



SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

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Why Australia Needs a Charter of Human Rights

And this is why we need a Charter of Human Rights in Australia! These obstacles to democracy currently exist both here in Australia and across the world. The rise of the extreme right, the excessive use of racism against minorities and those who oppose the powerful, the attacks on democratic rights and the trade unions are growing apace and we ignore these at our peril.

History shows us this and, as the saying goes, if we ignore the lessons of history we will be condemned to repeat them. Nazism grew and took power in Germany in the 1930s; it began with racism against Jews, gypsies and those with disabilities, and then encompassed trade unions and any who opposed its ideology.

happening today in Australia and those in power are the perpetrators of this unacceptable ideology that encourages the growth of right wing extremism.

Who would have believed that in New Zealand these extremists would attack mosques and murder 50 innocent people, and wound many others, not just physically but mentally perhaps forever. Yet this is the situation today.

This is happening not just here in our country but across the world. Racism and fascism are on the rise in Europe, in the US and in the UK. This extremist ideology is growing apace and is based on hatred and lies: hatred

The two greatest obstacles to democracy in the United States are, first, the widespread delusion among the poor that we have a democracy, and second, the chronic terror among the rich, lest we get it.

– EDWARD DOWLING 1941

As they were demonised and picked off, the whole structure of society was weakened, allowing fascism to develop.

Today in Australia we are facing the growth of the extreme right, the introduction of policies that target progressives, legislation that limits democracy and attacks on the trade union movement. We are seeing the growth of far right parties such as One Nation and the Shooters and Fishers Party, and far right extremists in the National and Liberal Parties.

Who would have believed that today, in the 21st century, in a country that purports to be democratic, and after the defeat of fascism in World War 11, that we would have governments demonising those seeking asylum in our country from wars in which we are engaged. That we would witness vicious attacks on our trade unions, that 'terrorism' would be used to demonise the Islamic faith, that synagogues and mosques and Islamic and Jewish schools and individuals would be targeted. Yet this is

of migrants, hatred of people of different religions, hatred of people of colour. This hatred is then used to excuse the excesses of capital and to divert attention from decisions being made at the very top of our society. These are decisions that deny us decent wages and conditions in our work, the right to employment, the right to housing, education and healthcare. They are decisions that cut the income of those struggling without a job and result in cutting people off essential services such as power and water because of their inability to pay. They destroy our environment in the name of profit; they divide us off, one group from another in order to weaken our ability to fight back.

This is why we have begun a campaign to fight for a Charter of Human Rights in Australia. We are the only Western nation not to have one, and while such a charter won't resolve all our problems, it will provide the basis for our rights to be protected. This is the Melbourne Unitarian Church's contribution to the fight for democracy and social justice. Will you join us? 

EDITORIAL

BY ROB WATTS

EAST MELBOURNE UNITARIAN PEACE MEMORIAL CHURCH • GREY ST, EAST MELBOURNE • 17 MARCH 2019



Thinking about change:

from abolishing slavery to getting an Australian Charter of Human Rights

As we all know, Australia is the last liberal democracy to have a 'Bill of Rights' or a Charter of Human Rights. This is odd because it is fairly likely that if a poll were taken of Australians about the question 'Are human rights a good idea?' that most of us – by a small majority – would say 'yes'.

Assuming that this was the result, Anthony Grayling (2007: 242) would say that this is because a momentous shift occurred around 1945 in the way governments, political leaders and public opinion thought about three things – war, the sovereignty or power of the state, and human rights. These changes in thinking, he says, ostensibly reflected what had been learned at the conclusion of a global war (1939–45) which saw ordinary citizens pay a far higher cost in terms of lives lost and the quantum of sheer terror and misery than that experienced by either citizens or military combatants in any previous war.

Grayling (2007:242) also says it was agreed that there was merit in synthesising all of the ideas about liberty and rights from the centuries before 'and to organise that thinking into a body of clear-cut principles and to affirm it as universally applicable'. This thinking, says Grayling, resulted in the United Nations drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights introduced to the world on 12 December 1948.

Since then there has been a lot of energy put into promoting human rights. The Universal Declaration would be followed over the following decades with a succession of major UN covenants, the first addressing civil and political rights and the second dedicated to economic, social and cultural rights. The UN has also subsequently drafted special covenants spelling out the rights of children, women, peoples

with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and so forth. On each occasion governments around the world were then invited to accept them as legally binding and to pass them into domestic legislation.

Take the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (UNCCPR) (1976). The rights protected under the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) are, in almost every country in the world, implemented by a domestic guarantee of rights often called a 'Bill of Rights' or a charter of human rights. In 1980 Australia ratified the UNICCPR. Article 2(2) of that Covenant says clearly:

Where not already provided for by existing legislative or other measures, each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to take the necessary steps, in accordance with its constitutional processes and with the provisions of the present Covenant, to adopt such legislative or other measures as may be necessary to give effect to the rights recognized in the present Covenant.

Australia remains in breach of this legal obligation. Indeed, Australia remains the only democracy in the world not to have passed a law directly implementing the ICCPR. When human rights activists ask when will Australia join the international community and legislate to introduce the ICCPR, governments and political leaders respond by claiming that the rights protected by the ICCPR are already adequately protected by the common law, existing legislation, and the democratic nature of our government. Our governments then routinely proceed to lecture other states about their abuse of human rights and the need to uphold a rules-based international order.

