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The Uncensored Truth

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GHOSTS OF PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE
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Censorship for Christmas

By PAUL G. CONLON

■ Paul G. Conlon is a former Australian Army officer, senior engineer, and author focused on digital autonomy and civil liberties.



Paul G. Conlon (pictured)

Knock knock.

It's not the start of a joke—it's the sound I waited for every Christmas Eve as a child. With German heritage, our family celebrated early, and that knock meant Santa's gift sack waited at the door.

I later learned it was my father's knuckles and my parents' gifts. The one I remember most wasn't wrapped in paper, but in a lesson, I've carried since.

One year, more than anything, I wanted a SEGA Megadrive. It would have been the first gaming console allowed into our home and earning it wasn't guaranteed. My parents weighed it carefully. Would it distract me from chores? Affect school? Could I handle the responsibility? These were judgements only a family with skin in the game could make, not a rule reducible to age.

When I finally unwrapped that Megadrive, it wasn't just a present. It was a coming-of-age, a signal I was ready for technology that could shape my habits



and attention. It taught me that readiness is built on preparation and parental discernment, not government dictates.

That world ends this Christmas with the under-16 social media ban.

According to eSafety.gov.au, "The Australian Government is protecting young Australians...through world-

first social media age restrictions taking effect on 10 December." Protecting children sounds noble—but behind that ornamental language sit two profound shifts: the quiet replacement of parental authority with national rulebooks, and the rise of digital enforcement systems reaching far beyond social media and age checks.

These changes unwind centuries of hard-won liberties. The Magna Carta began a long drift of power away from rulers; this policy pulls it back. And the human cost isn't acknowledged.

Children need risk to mature. Riding horses, using power tools, navigating early responsibilities give young people measured

exposure to consequences and growth.

In fact, an Australian flight instructor can deem a fifteen-year-old ready to fly a plane solo. Yet that same teenager is now considered too fragile by Canberra to watch YouTube cat videos for another year. Is it any wonder our children struggle to form a healthy sense of self?

If child protection is the metric, why was Pornhub excluded? Why are the platforms most effective at political debate and alternative viewpoints the first to be restricted?

Safety isn't the issue—control is. Once age limits police the internet, compliance requires identification from everyone—and a government with perfect visibility holds absolute leverage.

Even Greens Senator David Shoebridge warned, "they're making it up on the fly—2.5 million young people are being disrespected and everyone's privacy treated like a joke." He's right. New restrictions and requirements appear weekly.

That's how scope creep works: first social media, then the wider internet, employment, medicine, travel, finance. And once identity becomes the gatekeeper, those essentials become conditional—a playground for discrimination.

Children lose rites of passage. Families lose rights of judgement. This isn't theory. It's unfolding now, in the weeks before Christmas. What legacy will we bequeath—earned autonomy or dictated prohibition?

Will our children's Christmases be Merry ... or Monitored?

■ For practical steps to protect your family's digital autonomy, visit Paul G. Conlon's Weekend Anonymity course at weekendanon.com