

# In political tribalism, ego is not a dirty word

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For a staggering show of vanity, it's hard to go past comments from Emily Rich last week. The director of start-ups for Asia-Pacific at Microsoft believes Christian Porter's new role as Industry, Science and Technology Minister will deter tech people from engaging with the Morrison government. "And it should," she pronounced.

"To borrow the words of Grace Tame, I'm using my voice amongst a growing chorus of voices that will not be silent," she told The Australian Financial Review, condemning Porter's new role following unproven and unprovable allegations made against him of rape when he was a 17-year-old debating student.

"The appointment of a minister even remotely linked to such allegations ... it's challenging ... This is a moment of national significance. We're entitled to expect better."

Rich is right. We are entitled to expect better. From her, and others like her. It's a fine project to use your voice for a cause you believe in. But that project becomes rather shady when you throw away the presumption of innocence to flaunt your moral superiority.

Rich's high-horse routine was outdone by Girl Geek Academy chief executive Sarah Moran, who told the AFR she would have to rethink whether she could accept government money, given Porter's portfolio. Maybe she should return previous grants given to her by a conservative government that believes in the presumption of innocence and the rule of law. Because it seems these ideas don't sit well with Moran.

These women have performed a public service of sorts. Their comments point to the scary similarities between the extremes of the left and the right.

Many on both sides of the political divide increasingly are driven by self-righteous grandstanding, a modern form of ideological narcissism where some people cannot conceive that there is something more important than their personal politics and their heartfelt feelings.

What unifies Donald Trump and his fans, and many on the left, is an egocentric inability to commit to something bigger than their emotions, such as the fundamental principles that underpin a democracy. There was an election. Voters have spoken. Forget it, say Trump and his more unhinged fans. The umpire was dirty. The system was rigged. We'll ignore democracy.

A presumption of innocence? Due process? The rule of law? No thanks, according to many on the left. People such as Rich and Moran condemn people who ought to be presumed innocent until proven guilty. Their egoistic certainty means they don't need a court to pronounce guilt.

These tech women are free to dislike Porter. We live in a free country. But it won't remain free if more people follow their path. The new order that aims to strip people of their careers, their livelihoods, their reputations, their dignity on the basis of unproven allegation harks back to the closed, ignorant, authoritarian world where witches were burned at the stake.

Sure, the self-appointed morality preachers in the modern era aren't lighting real fires. But it is just as wicked to use one's voice to fan the flames of unproven and, in Porter's case, seemingly unprovable allegations, to try to damage a man's career and stain his reputation. If you plan to do that, you ought to have tonnes of evidence to support the serious consequences. But today it's done on the whiff of a self-righteous rag. For many, particularly on the left, politics has become their unwavering moral code. To ingratiate themselves with their chosen tribe, they end up perpetuating mob rule.

Unlike most religions, which offer justice for the innocent and redemption for the guilty, this new model of governance has a purely political attachment to the idea of innocence until proven guilty, or redemption for the guilty. The concept applies only to people with whom they agree.

Hence, Israel Folau is still unable to make a living from rugby because a bunch of diversity and

inclusion hypocrites in rugby clubs and the media decided that free speech is vulgar if it means Folau can express his Christian views about homosexuality. Two years later, rugby bosses have decided there is no room for redemption either.

One day it's Rugby Australia flaying Folau. The next day it's the ABC running a wickedly biased campaign against Porter with allegations they know cannot be proven. Then a few female tech workers assume that adding their voices to the mob is legit because their motives to rid society of sexual harassment are well intentioned. If they can park their feelings for a few short minutes, they might consider where their path takes us. Mob rule, even by a bunch of female techies who want to use their voice, is no substitute for the rule of law. And given that mob rule begets more mob rule, who will defend them, or their partners, or brothers, or fathers if they become the target of unproven allegations?

It took Microsoft's local boss, Steven Worrall, two days to make it clear that Rich's comments were not the views of Microsoft. What's unclear is whether Worrall was stepping in to defend time-honoured principles such as the presumption of innocence or trying to protect the tech giant's \$60m annual pipeline of work for federal government.

More likely the latter. Condemning Trump as a danger to democracy is kid's play. It takes more moral fibre to pull your own band of anti-democrats into line.

In a speech last week, NSW Chief Justice Tom Bathurst rightly accused lawyers who used courts for "the advancement of untenable arguments" of undermining the rule of law. They owed a paramount duty to the administration of justice, he said.

While Bathurst singled out attempts by Trump's lawyers to overturn a clear election result, his observation applies equally to those who use the media and social media platforms as a cheaper, more accessible court of public opinion to damage people they detest using unproven allegations.

For those who claim to be progressive, it's especially rich to watch how their politics has become a warped moral code. It acts like a cancer, slowly killing democracy by making no room for the presumption of innocence, due process and the rule of law.

The only cure is to call these pretentious anti-democrats to account every time they try to

trash democracy.

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