It is not for want of trying that Australia continues to be the only liberal democracy without a national human rights act or Bill of Rights. The long history of failed attempts to pass a parliamentary Bill of Rights for Australia suggests that resistance to embracing a formal declaration of rights in Australia has been as longstanding as public discussion about it (Charlesworth 2002, 2006, 2008; Williams 2006). Every effort to introduce national 'bills of rights' in the past three decades has failed.

We got very close in 2008–9 when the Rudd government sponsored a national Human Rights Consultation. The Brennan Committee received 35,014 written submissions – by far the largest response to a national consultation in Australia. Of the 35,014 submissions received and of the 32,091 that addressed the question of the value of having a Human Rights Act, 27,888 were in favour of a Human Rights Act and 4,203 against. Among its thirty-one recommendations, the committee recommended that Australia adopt a federal Human Rights Act. I am advised by Father Brennan that faced by a tough veto from the ALP Labour Right, the Rudd government declined to adopt that recommendation. It adopted a number of the Brennan Committee's minor recommendations.

This history points to a mixture of community sentiment vaguely favouring human rights and persistent opposition by Australia's political and legal elite to formally establishing a constitutional or statutory basis for protecting human rights (Williams 2006: 883–4).

It is clear that human rights continue to lead a fugitive existence in Australia (Galligan and Larking 2009). It is high time to change that. So let me say something now about how we might approach the task of changing people's minds by asking what marks out the successful campaigns for change and social justice. While there are a number of outstanding candidates, Adam Hochschild (2005) makes a good case for treating the antislavery movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as an exemplary social movement.

SUCCESSFUL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: THE ANTISLAVERY MOVEMENT, 1787–1833

In his great book, *Bury the Chains*, Adam Hochschild notes that at the end of the eighteenth century, more than three-quarters of the world's population was then in bondage of one kind or another, either slavery or serfdom. In some of America's colonies, slaves far outnumbered free persons. Slavery in the eighteenth century was also a fundamental aspect of the global economy and a vital component of England's empire. It was also a time-honoured institution with antecedents stretching back over millennia.

And then, as Hochschild tells the story, twelve men gathered to attend a small meeting held on the afternoon of 22 May 1787 in a book and printing shop at 2 George Yard in London. The people gathered there included John Newton, a repentant slave ship captain who wrote the hymn 'Amazing Grace'. There

was Olaudah Equiano, a former slave whose eloquent memoir made him a literary and political celebrity. There were Quakers like Granville Sharp, James and Richard Phillips and James Ramsay. And then there was 27-year-old Thomas Clarkson. At 25, and a student at Cambridge, he had written an essay for a university competition set by Cambridge University's vice-chancellor on the topic: 'Is it lawful to enslave the unconsenting?' He read everything he could on the subject, including firsthand accounts of the African slave trade. After winning the prize, Clarkson was travelling back by horseback to London. He was agitated:

... the subject of it almost wholly engrossed my thoughts. I became at times very seriously affected while upon the road. I stopped my horse occasionally, and dismounted and walked. I frequently tried to persuade myself in these intervals that the contents of my essay could not be true. The more, however, I reflected upon them, ... the more I gave them credit. ... I sat down disconsolate on the turf by the roadside and held my horse. Here a thought came into my mind, that if the contents of the essay were true, it was time some person should see these calamities to their end. Agitated in this manner, I reached home. This was in the summer of 1785.

The small group that met in 1787 powered the 'moral steam engine' that propelled an ideal that today has almost near-universal acceptance. Slightly more than 50 years after its humble birth in a London print shop in 1787, the British antislavery movement 'overturned the atrocity that had formed the economic backbone of the world's most powerful empire' as Hochschild puts it.

Just sixteen years later that Society had helped achieve passage of the Slave Trade Act of 1807, which ended the British trade in slaves and provided for British naval support to enforce the law.

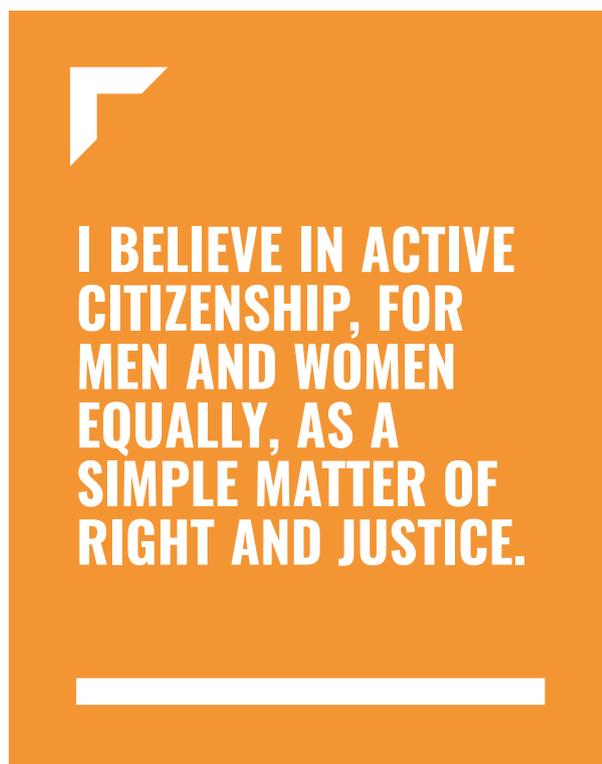
Clarkson and Wilberforce subsequently established the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery (later known as the Anti-Slavery Society In 1823). Clarkson travelled the country to build support for its goal. He covered 10,000 miles, and activated the network of sympathetic antislavery societies that had been formed. This resulted in 777 petitions being delivered to parliament demanding the total emancipation of slaves. When the society adopted a policy of immediate emancipation, Clarkson and Wilberforce appeared together for the last time to lend their support. In 1833 the Slavery Abolition Act was passed, with emancipation to be completed by 1838 in all British colonies.

