

NZCPR Weekly

28 September 2008

NEW ZEALAND CENTRE FOR POLITICAL RESEARCH

THE MARCH OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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The recent dedication of a Select Committee room of Parliament as the “Rainbow Room”, shows just how far the human rights movement in New Zealand has marched over the last sixty years. Standing alongside other Select Committee rooms dedicated to Maori, Pacific Islanders, Asians and women, the Rainbow Room recognises the contribution made to society by gay, lesbian and trans-gender New Zealanders.

On December 10, 1948 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the foundation document of the human rights movement.[] Originally designed to protect citizens from the abuse of power by the state, human rights legislation has now become a vehicle used by activists to harness the power of the state to promote and mainstream their causes, usurping traditional public values and views in the process.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which came into being after the Second World War, reflected the world's abhorrence with atrocities such as the Holocaust. The fundamental idea behind the declaration was that if some basic safeguards for citizens, such as the protection of life, liberty, and dignity, were developed to protect them from mistreatment by the state, then all governments would be able sign up.

The process of developing the UDHR was carried out by a multinational committee of the United Nations under the chairmanship of Eleanor Roosevelt. Their challenge was to devise a binding code of conduct for governments that would be universally accepted. At the heart of the Committee's deliberations was the merging of the Anglo-American view of rights as *limitations* on government with the Continental concept of rights as *claims* on government. It is this marriage of ideologically opposed approaches to human rights that has distorted the original purpose of the declaration, creating grave difficulties for nation states as minority agendas, often driven by the United Nations, are forced on them.

The Anglo-American approach to human rights is based on the concept of protecting citizens *from* the Government. It recognises the considerable power held by the state, which, if used in the wrong way, can lead to death and destruction. With history being littered with tragic tales of genocide, torture, and persecution this approach to human rights attempts to prevent such

atrocities. Its focus is on the need to protect the freedom of individuals from state control, and to restrict the way that the government deals with them: from safeguarding the freedom of expression, to protecting private property rights and enforcing the rule of law.

The Continental approach on the other hand is concerned with utilising the power of the state to provide services - education, welfare, pensions, health care, public housing and the like - and to ensure that individuals have the right of access. This approach, however, rather than restricting the power of the state, leads to an expansion as individuals and groups call for the government to do more - all in the name of “rights”. Activist groups in particular, successfully use claims of discrimination to harness the power of the government to promote their cause and transport them into the mainstream, often overturning centuries of history and world-wide tradition.

Who could have imagined, for example, that those early calls for an end to discrimination against women would have resulted in feminists successfully undermining marriage and the family, not to mention marginalising boys and men in the process. Such is the insidious way that the rights movement works - whereby activists gain powerful positions in the government, the public service, academia and non-government organisations (NGOs) from which to drive their agenda - that mainstream society is often largely unaware of any threat to accepted traditions and values until it is too late.

This week's NZCPR Guest Commentator Bruce Logan, author and founder of the Maxim Institute, describes the growth of the rights movement in his opinion piece “Is the United Nations a Threat to National Sovereignty?”. He explains how tensions have arisen between the United Nations and individual governments, which are increasingly uncomfortable about accepting a human rights agenda that is driven by the UN's desire for a “new world order” rather than by the demands of their own citizens:

“A subtle shift in authority and propaganda is taking place between the New Zealand government and some conventions of the United Nations. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has, in the domestic setting since it was ratified in 1993, developed its own special kind of authority (especially in

the eyes of public intellectuals appointed to implement it), and, as a consequence, trumped the sensitivities and beliefs of ordinary New Zealand citizens.

“We have seen this in the last couple of years with the removal of Section 59 of the 1961 Crimes Act. There were no hordes of parents or children demonstrating on the streets. The call for change came from public intellectuals and noisy NGOs, well placed in relation to the levers of control and media influence. They won the day because the clear, common sense distinction between parental discipline in the context of the family, was usurped by an ideological confusion of parental correction with violence. And Human Rights' Commissions are partners in seduction. In New Zealand the Human Rights Commission supported the removal of section 59 from the Crimes Act”.

In fact, the removal of section 59 of the Crimes Act is part of the “Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children”, an international human rights campaign driven by the United Nations] While it is promoted as a way to safeguard children's rights, the more sinister outcome is the undermining of the rights of parents.

Thanks to MMP and the Green Party, New Zealand has now signed up to the global agenda and outlawed traditional child correction methods. This follows on from the Labour Government's abolition of corporal punishment in schools in 1989, similarly carried out for ideological reasons, rather than through public demand. This change has seen an unprecedented escalation of violence in schools, seriously undermining the authority of teachers.

Another United Nations driven rights campaign that has fueled the actions of a minority group in New Zealand to progress a radical agenda is the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This campaign, which blames colonisation for

the oppression of indigenous people, demands self rule. In particular Article 4 states: “Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self determination have the right to autonomy or self government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions”.

This right to self government is a key demand of Maori sovereignty activists and, according to a recent speech given by the President of the Maori Party, the Maori Party itself: “Our four members of Parliament ... are the foundations blocks for the Tikanga Maori House that has emerged. This is the House that our tupuna tried to fashion a century ago. It is now a reality. Every vote for the Maori Party is a vote for the Tikanga Maori House”.

While the New Zealand Government joined Australia, Canada and the United States in voting against this UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, it is likely that, with the support of the United Nations, the call by activists for self government will grow stronger.

During its 9 years in power, the Labour Government has been a champion of the rights movement. However, the Minister of Education, Chris Carter has been accused of taking his commitment to gay rights a step too far. By endorsing a scholarship for gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or transgender students on a flyer to schools, the Minister could be seen as putting the rights of gay students ahead of others.

It is when the rights agenda crosses the line into the area of positive discrimination using the power of the state to promote the cause, rather than minimizing barriers to advancement that it goes too far. Chris Carter appears to have crossed that line.

This week's poll asks: Do you think that the United Nations has too much influence on New Zealand's domestic law?

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