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Socialism In Our Time

Young Labor Left NSW Submission on the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill 2024

Young Labor Left expresses deep concerns over the Government's intentions to restrict access to social media for people under 16.

It has been proven time and time again that by banning access to goods and services, users face a harder time reporting, and seeking help for harm caused. Legally restricting social media for people under 16 years old *will not* significantly reduce the rate at which young people access social media and *will not* decrease instances of cyberbullying, abuse, or other forms of digital harm.

Young Labor Left is concerned with the means in which age would be verified. Young Labor Left has deep reservations should the legislation require the provision of government ID documents to platforms to social media companies, given how prone these companies are to leaks and data misuse. Young Labor Left sees this as a blatant infringement on people's right to privacy and on their civil liberties.

Young Labor Left notes the lack of scientific evidence backing claims that social media causes mental ill health. The ban will have an adverse effect on young Australians who will be cut off from online support networks of friends and family, as well as people with similar identities, interests and passions. In a globally acknowledged loneliness crisis, restricting social media will worsen an already extreme epidemic.

Young Labor Left also notes the importance of social media in pushing for progressive changes in society, such as the # MeToo movement, Black Lives Matter, and School Strike 4 Climate. Social media is indispensable for movements like these, and restricting young people's access will cut them off from the movements that inspire and represent them.



Proponents of the legislation have cited falling education results as a key factor necessitating this legislation. This is a flawed position that needs more nuance. Understaffing, lack of funding, and lacklustre support services are driving these declines in results. The government must not govern on knee-jerk reactions, and must instead commit to funding the systems that have served Australian children well for decades.

Finally, with more and more news consumed on social media, digital literacy is an increasingly important skill. Allowing young people to navigate the internet freely and with unimpeded support from family and educators is vital to ensuring misinformation and disinformation are combatted on the internet. By legally restricting access, young Australians will have less time to develop an understanding of digital environments upon reaching adulthood, leaving them vulnerable to dangerous online narratives. This must be combatted by education and guidance, not bans.

In Solidarity,
Young Labor Left

Jemma Hardman
Secretary of Young Labor Left NSW