The abolition of slavery, says Hochschild, is the single most effective example of a successful social movement in modern history. As Margaret Mead once said, 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has'.

This extraordinary achievement in promoting basic human rights was revolutionary, says Hochschild. It was not just a moral victory. It also inaugurated

the modern grassroots human rights campaign. As Hochschild put it:

Though born in the age of swords, wigs, and stagecoaches ... the British anti-slavery movement leaves us an extraordinary legacy. Every day activists use the tools it helped pioneer: consumer boycotts, newsletters, petitions, political posters and buttons, national campaigns with local committees, and much more. But far more important is the boldness of its vision.



Hochschild also emphasises the hopefulness this achievement properly engenders in our time. In a time that has long felt and still feels politically grim, for people who care about social justice we can and should take heart from a story about a small group of people who started a campaign at a time when the idea of abolishing slavery seemed totally utopian, crackpot, wildly too idealistic. But they succeeded. And they succeeded in fifty years ... in the lifespan of some of its founders like Thomas Clarkson.

As Hochschild said in one interview:

I would just like to see [my book] have the effect of making people working for justice today feel heartened and to know that any big struggle will always be a long one with many setbacks ... people have to think in 50-year chunks (Gilson 2005).

Now I don't think we need to be so pessimistic: the scale of the problem we face today is far smaller and more localised than that facing the 12 men in that print shop back in 1787.

SOME GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We already have two jurisdictions that have introduced the UN ICCPR. We will need to persuade either the politicians who make up an Australian government or a coalition of politicians from a number of parties to introduce and pass the UN ICCPR as domestic legislation. We will need to sustain and mobilise those citizens already committed to the idea that a charter of rights is a good idea. We will need to engage with the substantial number of opponents.

It has been said that the greatest obstacle to change is the way things are. While that refers to the way institutions and ways of doing things can be quite resistant to change, it also highlights the role played by our current beliefs, feelings and moral frames. The brutal fact is that we don't like changing our minds. None of us!

The success of the antislavery movement reminds us that it can be done. There are some basic principles. In what follows, I draw largely on the work of George Lakoff, one of the most significant cognitive theorists of our time who has transformed the way we think about thinking and about how to change people's minds. The key principles are spelled out in Lakoff's *Don't Think of an Elephant* (2005).¹

Lakoff's work shows us that people's political views are a mix of moral and emotional frames and commitments expressed metaphorically. These he characterises using two family-based metaphors. Let me start with the idea of frames and framing.

FRAMES AND FRAMING

Frames are mental structures that shape the way we see the world. As a result, they shape the goals we seek, the plans we make, the way we act, and what counts as a good or bad outcome of our actions. In politics our frames shape our social policies and the institutions we form to carry out policies. To change our frames is to change all of this. Reframing is social change.

You can't see or hear frames. They are part of what cognitive scientists call the 'cognitive unconscious' structures in our brains that we cannot consciously access, but know by their consequences: the way we reason and what counts as common sense. We also know frames through language. All words are defined relative to conceptual frames. When you hear a word, its frame (or collection of frames) is activated in your brain.

Reframing is changing the way the public sees the world. It is changing what counts as common sense. Because language activates frames, new language is required for new frames. Thinking differently requires speaking differently.

As Lakoff notes, when you criticise someone else, you evoke their frame.

When I teach the study of framing at Berkeley, in Cognitive Science 101, the first thing I do is I give my students an exercise. The exercise is:

¹ In what follows I have lifted and/or paraphrased Lakoff's (2005) key points. Please go back to this book or to his more developed account of the left and right frames in his 2002 text, *Political Morality*.

Don't think of an elephant! Whatever you do, do not think of an elephant. I've never found a student who is able to do this. Every word, like "elephant", evokes a frame, which can be an image or other kinds of knowledge: Elephants are large, have floppy ears and a trunk, are associated with circuses, and so on. The word is defined relative to that frame. **When we negate a frame, we evoke the frame.**

TWO THINGS NOT TO DO

Hitting people with facts doesn't work so avoid too much fact dumping. As cognitive theorists like George Lakoff (1999) point out, humans tend to search for or interpret information in a way that confirms existing preconceptions. Cognitive psychologists call this 'motivated cognition' – a tendency to select or interpret facts to fit an existing mental map of the world we wish to believe is true. Research shows, for example, that experiments which focused on assessing the effectiveness of corrections show that presenting people with facts that contradict what they believe simply ends up **strengthening their existing** beliefs. What Leon Festinger called cognitive dissonance explains why this happens.

