The ACLU And The Aphonic Ninety Percent

by John M. Joyce

Recently I read an article about the ACLU at [this site](#) .

The main point that I took from the article was that apart from the fact that free speech is an absolute, a position the ACLU doesn't support any more, it seems that the most important question in free speech cases is: who gets to decide what is and is not free speech? Well, no one should be allowed to order people not to say something, but for people everywhere the answer to the question is: not you, not me, not the ordinary people. We don't get to decide.

Never you. Never me. Never the ordinary man in the street. Never Joe Bloggs on the Clapham omnibus. It's always going to be those in power, or maybe those influencing power, that you and I can't, or don't know how to, resist or get to. For example, more often than not the people who belong, deliberately or unknowingly, to bullying pressure groups are the ones who set the agenda. They're the ones who most often have political power, or easy access to those who do wield such power.

Now, why would anyone want to give bully groups and mealy mouthed politicians the power to decide who should speak and what they should and, more importantly shouldn't, say? Why on earth aren't we ordinary people yelling our displeasure at every politician we come across or we can reach? We, the silent ninety percent, are silent but not aphonic. It's time we yelled.

I rather liked a couple of quotes from the article as well: "The only real antagonist of free speech and social justice is power, political power." and "Speech restrictions are like poison gas. They seem like they're a great weapon when you've got your target in sight. But then the wind shifts." (Ira Glasser; executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union from 1978 to 2001; in [this article](#)).

In conclusion I have to say that here in the U.K. there is a tiny little bit of good news on the free speech front and you can read all about it by following [this link](#).