

In Truth and Education.

I believe that before we attempt to address human rights, we need to consider a root problem in our society. This problem drains our energies and places us into a state of inactivity until we give into its defeatist mentality. It is as contagious as AIDS but everyone is too ill with its dizzying effects to realise. It is affecting more Australians than obesity and is one of the few things that do not discriminate. We don't know where it is coming from exactly and we don't know when it will affect us. In fact I can only wonder if I am affected by this disease as I write. The reason we don't realise it is because we don't even care yet.

When we read that ten million child die each year from tuberculosis, polio and other curable diseases, we are unable to act.

When we hear that cervical cancer is the silent killer of 800 Australia women, we dismiss it as 'insignificant' because of this same disease. When governments are involved in unjustified wars, this disease ironically draws support for them (much like the soma that conditioned Aldous Huxley's World State citizens). But what is it? ...

It is none other than the dark and dangerous disease called *apathy*.

When I first heard of this word, I thought that it was a term to describe someone who does not express any sense of pity. However, I have come to realise that pitying is as artificial as the news that we watch on commercial television. I have witnessed the contradiction: students can offer emotive speeches at school assemblies and sell badges to commuters at Central Station; yet they laugh mockingly when they hear about important issues affecting the community. They are the farcical news reporters of Australia's educational institutions!

Further, whilst observing how hard the students worked at school, I became puzzled as to their 'real' future goals and ambitions. So, I asked my mother if it was okay to pass through school with the intention of simply gaining entry to university. She said that education is something to value because not many people in the world have such opportunities. But she said something further that made me evaluate everything I had ever aspired to for the future. She questioned plainly: "The main concern for aspiring students is: What will you do with your education?" I had never thought of that actually. I simply went to school and my grades were satisfactory. I was very relaxed and nowhere near as stressed as many other ambitious students.

That night was the first time that I studied more than my usual one hour. I did not study because my mother had hinted at me bludging too much lately. Rather, I

studied because I felt sick with guilt and felt terribly hypocritical for often being apathetic myself.

That night, I examined myself closely asking this: “If I am aware about all the injustices occurring in the world and I don’t appreciate the opportunities that I have; could it be that I am more hypocritical than those who live blissfully in ignorance?”

It had not occurred to me until then that there was one thing stopping everyone in the world from changing their world: an uninformed understanding of what really goes on under the sun. If you think about it, from the people receiving propagandist messages in Communist China to the sensationalist news articles of local tabloids, people are denied access to the total truth. So I decided that if people are too lazy (*and apathetic*) to find out more about the world, I will endeavour to shed light on global injustices for them.

Since then, in my final days as an HSC student, I have been attempting to uncover the key human rights issues of the world at school. Often I feel frustrated with the slow progress of my work; sometimes I only manage to get a handful of letters to free a political activist in Uzbekistan and on other days, only a few shy juniors attend a lunchtime meeting. But the last couple of months have been great as I

have formed a network, Social Justice Order, with a few but brave like-minded students who are all ambitious about creating awareness about social issues.

I suppose that part of the process in exposing human rights abuses is about taking leadership. Thus, I will always remember something that my *Sydney Leadership* mentor, Sebastian Knowles said to me. “The first step to fixing a problem is to identify the root issue. And the last step is to watch your work grow to the canopy of the rainforest and bear fruit.” The fact of the matter is that there is much that goes on between identifying a problem and accomplishing the success of your solution. Hence, no easy route!

I understand now that valuing ‘human rights’ can not be superficial; but rather it requires one to move forward with immense courage. Certainly, taking a stand for human rights is not about a quick-fix solution either. It is about creating awareness and valuing something as simple as human life and a ‘fair go for all’ (i.e. equality). The day we fail to appreciate the fact that we have human rights that others may not enjoy, is the day we ought to lose the privileges of living in a developed nation! Only from this acknowledgement can we then take action to alleviate suffering all over the globe.

Once people emerge from the shell of apathy, they are liberated from ignorance and at the fundamental level; at least they will be able to evaluate the status of human rights all over the world.

I realised however that we often take things for granted because we are not educated about what 'really' happens in the world. I think for now as students we should contemplate on the quote by Helen Keller "The highest result of education is tolerance."

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