Avoid critique. Criticism doesn't work. As Lakoff puts it pithily, when we negate a frame we evoke the frame. Richard Nixon found that out the hard way. While under pressure to resign during the Watergate scandal, Nixon addressed the nation on TV. He stood before the nation and said, 'I am not a crook'. And everybody thought about him as a crook. This gives us a basic principle of framing, for when you are arguing against the other side: Do not use their language. Their language picks out a frame – and it won't be the frame you want.

TWO THINGS TO DO

Listen to people. In a striking example of this, when the ACTU ran its campaign against the Howard government's Work Choices legislation in 2006–7, it started out by listening to what ordinary Australians thought about the proposed changes. (It did so because Lakoff's approach had been imported to Australia.) It then used some of those people's own voices and views in a sustained advertising campaign. The Howard government never recovered from the damage done. The ACTU had framed the moral and emotional terms of the issue. In their attempts to rebut the ACTU's frame the Howard government was accepting the ACTU's frame. The ACTU had set a trap: The words draw you into their worldview.

Always set out to reframe. All of us rely on a mix of cognitive, emotional and ethical processes expressed metaphorically. Framing is about getting language that fits your worldview. It is not just language. The ideas are primary – and the language carries those ideas, evokes those ideas. The famous antislavery medallion 'Am I not a man and a brother' relied on the metaphor of family and made a direct emotional-cum moral appeal to this idea: we are all in this together. There is here both a politics of recognition and a basic appeal to solidarity.

CONCLUSION

In 2019 we are called on to act by the words of Eleanor Roosevelt. From 1945 on Eleanor Roosevelt, the widow of US President Franklin D Roosevelt and a courageous advocate for the rights of women and Afro-Americans, staged a highly visible public campaign to promote what was to become the United Nations *Declaration of Universal Human Rights* (1948). In 1947 Roosevelt (2000: 180–6) made a speech that still resonates seventy years on. In it she said:

I believe in active citizenship, for men and women equally, as a simple matter of right and justice. I believe we will have better government in all our countries when men and women discuss public issues together and make their decisions on the basis of their differing areas of experience and their common concern for the welfare of their families and their world.

When Eleanor Roosevelt talked about human rights she spoke about the links between a conception of 'active citizenship' and the 'stuff' of rights and justice. For Eleanor Roosevelt, 'active citizenship' required a process of active public deliberation. It also involves a project designed to enhance our capacity to lead flourishing and just lives.

We still seek the place none of us has ever yet seen. This is not 'utopia' so much as a future worth having. To this extent I do not agree with George Orwell who once said that any map that does not include a place called 'utopia' is worthless. We have seen too often what utopians can do to the rest of us. What we do need if we are ever to work towards a future worth having are the very capacities for clarity and a principled regard for important virtues like courage and common sense, allied to a basic ethic of respect for other people and for truth which Orwell always tried to live out in his work as a writer and activist. 🕯

WE ACKNOWLEDGE

Traditional owners of the Kulin Nation,
past Warriors, Elders past and present.

AUTHOR: THANK GOD FOR THE REVOLUTION; COLD TEA FOR BRANDY; OLD CUBA, WORLD HERITAGE;
NUGAN HAND; SOME FACTS ABOUT LIBYA; CO-AUTHOR ROOTED IN SECRECY



I've used a variation of this title before because it's saying something that's fundamental – that you can't have genuine feminism without socialism or genuine socialism without feminism, and naturally I link the two with what I'm about to say. I would like to relate some personal experiences based on life in general and 50 years of activism, which was how I built up my political nous. My activism took off in the mid-1960s at a time when my hands were well and truly full with being a wife, mother of three, studying art at the Victorian Artists Society, scavenging around Melbourne and parts of rural Victoria looking for old interesting buildings to draw before developers got to them (I lost that battle), exhibiting my paintings and drawings, and doing survey drafting part time for an agency, who creamed off most of my wages. At the end of the decade I even spent a few fraught years as a textile designer for a Collins Street fashion house and that is a story in itself. I couldn't have done any of it without Cedric's support.

Like thousands of others I became so enraged at what we were doing in Vietnam, with its images of napalm, bombs and defoliants raining down on poor defenceless people struggling for independence and our grovelling role in the whole disgusting saga that I temporarily put aside my art and joined the anti-war/anti-conscription movement and the Labor Party, immersing myself in policymaking: civil rights, anti-uranium and as the founding president of the Status of Women committee when socialism wasn't a dirty word and most of the women made the link that was reflected in our policies. And I went on a fast learning curve and realised that if you want to change unjust laws you had to break them and that frequently meant gaol. As Cedric said, he married a reasonably conventional young woman (questionable) and ended up with a gaol bird. And there's nothing like a stretch in the slammer to sharpen one's political wits. It's the capitalist system unadorned, where few if any well-heeled crims from the top end of town enter prison's portals, just the powerless poor.

If you're a working class female in today's society, there are plenty of things to drive you nuts. Your job, if you have one, your wage (unequal), your kids, the bills that keep rolling in, housework, looking OK and

not looking OK, getting older and becoming invisible – and they're just a few of the personal bits. All of which can apply to men, with some modifications. But when you look at the wider world, with so much aggression and so many unhinged leaders, it's enough to send you round the bend.

During the late 1960s, Women's Liberation in all its variations marched into our lives and re-established the link between the lot of ordinary women and our political system, and many women joined its ranks. Not that we expected the world would fall into our laps, because we knew what happened when you took on the bosses. Like the valiant IWW, the Industrial Workers of the World, who tried to organise ordinary people into one large union in the early part of the 20th century and were ripped apart by cops, the government and their own lack of a clear direction. Nevertheless, forty years ago, women who wore the feminist label were keen to take on all comers. The more political savvy had been blooded in the anti-war and union movements and been inspired by feminist literature like Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, while others were simply fed up with being an add-on to a male.

