

WHO WILL SPEAK

IF WE DON'T?

*“**First** they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out— Because I was not a Socialist.*

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out— Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out— Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me —and there was no one left to speak for me.”

Martin Niemöller (1892–1954) was a pastor who was an outspoken public foe of Adolf Hitler and spent seven years in concentration camps.

An **OPEN LETTER** from employees in offshore detention centres to the leaders of the Australian political parties regarding the law that came into effect on 1 July has been made public. (See over page.) We have the opportunity to support the authors of this letter, the doctors, psychiatrists and staff who are taking a courageous stand for people who are at risk of harm in detention centres and who are denigrated by government and media.

You could write to:

Tony Abbott, The Prime Minister,
Peter Dutton, The Minister for Immigration and Border Protection
and Bill Shorten, Leader of the Opposition
C/- Parliament House Canberra ACT 2060

Points could include:

- * support of those who wrote the letter
- * acceptance that their experience and professionalism gives them credibility greater than that of any other person, in government or elsewhere, regarding detention matters
- * rejection of the fact that government continually represents asylum seekers in the worst possible light and uses them as electoral pawns
- * opposition to the secrecy and lack of scrutiny which prevents Australians from knowing what is being done in their name by government
- * declaration that for government to continue to place children in harm’s way is state-sponsored child abuse
- * support of the challenge of the letter: arrest and charge these and other ‘entrusted persons’ who publicly object, and so bring the matters to court

As Jesuit **Andrew Hamilton** points out, the **Australian Border Force ACT 2015** resembles similar laws passed by Apartheid South Africa, Nazi Germany, Chile and Argentina during martial law eras. We Australians have the responsibility to protest against similar erosion of human rights being made legal in our land. You could let **Professor Louise Newman** know of your action and ask her to advise the other signatories. She can be contacted at: Louise.Newman@monash.edu

Open letter regarding the Australian Border Force Act 2015

To: **The Prime Minister, Tony Abbott,**
The Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, Peter Dutton,
and Leader of the Opposition, Bill Shorten

Today the Australian Border Force Act comes into effect. It includes provision for a two year jail sentence for "entrusted persons" such as ourselves if we continue to speak out about the deplorable state of human rights in immigration detention without the express permission of the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection. This adds to the wall of secrecy which prevents proper public scrutiny.

We have advocated, and will continue to advocate, for the health of those for whom we have a duty of care, despite the threats of imprisonment, because standing by and watching sub-standard and harmful care, child abuse and gross violations of human rights is not ethically justifiable.

If we witness child abuse in Australia we are legally obliged to report it to child protection authorities. If we witness child abuse in detention centres, we can go to prison for attempting to advocate for them effectively. Internal reporting mechanisms such as they are have failed to remove children from detention; a situation that is itself recognised as a form of systematic child abuse.

Evidence of the devastating effects of institutional self-protection and blindness to child abuse has been presented before the current Royal Commission. We are determined not to collude with a system that repeats these same mistakes.

There are currently many issues which constitute a serious threat to the health of those in detention for whom we have a duty of care. The Department of Immigration and Border Protection is aware of these problems and has for years failed to address them adequately.

We are aware that in publishing this letter we may be prosecuted under the Australian Border Force Act and we challenge the Department to prosecute so that these issues may be discussed in open court and in the full view of the Australian public.

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