

In Germany, the Government Wants to Decide What Is True



Rainer Zitelmann

Apr 03, 2025

The opinions expressed by columnists are their own and do not necessarily represent the views of Townhall.com.

In Germany, coalition negotiations are currently taking place to form a new government, with discussions underway between the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats. A joint paper issued by the two parties states: “The deliberate dissemination of false information is not protected under the right to freedom of speech.”

The outcome: “The media supervisory authority, which operates independently from the government, must be able to take action against misinformation, hatred, and incitement on the basis of clear legal guidelines while safeguarding freedom of expression.”

The thesis that false factual statements are not protected under freedom of speech is problematic because there has been an increasing tendency in recent years to denigrate dissenting opinions as “hate speech” and to present certain opinions as indisputable truths, even when they are not. The trick: Dissenting opinions are labeled as “hate speech” in order to then assert that “hate is not an opinion.” Furthermore, false claims are portrayed as truths and facts are equated with the dissemination of hate speech, just like in Orwell’s *1984* or under authoritarian regimes such as the German Democratic Republic.

In the socialist GDR, the offense of “anti-state agitation” was classified as a state crime under Section 106 of the Criminal Code (originally known as “boycott agitation”). This law criminalized activities such as attacking or inciting against the social order of the GDR through “discriminatory” writings and similar actions. Many members of the GDR opposition were arrested on the charge of “anti-state agitation,” in particular because the wording of the law was so vague that almost any critical statement could be used as grounds

for punishment under this provision. Section 106 of the 1986 Criminal Code punished “anti-state agitation” with a prison sentence of between two and 10 years.

The role of fact-checkers in Germany today is a contentious issue, as they effectively restrict freedom of speech, like censors, particularly on social media platforms. Typically, these “fact checkers,” most of whom have a strong left-wing bias, never criticize false claims when they are made by anti-capitalists. For instance, the fact checkers could theoretically object to assertions that capitalism leads to hunger and poverty on a daily basis. But they do not.

Recommended



The Globalist Authoritarians Are Playing With Fire

Kurt Schlichter



Inside the FBI's Elaborate System to Protect Joe After the Hunter Biden Laptop Story Broke

Matt Vespa

One example: Before the emergence of capitalism, most people in the world lived in extreme poverty – in 1820, the rate was 90 percent. Today, it has fallen below 9 percent. What is truly remarkable is the rapid acceleration of this decline in poverty in recent decades: Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the implementation of market economy reforms in China, poverty has declined at a faster rate than at any previous stage in human history. In 1981, the rate was 42.7 percent, by 2000 it had already fallen to 27.8 percent and today it stands at 8.5 percent.

Anyone who claims that capitalism leads to poverty is therefore spreading misinformation. In my book *[In Defense of Capitalism](#)*, I have refuted such false claims about capitalism on over 400 pages, backed up with over 800 sources.

And yet, these erroneous claims are perpetuated by the media on a daily basis. Should all these claims be banned? I don't think so. Talking nonsense must also be allowed, including saying that global hunger and poverty are on the rise and that capitalism is to blame. Or that capitalism is to blame for slavery (although capitalism has in fact largely abolished it).

In the ongoing debate surrounding climate change, claims are often described as scientifically proven facts that are anything but. Within the public discourse, it is now regarded as an allegedly indisputable fact that climate change is directly responsible for the escalating frequency and intensity of extreme weather events and that these are resulting in ever higher costs and ever more destruction. The reality, however, is that the rise in damages caused by extreme weather can be attributed to factors such as increased urbanization and inflation and there is still no evidence that this is due to climate change. Despite this, the scientific data does not change the public discourse. "How climate change is producing more and more killer storms" was the headline of the leading German news magazine *Der Spiegel* in July 2002.

Should claims like these be banned? I believe the answer is no. As far as I'm concerned, someone can even claim that there are dozens or hundreds of genders.

Allowing people to talk nonsense poses less of a threat to society and individual freedom than granting the state the power to dictate what is right or wrong. Once the government starts defining what is true and what is false, at some point we'll end up with a Ministry of Truth, the workplace of Winston Smith in George Orwell's *1984*.

Rainer Zitelmann is a historian and sociologist and author of the book *The Power of Capitalism* <https://the-power-of-capitalism.com/> and *The Origins of Poverty and Wealth* <https://origins-poverty-wealth.com/>