

Crikey publisher: more vigilance needed

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RESPONDING to a speech by parliamentarian Michael Danby, the publisher of online newspaper Crikey has agreed that sometimes comments made on websites can go “too far”.

Speaking to the Main Committee in the House of Representatives on Monday evening, Danby singled out Crikey and New Matilda as examples of websites that consistently allow “unmoderated, unleashed and unhinged” public comments on articles related to Middle Eastern politics.

“Their writing and the editorial bias of the online publications for which they write clearly puts them on the fringe of Australian politics,” Danby said. “If one compares the things they wrote with, say, Labor Party discussions at the recent national conference, one would see they are completely outside the mainstream of the Centre Left party in this country, for instance. For those writers to seek refuge behind their ethnicity is particularly craven. It is dishonest.”

Eric Beecher, Crikey’s publisher, rejected the idea that the daily online newspaper was in any way anti-Semitic or deliberately sought to demonise or de-legitimise Israel.

“It is true though, that Crikey pushes the boundaries, and in doing so sometimes pushes too far,” Beecher said.

In addition to his speech, Danby tabled a list of comments left on Crikey. They included remarks such as: “Tell us your last name ... or are you just another Zionist coward, bar-racking from behind your nom de plume for the killing of innocent civilians”.

Beecher agreed that these comments did not have a place on his website.

“Some of the examples of reader comments cited by Michael Danby in his speech pushed too far, but [this is] as a result of poor editing and moderating comments, not as a result of any editorial mandate or policy,” he said. “Like other media operating in a free-flowing online environment, Crikey needs to be vigilant to ensure comments are not racist or do not go beyond the boundaries of legitimate debate.”

Even prior Danby’s speech, New Matilda responded to criticisms of its website by switching off the comments facility on articles relating to Israel and Middle East politics.