I admired Women's Liberation's energy and determination and worked closely with them on a number of issues such as the right of women to a free safe abortion and equal pay but somewhere along the line it missed the bus by failing to attract significant numbers of working class women to its ranks – they were probably too weary to attend the endless meetings and rallies – a failure that left a significant hole in the movement. Nevertheless, Women's Lib contained radical elements who believed in nothing less than the radical restructuring of society and a break-down of hierarchical structures, but it was outsmarted by the more conservative, middle-class Women's Electoral Lobby which wanted changes from within without upsetting the status quo ... hardly a recipe for genuine change.

It was therefore inevitable that equal opportunity became affirmative action and was co-opted by the well-heeled, better educated women with the know-

how to use the system to advance themselves. A few fought their way up the male-dominated corporate and parliamentary ladders and then proceeded to behave in exactly the same self-seeking ruthless way as the males they replaced, the Margaret Thatchers of the world. Today the boys still have the best gigs in town and the statistics are sobering when you look at the wage rates, especially the ones relating to women on the lower rungs of the workforce.

It's worthwhile looking back at the great suffragette battles at the beginning of the 20th century and which have been almost completely obliterated from our history books. The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), founded by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters Christobel and Sylvia, was the first and largest militant suffrage group in England and was portrayed as 'unwomanly and frustrated lacking normal feminine appeal', a line you still hear today. Their campaign started off with public meetings and speeches but their slogan 'deeds not words' was swiftly put into practice and even titled ladies stormed parliament, smashed windows and organised bombing and arson attacks.

As a result the women suffered appalling retribution, beatings, forced feeding and even death. More than a thousand WSPU women were imprisoned in Britain, their actions upsetting the non-militant suffragettes, but WW1 caused the disintegration of the movement and a permanent split in the Pankhurst family. On one side, Sylvia Pankhurst's revolutionary socialists, on the other, Emmeline and Christabel, the more conservative feminists who the government preferred to negotiate with.

In any case, the social changes brought about by the war proved that women could act as equals with men, increasing support for the vote, although even then its granting in 1918 was restricted to women over 30 who fulfilled certain property requirements. Of 17 female candidates, only one was elected – a Countess in Dublin – an Irish revolutionary who refused to take an oath of loyalty to the English Crown and therefore forfeited her seat in the House of Commons (a very Irish outcome).

We were ahead of our English sisters, but the vote didn't come without a fight. New Zealand was the first country in the world to give women the vote in 1893 but they had to wait until 1919 before being allowed to stand for parliament, followed closely by South Australia in 1894, then a colony, which did allow women to stand for parliament. In 1902, the newly federated country of Australia enacted the Australian Commonwealth Franchise Act that enabled women to vote and stand for parliament, making us the first nation in the modern world to do so, but not for our Aboriginal sisters.

Broader questions around women's rights stayed on the sidelines until a new wave of feminists erupted in the late 1960s during a period of global ferment when we felt we could change the world, and then on 11 November 1975 freedom fell on its sword, when it became clear that even a moderately independent government was not acceptable to Washington.

Just a few weeks before Whitlam got the chop in a CIA-run coup, the government organised a Women

and Politics Conference in Canberra to celebrate the United Nations 'Decade for Women', which it hoped to control but couldn't. We simply took it over. The 700 who attended were every woman – trade unionists, radicals, conservatives, church workers, members of political parties – and instead of sticking to the official line of consensus or how to influence Tweedledee to become Tweedledum, more and more subjects emerged which confronted the real issues that can't be tackled by a new institution or committee of inquiry or handout. There was a general recognition that socialism and feminism could not be separated but were part and parcel of each other.

I gave a paper and workshop raising issues which have concerned progressive women from day one and are still painfully relevant today: the influence of a monolithic media in indoctrinating women and suppressing their concerns, the linking of women's rights with the liberation of all oppressed groups in our society and the cruncher – the extent to which women can work within a hierarchical, right-wing economic system without being compromised and swallowed up whole. A socialist Canadian MP put it this way. She said '**power is a competitive destructive force which thrives on the exploitation of the weak by the strong. If women exercise power as men do, betrayal is added to oppression.**' We wound up the conference by marching and singing through Canberra's conservative streets and occupying the office of the *Canberra Times* and pulling out their phone lines for good measure because of the biased coverage they'd given us. Could such a conference happen today? I doubt it.

In 1973, I stood as a Labor candidate in Victoria's safest Liberal seat and ran a socialist/feminist campaign and had a ball because no one gave a toss what I did. I focused on public transport, health, and education and got national coverage because of my pro-abortion stance, getting up the nostrils of the Right to Life mob whose members set up stalls outside the polling booths and gave me zero out of ten in their highly loaded assessments. In an ironic twist, unlike the rest of Labor's candidates, my vote went up while theirs went down.

