

# Dear Chloe Smith, Why are you taking away the right to ...

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I [have written today](#) about the enormous threat to free speech that the government is intending to rush through Parliament in early September in the form of the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill.

In that blog I urged people to write to Chloe Smith MP expressing their concerns about their continuing right to free speech. I have now written to Miss Smith, saying:

*Dear Chloe Smith*

*I am writing to you to express my concern about Part 2 of the [Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill](#).*

*In 1946 my grandfather who gave me my name died. His was a war death. In his forties he'd served on HMS Sheffield, helping sink the Bismarck before escorting convoys from Scapa Flow to Murmansk and back for months in a row. The stress eventually killed him. He has a war grave.*

*I always presumed he died for a reason. Yes he fought fascism, but he fought for something more than that. I believe he fought for the fundamental freedoms that went on to be encapsulated in the United Nation's declaration of human rights. [That includes Article 19, which says:](#)*

*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.*

*I believe you are now intending to deny me that right. Part 2 of the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill will, if passed, quite specifically deny me the right to hold opinions and impart them without interference through any media. This is going to have a massive impact on my life in a great many areas.*

*As a chartered accountant, blogger and campaigner for tax reform — two of whose ideas (on a general anti-avoidance principle and country-by-country reporting) have been at least partly adopted by your government — I will be potentially barred from publishing my work, which is partly funded by donations given with the express intention that I seek to change public opinion on matters relating to tax justice, unless in the year prior to an election I:*

- 1) register as a 'recognised third party';*
- 2) comply with the requirements of your proposed law;*
- 3) report the donations I receive in an onerous fashion;*
- 4) do not cooperate with others to publish opinions without risk of substantial additional obligations and penalties arising.*

*I wonder, is this your real intention? Do you really wish that debate on an issue of public concern, such as taxation, be restricted in such an onerous way in the year prior to a general election?*

*And do you really wish that those who share common opinion on such issues be prevented from saying so for fear of financial and criminal penalties being applied to them for simply saying they agree with each other?*

*Do you really, as a result, wish to deny me my freedom to speak without fear? And do you wish to deny me the chance to publish as I would want in free association with others?*

*From my reading of your Bill it would seem so to me.*

*More worryingly, I realise that this does not only apply to my work. The restrictions you plan would seem to apply to many of the organisations of which I am a member and to which I donate funds and which will not, without compliance with these extraordinary obligations you are proposing, be able to take part in normal dialogue and debate in the future.*

*The National Trust, RSPB and Norfolk Wildlife Trust, all of which I am a member of, quite clearly seek to change public opinion on matters relating to the environment which by no means all political parties agree with. All are charities, but are you now seeking to declare them political? If so, will you then remove their charitable status? Is it your intention that charities must not now ask why there are problems, but should only seek to redress harm caused, without raising questions that would seek to prevent recurrence?*

*Christian Aid, Oxfam and other charities I support campaign on tax justice. Would you now seek to stop them doing this work in the year before an election even though the*

*G8 has recognised the importance of their work on this issue?*

*And as a member of union I also note that the TUC will now no longer be able to hold a conference next year — because your Bill will effectively outlaw it. No doubt that will be true for Unite — the union of which I am a member — as well. Did you really want to deny the biggest mass movement in the UK a voice? Don't you know what happens to states that suppress unions? And aren't you aware that to deny a union the right to represent their members' views is contrary to Article 23 of the UN declaration?*

*Finally, I am a Quaker. The Quaker testimonies are to peace, truth, simplicity and equality. By no means all political parties share Quaker interpretation on these issues. Is it now to be the case that you will deem an expression of religious belief to be political lobbying? And in that case, where does this end?*

*Your Bill undermines fundamental freedoms that the people of this country have fought for.*

*Your Bill will undermine the democratic process by denying many the freedom to partake in it.*

*Your Bill will undermine the right of people to associate and publish as they wish.*

*Your Bill will create a climate of fear when people speak out.*

*Your Bill may well criminalise the right to peaceful protest.*

*Your Bill seeks to impose a silence few will dare challenge.*

*Is that what you really intend?*

*If so, please say why, openly and clearly because I really want to know why you are taking basic human rights — the rights my grandfather fought for when he risked his life and eventually lost it — away from me and millions of others in this country whose only passion is that we live in a country that is better for all of us.*

*I look forward to hearing from you.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Richard Murphy*