



Protesters rally at Conroy's office

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POLITICAL opponents of Stephen Conroy's media reforms converged on the Communications Minister's suburban office to denounce the agenda and accuse him of Orwellian motives.

More than 50 protesters, blasted by bitterly cold Melbourne weather, yesterday gathered in inner-western suburban Newport to confront the minister. He did not materialise.

Several Liberal MPs used the footpath as a soap box to attack Senator Conroy's motives.

State upper house MP Bernie Finn is a broadcaster by trade, having spent a decade at radio station 3AW.

He told *The Australian* it was the first time in his 51 years that the commonwealth had attempted to clamp down on free speech.

"People are concerned what's

going to happen," Mr Finn said.

"This is the first time in my life I can recall a federal government censoring freedom of speech," he said.

"The federal government has made clear what its intentions are. Australia is the land of the free. Where do we go if our freedom goes?"

Senator Scott Ryan, who sits opposite Senator Conroy in Parliament House in Canberra, said the Conroy reforms could lead to some journalists being officially approved and others being on the outer.

Senator Ryan, the shadow parliamentary secretary for small business, said politicians should not be appointing an advocate.

"You can't compare this to defamation law," he said, adding that judges were independent and

had hundreds of years of history to draw upon when making decisions.

Liberal senator Mitch Fifield told the rally that although a photo in a local newspaper last week might be unflattering, he should not be able to stop it appearing simply because he did not agree with it.

"That is the thing about this legislation — we have a government that is a dill, trying to stop people from finding out about it, and that's why this legislation is wrong and it must be fought against with every fibre of our bodies," he said.

"We are going to have a government-appointed person to tell us what is, or is not, newsworthy."

ADDITIONAL REPORTING:
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DAVID GERAGHTY

Victorian Liberal MP Bernie Finn addresses protesters outside Stephen Conroy's suburban electoral office yesterday