Over the years I had got into the habit of calling into the federal office of the Builders Laborers in the basement of the Victorian Trades Hall when I needed to do some photocopying, which was how I met Pat George, secretary to Normie Gallagher, the larger-than-life union boss. I mostly ran off serious political stuff but also used their over-worked machine for other things, like running off catalogues for my various exhibitions. As a result, in 1974, I was officially commissioned by Norm to draw the Green Bans buildings around Australia and struck a deal, a minimum price for each drawing with my airfares and accommodation thrown in. The Green Bans campaign was a world first, a brilliant and unique initiative which saw a militant blue collar trade union join hands with small community groups to protect our urban environment from greedy developers at a time when people were fed up to the back teeth with the wanton destruction of our early buildings.

The Green Bans quickly expanded to include old

theatres, terrace houses, pubs and banks, the Victoria Market and scores of sites around Australia under threat from developers. Norm kicked it off when he saved a children's playground in Carlton and I drew the Princess Theatre, the Regent Theatre, the Windsor Hotel and an old shed at the Victoria Market, all under threat. Some were difficult structures and needed a good eye and a careful hand. No pencils and no photographs, I go straight in with my pen, and draw what I see on site.

Hobart was charming and peaceful and freezing, but I didn't have the luxury of waiting for the sun to shine and the icy blast to abate. Rugged up to the gills, my teeth chattering like castanets, I drew Arthur's Circus and Salamanca Place with snow-covered Mount Wellington in the background, and then on to Brisbane in Bjelke-Petersen land, stinking hot and tumultuous with a nasty political feel to the place. Nearly all the fine old Queensland buildings I drew were bulldozed soon after thanks to the 'white shoe' brigade and officialdom's hands in the developers' till.

Sydney was something else again, full of fireworks and passion. I arrived in the middle of a serious union blue, because this was a rank-and-file union with a 'New Left' agenda with limited tenure for officials, which went down like a lead balloon with other unions. Joe Owens, who had taken over as state secretary from Jack Munday, met me at the airport for a grand tour of Green Bans sites on his motor scooter, and we tootled around while he described the local scene. I was enjoying the breezy ride until we reached Victoria Street, Kings Cross, which was like walking into a war zone.

Corrupt developers versus local residents, radical students and the NSW Builders Laborers Federation fighting like hell to keep the street open for the wharfies and workers, the battlers and characters without a brass razoo. Our boys were stopping projects worth millions of dollars, said Joe. You're a bit luckier in Victoria, whereas we're run by a bloke who's as crooked as a dog's hind leg. If you were an overseas gangster or member of the local mafia, Sydney was the place to do business, where billions of dollars were washed clean through some of the most 'respectable' corporate structures and business houses.

Normally a pleasant street of trees and old terrace houses, one side of Victoria Street was now an armed camp. The National Trust put the street on its classified list but that didn't stop the thugs and hoons from moving in. The 300 tenants were given eviction notices and seven days to clear out. Half stayed put and were threatened with swift physical relocation to the footpath if they refused. Despite all the pressure, a group of hardy souls sat tight, organising patrols to keep out the vandals, but dozens were forcibly evicted during the 'Siege of Victoria Street'.

We drove slowly past, far too slowly for my taste, the high wire fence that ran along its entire length, behind which prowled mean-looking men and mean-looking dogs. Protestors were perched up trees and police were everywhere and I thought god help me, I've got to draw this lot. Everyone knew that a group of the most powerful, corrupt developers had the

government and cops in their pocket, right up to the person of Premier Askin and his handpicked cronies. A few months earlier, Jaunita Nielson had disappeared. Juanita had been circulating a small anti-developer magazine around the Cross and was a popular voice for the people. Her old man was a millionaire but that didn't save her. A journo friend told me that Juanita had been lured to a Kings Cross motel and taken upstairs to a room where three men were waiting. Her body was dismembered and fed into a commercial garbage disposal unit.

Anything after that had to be an anti-climax. And was. Adelaide is a lovely city and very quiet. The local BLs had slapped on three bans. And I had to make artistic sense of a group of shops, a paddock near a supermarket and a bicycle velodrome. And that was that. Job completed. My drawings were gathered together and displayed in a special gallery next to Norm's old federal office. The exhibition was formally opened by Rodney Davidson, the rather toffy head of the National Trust. Prints were made from eight of the drawings and sold like hot cakes, more than covering the cost of my interstate forays. Wherever the original drawings are today, I hope they're being treated with tender loving care. They are, after all, a small part of our labour history.

And then out of the blue, a leading trade unionist approached me to stand for State Parliament and I wondered if this was an attempt to shut me up, because that's what normally happens when people become politicians. I agreed to stand for pre-selection but didn't lobby anyone and didn't expect to win, but I did by one or two votes. After an incredibly dirty campaign when I was attacked by Tom, Dick and Harry, and even had two heavies from the Painters and Dockers Union guarding me on election day, in May 1979, I was elected to Victoria's Upper House, one of the first two women in its 127-year history and entered a world of weird rituals, 18th century garb, convoluted language and no women's toilet.

I survived by avoiding the power games and inflated egos and by staying firmly on the back bench and found the most satisfying part was helping people in my electorate and using my office as a resource centre. I believed my job was to put their case to government and not the other way around. We used to get pro-forma letters on how to reply to contentious issues, which I ripped up and threw in the rubbish bin (and was naturally labelled a 'maddie' for my 'extreme' views). Years later I became a friend of British left-wing MP Tony Benn and found the same labels were used against him, which suggests an internationalisation of insults. After two terms, stretching to thirteen years, in 1992 I happily retired as a member of parliament.

