

# Let a hundred flowers bloom; let a hundred schools of thought contend.

By Mark Blumer

You may or may not be glad to hear that I'm more of a Confucian than a Maoist: *To see what is right and not to do it is want of courage.*

**T**his is my last President's Page. I want to use it for a bit of explanation and a bit of exhortation.

First, the explanation. I've tried to adhere to the two bits of philosophy quoted above in whatever leadership I've provided.

The first idea is to encourage the members, the directors, the state presidents and committees, to speak out on things about which they know. Thus, ALA's voice would be diffuse, decentralised, rich in texture and harder for other contestants in the field of ideas to predict or contain. At the same time, those voices are supported and marshalled by 'head office'. I think this strategy is working. We are being heard widely and, quite often, listened to. We have many voices.

The second idea is one that has characterised our organisation and its members from the beginning: to speak out for the voiceless and the vulnerable, and to put our knowledge and skill to work on behalf of the powerless. This is not an easy task. It is something that is treated with derision by those who wish to hold on to power. It is not economically justifiable. It sometimes makes us feel ridiculous – perhaps I am speaking

mostly for myself here. It is hard to know what is right and wrong and, having worked that out, where to insert yourself into the chain of causation to have a beneficial effect. To have the courage to act, when we think that we have seen *what is right*, is our whole reason for existing.

Looking back, my explanation is also an exhortation. No further exhortation required!

Highs and lows of this year for me include:

- The federal government decided to ignore the recommendations of the Brennan Inquiry to legislate for a Charter of Rights.
- The Queensland government decided to retain wide access to common law in its workers' compensation system.
- The South Australian government came very close to losing power, despite its 'tough on crime' rhetoric reaching new lows, while sitting on one of the worst workers' compensation regimes in the country.
- Tasmania chose a Labor/Green government, giving some hope for the introduction of the Human Rights Act recommended by the Tasmanian Law Reform Commission.
- Western Australia introduced mandatory sentencing for assaults on police officers and others, preventing judges and magistrates from considering individual circumstances.
- Victoria's and the ACT's human rights legislation continues to provide an example for other states as to how moderate and beneficial



the effect of this type of legislation can be.

- Indigenous people continue to be incarcerated at a rate about 13 times higher than the rest of the population, with the worst states being Western Australia, New South Wales and South Australia. The national average daily Indigenous imprisonment rate increased by 10 per cent in the year from September 2008 to September 2009. The NT Intervention has been continued by the Labor government.
- By the time of publication, head office's new IT system should soon be up and running, making communication between all parts of the organisation richer and easier. Team ALA is working well and our budget is coming under control. Good luck everyone!  
(Definitely no more exhortations.) ■

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