

From the Editor

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THE time has come to stop the advocacy charade. For far too long we have allowed ourselves to be manipulated, abused and fleeced by a growing gang of advocacy non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

We have allowed these group to make false claims about representing civil society or other mass causes. We have allowed them to undermine national sovereignty and democratic institutions, to 'dumb down' debate on vital but complex issues, to lie, to destroy property without just cause and to capture the imagination of the young.

In short, we have allowed them to undermine the essential institutions of a liberal, democratic society and to flourish in so doing.

Why? In large part we have allowed this to happen because we *are* an open, liberal, democratic country, tolerant of dissent and dissenters and concerned about the concentration of power. But in our tolerance we have failed to demand of advocacy NGOs minimal standards of honesty, behaviour and accountability.

Many NGOs (including some advocacy ones) have applied high standards as a matter of course, but far too many have failed to do so.

In this issue's feature article, Patrick Moore, co-founder of Greenpeace, outlines the wayward path taken by Greenpeace and other environmental groups over the last two decades. Greenpeace initially played a vital role in raising public awareness of real environmental issues, such as the danger of nuclear weapons testing, the over-exploitation of some whale populations, and the tendency to harvest government-owned forests in an unsustainable manner. But by the mid-1980s, Greenpeace became captured by extremists, focused itself on self-perpetuation and employed tactics that can best be described as insidious. Despite its waywardness, Greenpeace



has flourished. It has a worldwide budget in excess of US\$100 million, brand recognition on a par with Nike and McDonald's and has a role in important decision-making processes—including the Sydney 2000 Olympics.

The recent debate about human rights also highlighted the corrosive role played by many human rights NGOs. Australians, more than most peoples, are conscious of the state's tendency to abuse people's rights. We are, after all, a nation of immigrants, many of whom fled persecution and oppression. However, rather than focusing on real human rights violations and violators, too many human rights NGOs tend to demonize the very societies that have been the strongest proponents of human rights—such as Australia—while downplaying the real culprits. They have lost all sense of proportion.

Australia is heavily criticized for mandatory sentencing while incarceration without trial goes unquestioned in North Korea. The Howard Government's decision not to issue an apology for the so-called 'stolen generation' is condemned by NGOs who in turn are silent about the millions of people of forcibly ejected by Vietnam in the 1970s and 1980s.

Indeed, between 1995 and 1998 Australia was criticized twenty times by Amnesty International for human rights

violations, while some of this century's worst despots, including Kim Jong Il of North Korea and Saddam Hussein of Iraq, received little attention (see Peter Phelps, 'Amnesty Infomercial', *IPA Review*, Vol. 51, No. 3).

This bias may greatly aid the fundraising efforts and political interests of the people running human rights agencies, but it runs directly counter to the interests of Australia and does little to prevent real abuses of human rights.

There are, however, promising signs that people and politicians are becoming fed-up with the advocacy charade.

Greenpeace USA is experiencing difficulties. Its board recently resigned *en masse*, membership and funding have declined sharply and Patrick Moore's call for a more result-orientated approach that uses, rather than abuses, the market will intensify its dilemma. Greenpeace Canada has been stripped of its charity status by Revenue Canada (Roger Bate, 'It's Official: Greenpeace Serves No Public Purpose', *IPA Review*, Vol. 51, No. 4).

Concern about the standards and methods of advocacy NGOs is not restricted to Greenpeace or environmental groups.

Michael Edwards, Director of the Ford Foundation's Governance and Civil Society Unit, has written an important pamphlet—reviewed by Gary Johns in this edition of the *IPA Review*—calling for NGOs to improve their standards of behaviour, transparency and accountability. If they don't, he suggests they be ignored.

Most importantly, by refusing to participate in UN shame games, the Howard Government—along with its Canadian and US counterparts—is starting to bring an end to the whole advocacy charade. The IPA will strive for an open and transparent market in advocacy, based on honesty and integrity. Anything less is a sell-out to anti-democratic behaviour.

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