Which brings me to the parliamentary charade. MPs are made to feel terribly important and have a high old time debating a variety of issues when the really vital decisions are made elsewhere, in overseas boardrooms and the Pentagon. By abdicating even more of their parliamentary responsibilities through the deregulation and privatisation frenzy, the parties have laid the groundwork for permanent national impotence. Even a dedicated group of parliamentary reformers would find it extremely difficult today to pull

this country up by its bootstraps.

The 1980s was the era of women's peace camps and I was privileged to take part in three of them. The Women for Survival Peace Camp took place in 1983 outside the gates of Pine Gap near Alice Springs to draw attention to the presence of the secret CIA-run base that operates completely outside normal governmental and legal constraints. November 11 was chosen as the starting date for sound historical reasons. On that date in 1880 Ned Kelly was hanged and in 1918 the Armistice was signed, marking the end of the First World War, while decades later it became infamous for the sacking of PM Whitlam, a crucial issue being the renewal of Pine Gap's lease.

Earlier that same year, Ceds and I were in the US to catch up with his sister who'd married an American doing National Service in the UK. In Washington DC I caught up with some left-wing mates and was invited to take part in a weekend of protest at a women's peace camp at Seneca Falls in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York which adjoined a huge army depot, a peace camp inspired by Greenham Common. The harassment and intimidation was extreme. The authorities had declared a state of emergency and brought in police deputies and state troopers – backed up by regular patrols of army helicopters – from fifteen surrounding counties. During our two-mile walk to the entrance of the army base, heavily armed police lined the road and after much stopping and starting and warnings by the sheriff to turn back as he couldn't guarantee our safety, we arrived at our destination and tied personal mementoes, coloured ribbons and banners on the towering fence that was covered with razor wire.

The following year I was in the UK visiting family and nicked off to spend a day with the gutsy women at Greenham Common in Berkshire. In 1979, as part of a secret NATO arrangement, the US Air Force was given permission to establish a cruise missile base on a common that belonged to the people, the first ground-launched missile base in the world. The women started from scratch with a few old tents and caravans that grew into a mighty movement and symbol for peace activists from around the world. In one year, despite biting winds and rain, 30,000 women from Europe left their jobs and comfortable homes to take part in an International Women's Day of Protest at Greenham with the slogan: *'Arms are for linking, not for killing'*. During my visit, I stopped at nearby Newbury, a conservative town much favoured by the racing fraternity, and bought up big from a local shop, filling up two boxes with fruit and vegies and throwing in chocolate bars, coffee and cigarettes for extras, but I wasn't prepared for the desolation of the place. And this was summer without the churned-up mud and rain-filled wind.

Despite the desperate conditions, intimidation and gaoing, the Greenham protest endured for almost two decades and should never be forgotten. At its

peak, the base housed one hundred cruise missiles, which were finally removed in 1990, but the women stayed on until the land was purchased by a trust fund and returned to the local community.

Today, many women feel that we haven't come very far. There's the unresolved question of childcare and unequal pay and even more complex problems involving women from different cultures who are bound by religious laws and traditions. There's also the 'lookism' issue, the magazines that sexualise and objectify females, even girls as young as ten, creating enormous emotional and social problems. In the 1960s and 1970s, sisterhood meant supporting each other and helping other pockets of society, giving a sense of unity and hope, whereas today it's been turned on its head and you have binge-drinking groups of young women trying to feel powerful by aping their drunken male mates and rushing to have plastic surgery for breast enhancement and face changes.

It is commonly said that socialism is dead because it doesn't work. This suggests that capitalism does work, which of course it does, for the favoured few. The capitalist system was designed to create a new class of rich people and for that it has been extremely successful. There are now individuals and corporations controlling riches beyond the wildest dreams of the kings and emperors of old, whereas capitalism is going for the jugulars of ordinary people. It's always been a bosses' system but it is now at its most lethal. Everything and everyone has become commodified. We used to live in one of the most egalitarian societies in the world, but never in the history of the world have we seen a wider gap between rich and poor citizens in so-called rich countries nor a wider gap between rich and poor countries themselves.

If we're not careful we'll land back in the Dark Ages and find ourselves face to face with an updated version of the Inquisition for even minor offences. We're getting there. Challenge popular beliefs and you'll probably be labelled 'un-Australian'. We have to accept that there's always been sexism no matter what the economic system, but sexism has no chance of being eliminated under capitalism, where divide and conquer is the rule. If some reckon 'they've made it', whatever that means, then the rest of us will still be used to supply cheap, free labour to consume and scab on each other.

If you're waiting for change from on high you'll be waiting for hell to freeze over. Recognise the limitations of our system and be aware of its entrenched power structures and make the connections between other issues, especially the most crucial one, climate change. And always remember that only in solidarity can we be free, and only in struggle can we create that freedom. And we're running out of time. Happy International Women's Day!



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Our commitment towards an Australian Charter of Human Rights



Justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe. – Frederick Douglass

Australia urgently needs a Charter of Human Rights. We are the only Western liberal democracy without one. Repressive legislation, racism and the move to the extreme right, here and across the world, have resulted in the loss of democracy and human rights. A Charter of Human Rights would stand as a protection when we need to defend those under attack for protecting themselves and their society from ill intention.

