



# Looking ahead with optimism

By Richard Faulks

As I sat thinking about drafting my last page as National President of the Lawyers Alliance, I reflected that although we had achieved much during the last 12 months, there are still many challenges ahead.

At times, it seemed that for every step forward we take, we are forced to take a step back. Many of our members experience frustration when dealing with governments and those who advise them, endeavouring to protect the rights of individuals for whom we act, combatting the overwhelming financial advantage of insurance companies and other corporations, or when lobbying for change or promoting a point of view through the media. I suspect that some of you have felt that it is easy to be upbeat about promoting and protecting individual rights when there are still rights left to fight for, whereas others would argue that their experiences cast some doubt upon that.

George Bernard Shaw said "people are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are people who get up and look for the circumstances they want and if they can't find them, make them."

Ever since I have been involved with the Australian Lawyers Alliance, there have been many such challenges. It is

fair to say that those of us who believe in the rights of individuals have frequently sought to change our 'circumstances'. Recent events would suggest that we should be positive in those endeavours. There is no doubt that momentum is gathering behind the need for a Bill of Rights to provide a framework for lawmaking in Australia. When the ACT Government decided to step forward and enact a Bill of Rights, few would have thought that soon after Victoria would be on the brink of enacting its own Charter of Rights, and that other states would also be looking at it.

*New Matilda* has launched and is promoting a Bill of Rights at the federal level. Our new human rights special interest group will be strongly supporting that agenda. Other 'circumstances' that encourage optimism are the findings of the upper house inquiry into personal injury in NSW, with its strong recommendations about reinstating some rights of the injured. Chief Justice de Jersey in Queensland has also spoken out about so-called tort reform going too far and the need for change.

So as I pass the baton to Simon Morrison for the next 12 months, even though we might ask ourselves questions like those raised in the Hoodoo Gurus' song: "Another thing I've been wondering lately, am I crazy to believe in ideals?", I suggest that the Lawyers Alliance should never lose

sight of the important ideals that are reflected in our objectives and in the work we do.

It is important that we are never ashamed that we work and earn a living helping individuals who are injured, suffering physical or mental illness, in custody, or banding together to resist the oppression of big business or big government. That is something to be proud of.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to members of the board, who have provided excellent support in policy development and governance over the last 12 months. I also thank our CEO, Eva, and the excellent staff at our national office for their tireless and committed work. I look forward to catching up with all of you at the National Conference in Queensland in October. ■

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