

# MPs vote on whether to end free speech this week - so i...

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Article [11 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#) says:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. The freedom and pluralism of the media shall be respected.*

Today MPs begin a debate to remove that freedom. As [Polly Toynbee says in the Guardian this morning](#):

*The "transparency of lobbying, non-party campaigning and trade union administration bill" will treat charities, thinktanks, blogs, community groups and activists of every hue as political parties. From tiny groups vocal on local matters to great national organisations, all risk being silenced in the year before a general election, to avoid falling under electoral law. Any organisation spending £5,000 a year and expressing an opinion on anything remotely political must register with the Electoral Commission.*

*The way permitted campaign spending is calculated has been widened in remit and cut by 60%, so it includes all staffing costs for the year. That will include not only large charities but little groups affiliated to national umbrella organisations whose spending will contribute to a national capped limit. So a Save Our Sure Start or Save Our Hospital in a small town finds every linked Sure Start or NHS campaign counted into its local spending for electoral purposes. Since almost everything is political, this kills much debate in election years when voters should be hearing policy choices.*

She's right. As [Helen Mountfield QC of Matrix Chambers has suggested](#) the new rules are so complex and unclear that they are "likely to have a chilling effect on freedom of expression, putting small organisations and their trustees and directors in fear of criminal penalty if they speak out on matters of public interest and concern".

As Polly Toynbee summarises it, the rationale for this is clear:

*This government has roused the indignation of what was once Cameron's "big society",*

*now suffering the brunt of his cuts. Many charities see it as their duty to speak up for the causes people donate to. Whether that's for the homeless or the green belt, for deprived young offenders or victims of crime, for the arts or sport, for green energy or anti-windfarms, it's always a fine line — but the Charity Commission already polices their politics, and has [installed a rightwing chair](#).*

In summary:

*This is just another crude gerrymander to hobble Labour and gag the government's most dangerous potential critics — charities more trusted by the public than any political party.*

I have already written on this, [here](#), and [here](#). A fundamental freedom - our right to speak on issues of concern - is at risk of being taken away from us by this bill.

If you value your freedom to speak; if you value democracy and if you value our way of life please lobby your MP today.

[38 Degrees have advice on how to do it.](#)