



Deeming defamation case shows media complicit in silencing women

MEDIA RELEASE, 25 October 2024

Moira Deeming's defamation action against Victorian Liberal leader John Pesutto has shone light on the injustice women are currently facing both in the Victorian Liberal Party and in the media.

During trial questioning from Sue Chrysanthou SC, witness evidence exposed serious questions about the information relied upon by mainstream media in the wake of the Melbourne Let Women Speak (LWS) rally in March 2023, which triggered the expulsion of Deeming from the Liberal Party. Together, the Liberals and the media effectively worked to vilify those attending the women's rights event following its disruption by a neo-Nazi group that stormed the rally.

The trial exposed the backroom machinations and gaslighting that Deeming endured at the hands of her colleagues. Thousands watching the livestream of the trial have been shocked at the complacency of party actors and the media in developing a defamatory narrative that smeared Deeming and all other women present at the rally. Misrepresentation and manipulation of information was reported as fact, and women were afforded no right of reply.

"In our democracy, independent media have a vital role in creating platforms for freedom of expression and legitimate public debate about controversial topics. As such, they serve as a check on the powers of executive government," said Australian Feminists for Women's Rights (AF4WR) co-convenor, Emeritus Professor Bronwyn Winter. "We thus hope that the media will heed the lessons of the Deeming defamation trial".

It is not just the Liberal Party: across the political spectrum, political leaders have vilified women who participated in the LWS rally as "nazis" and "bigots". State and Federal governments in particular, most of which are currently Labor, have used this narrative as justification for their consistent shutting down of any discussion about women's sex-based rights.

"We call upon our current State and Federal governments to stop actively disenfranchising the very women whose votes won them victory at the polls", said Professor Winter. "We also call upon the media to put an end to their sexist bias in reporting on the complex political questions of sex and gender".

With closing arguments now completed, we now await the Court decision. The question for so many women now is: will this Court finally vindicate Deeming, and with her, all women who have been smeared and silenced by the media and by our political leaders?

Australian Feminists for Women's Rights is a left-wing feminist organisation providing research-based advocacy on women's sex-based rights.

ENDS