four banks) and our organisation, ASPI.*" (Emphasis added.)

ASPI elaborated:

"The campaign also amplifies negative messaging on a broad range of topics, individuals and organisations, including, for example, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, PwC and journalist Stan Grant. *Major Australian banks* are a key focus for many accounts in the campaign, including the Commonwealth Bank, the National Australia Bank, ANZ and Westpac. *This includes claims that Australian banks aren't serving regional Australia* and First Nations customers. Concurrently, *the campaign promotes the views of certain individuals (such as former prime minister Paul Keating) and organisations (especially the Australian Citizens Party).*" (Emphasis added.)

And there you have it: ASPI's claim was a thinly disguised attack on the Australian Citizens Party (ACP) for its enormously successful campaign against bank closures in regional Australia. The reason ASPI would want to attack the ACP is because the ACP has forcefully countered ASPI's propaganda lies regarding China for almost a decade. Often in that time, the ACP has been the only organisation in Australia that has been brave enough to do so, because taking on ASPI means taking on the might of the Anglo-American war and propaganda machine. Initially ASPI would have tried to dismiss the ACP's effective debunking of its lies as the work of a "fringe" organisation that could be ignored, but over time the ACP's general political influence has expanded enormously. The campaign around regional bank closures was especially effective, forcing ASPI's desperate attempt to undermine it by claiming it was a Chinese government influence operation—as if Xi Jinping personally cared that regional Australian towns were losing banking services!

And the only proof ASPI presented was screenshots of tweets by supposedly "Chinese Communist Party"-linked fake accounts commenting on issues like the Voice and regional bank closures, except the screenshots showed how ineffective the accounts actually were. They only registered tiny engagement in terms of views, comments and retweets.

Most telling about ASPI's claim is that it went largely ignored by the media and politicians. Given ASPI has been the go-to authority for all mainstream media and major

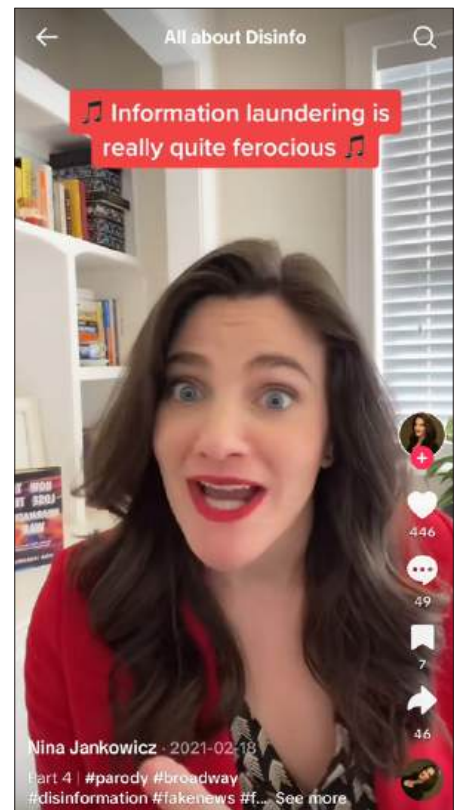
party politicians on all things China for a decade, the disinterest of the media and politicians demonstrated that even they found the claims hard to believe.

Until visiting American Nina Jankowicz told Fran Kelly, that is.

And how did Jankowicz find out about these claims? Her reason for visiting Australia was to speak at ASPI's annual Sydney Dialogue on "How to navigate the deep fake and disinformation minefield".

The most revealing part of Fran Kelly's interview with Jankowicz came when Kelly asked about the danger of encrypted apps, and the need to force the apps to allow authorities to access the content. Suddenly Jankowicz's mask slipped, and she admitted her background was in using those apps to work with US-backed groups in "places like Russia, Belarus, Ukraine" to undermine their governments, which she called "democracy support".

Given that one of the stated purposes of the government's MAD bill is to "prevent ... foreign interference", Jankowicz's visit makes clear that the issue is not really disinformation at all, but information warfare. The government wants to be able to control what information (including deliberate disinformation) Australians are allowed to see, to preserve *their* political power, while actively supporting our ally America's disinformation operations to overthrow other governments it regards as adversaries.



Biden's Minister of Truth Nina Jankowicz is most famous for her Tik Tok video singing about disinformation to a Mary Poppins tune. Behind the façade, she's involved in information warfare that topples governments and sparks wars.