On Sunday 17 March the Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church (MUPMC), in keeping with its commitment to democracy and social justice, hosted a forum to promote a campaign for a Charter of Human Rights for Australia. Over 120 members of the public attended the event, which consisted of four addresses and participatory workshops.

Professor Rob Watts (Professor of Social Policy, RMIT) spoke about the need for a committed campaign for a Charter of Human Rights; Julian Burnside QC spoke about the historical beginnings of current Bills/Charters of Human Rights; Professor Gillian Triggs (former president of the Australian Human Rights Commission) spoke about the abuse of power by the Australian government in retrospectively legislating to allow the demonisation of innocent people, emphasising the urgent need for a Charter of Human Rights to ensure that courts are able to exercise their responsibility to hold Parliament accountable; and Hugh de Kretser of the Human Rights Law Centre spoke about how the Law Centre is championing the human rights of vulnerable and marginalised Australians, and the work they are already doing in campaigning for a Charter of Human Rights. Following the addresses, forum attendees participated in community workshops that looked at why a charter is needed, what an effective campaign would look like, and how to mobilise support.

The forum concluded with the passing of a resolution that expressed the attendees 'absolute commitment to the establishment of an Australian Charter of Human Rights.' The resolution continued:

We take this position because we note the serious deterioration in the economic, social, political situation we are confronting. We reject the introduction of legislation that will lessen our political and democratic rights.

We totally oppose the rise in racism and the move to the extreme right and the resulting corruption that is emerging in our society. We view with concern the attacks on the trade union movement and attempts to shackle its ability to represent its members. We express our determination to oppose racism, rising fascism and corruption and to fight for social justice, democratic rights, and opposition to poverty and exploitation in Australia.

For this reason, we demand that the process to introduce a Human Rights Charter be immediately pursued.

It is almost universally accepted that politicians are untrustworthy, that the Australian Parliament has become a national joke, that decisions are taken in the heat of the moment and tied to what politicians see as voting intentions, without assessment of their value or service to the majority. We have witnessed countless examples of this around issues of illegal wars and corruption, issues that affect our everyday lives such as housing, healthcare, education, pensions, the care of our elderly, in attacks on trade unions, and in the treatment of those seeking asylum on our shores.

Our prisons are overcrowded, our young people have lost heart, and our environment is being trashed to an almost irreversible stage. Lawyers advise that over 63 pieces of legislation have already been introduced that will impact on the civil and democratic rights of ordinary citizens, although they are said to 'protect us from terrorism'. People of different faiths, good, hardworking people are being targeted because they are 'different'. It is called scapegoating and it is a very handy tool for those who would control society.

With the endorsement of the forum participants; other churches; ethnic groups, including the Islamic Council; unions and community and social justice organisations, the MUPMC is committed to a grassroots campaign that we hope will become a national one until a Charter of Human Rights for Australia is achieved.

Our weekly Sunday service is an hour of music, inspiring words and an address based on issues of peace, the environment, social justice, democratic rights and political issues of a non-party nature. The MUPMC firmly believes that churches have a responsibility to take up all issues that affect the people.

from our readers



HELLO MUPMC

It's hard to believe it's been over a year since I was with you all. I fondly remember our time together as well as the wonderful experiences my (now) husband and I had in Victoria. We were married this past October. We continually talk about planning another visit to Australia, so my hope is that we will visit you all again in the near future.

I am grateful for being on the *Beacon* list and I realise the subscription is past due. First, if this subscription causes you any additional postage costs, please don't spend anything extra to send this to Kentucky! Second, what forms of payment do you accept from the United States? I would like to make a donation whether or not the printed *Beacon* continues to be sent.

Wishing you all well as we inch closer to a beautiful spring here in Kentucky.

Best

Brian

**Rev. Brian Chenowith || Minister UU Church of Lexington || 3564 Clays Mill Rd
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DEAR EDITOR

H Williams (letters, March 2019) is quite right. We Australians do indeed need a bill of rights. It won't happen any time soon if we wait for the politicians to act. However, we the readers of the *Beacon* can possibly start it. I suggest that we each read various rights documents – the US amendments to their constitution, the UN Bill of Universal Rights, Geoffrey Robertson's list in his recent book *Dreaming too loud* – any and all sources each of us can find. Then choose five rights that are most important to you – each of us will have a different list. Work out a clear, short statement for each, with no ambiguities. An example – everyone has the right to peacefully practise or not practise religious beliefs without penalty or harassment. Get those five done and send them in a letter (NOT an email) to your federal representative (no matter what party), another to the attorney-general of the day and one to the prime minister of the day. Enclose a covering letter that explains your urgent desire for the legal protection a bill of rights provides. Be prepared to respond fully to any answer you receive. Don't accept waffle or obfuscation!

I have no idea how many Beaconites there are but a small, logical, determined group can surely make an impact.

S Rogers, NSW

DEAR DONNA

Thanks so much for sending me the *Beacon*. It is indeed a thought-provoking read and a godsend in these days where mass media present only right wing ideas and often mislead.

Please extend my readership for another two years and accept a small donation.

Yours faithfully

R Findlay

Our church is a public and usable asset with portable seating and excellent conference, meeting and function facilities. We welcome its use by those who support our motto 'Seek the Truth and Serve Humanity'. Interested individuals or groups can contact the church office – we would be delighted to speak to you. A donation is payable.

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Sisterhood needs socialism and vice versa

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