

Speaking Out Through Submissions

(Ronji Tanielu, Policy Analyst)

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

This challenging statement is attributed to Pastor Martin Niemoller, a German Lutheran clergyman who vehemently opposed Hitler's Nazism in the 1930s and 1940s. History tells us that Pastor Niemoller originally *supported* Hitler's rise. But Hitler's agenda of promoting his national socialism over religion and the Christian faith greatly irked Pastor Niemoller. Consequently, Pastor Niemoller, along with many other German clergy, openly opposed this Nazism. Niemoller himself was sent to the Dachau and Sachsenhausen concentration camps between 1937 and 1945 for his opposition to Hitler's new way.

Numerous lessons can be found in looking at this famous statement – as well as Niemoller's own life – that are highly relevant and applicable to our modern world. For example, Pastor Niemoller spoke several times about the rising and violent anti-Semitism of Hitler's Germany. Furthermore, this statement criticises the apathy that so many people had at that time about the politics and policies Hitler promoted and delivered.

However, the aspect we want to highlight here is Niemoller's bold, yet subtle, challenge to actually speak out on important issues, particularly when some parts of our society are unable, ill-equipped or even not allowed to speak for themselves.

The Salvation Army does **not** have exclusive rights on speaking out on behalf of vulnerable and marginalised people in our nation. But we do try to 'speak' out as much as possible. In all honesty, our 'speaking out' is based on many things. Firstly, it is based on our long history in working with marginalised families and communities around the globe. Secondly, it is based on the rich and unique Christian heritage and Biblical foundation that underpins all of our work. Finally, it is based on our commitment to whatever community we are working in. For example, in 2014, The Salvation Army supplied 55,245 food parcels to 28,100 families across New Zealand. It is vital that any 'speaking out' we do is informed by our history, our heritage, the social needs in our nation, our own staff and programmes, and other evidence-based and best practice approaches.

The Salvation Army attempts to 'speak out' via major reports like the recent *A Mountain All Can Climb* state of the nation report. We also use press releases, surveys, social media, advocacy projects, briefing papers, face-to-face meetings, conferences, and so on.

We also aim to make good use of the submissions process (to legislation, or government consultations) in our government system. Submissions are a very unique mechanism or tool in social policy and provide the public a very real way to engage the political and legislative process. For The Salvation Army, submissions are a very quick and direct way to engage with politicians, political parties and policy makers. We always aim to present our submissions orally as well as in writing in order to advocate, or speak out, about some of the key issues we are raising.

As a social policy tool, the submission process has some inherent flaws. For instance, the timeframe to respond to amendments are normally extremely short and tight. Also, the content of the Bills that submissions are called for are often very dense, complex and large. This can mean that those without a legal or policy background, or even those who don't have the time or ability to mentally digest these documents, can be excluded from this fundamental democratic process. Finally, the sheer volume of Bills seeking submissions or government consultations can be very problematic. For example, in December 2014, various government departments had decided to have closing dates for five key inquiries or consultations all due in the first three weeks of December. Two of these important submissions closed two days before Christmas Day!

In February 2015, The Salvation Army has already made submissions to the Policing (Cost Recovery) Amendment Bill, the Gambling Amendment Bill (No 3), the Organised Crime and Anti-corruption Bill, and a Statistics New Zealand consultation on civic and cultural participation. We are currently working on two submissions to two separate United Nations conventions that our Government is reporting back to.

Submissions are an absolutely vital part of our government, political process and democracy. It is a unique policy tool that allows any and all New Zealanders to contribute and engage with these processes. This liberty to engage is crucial given that nearly every aspect of our lives is shaped and influenced by the laws and policies that emerge from these pieces of legislation or government consultations. Of course, these processes as mentioned above have some flaws. But in terms of having the freedom and mechanism through which we can 'speak out' about important issues, the submissions processes are wonderful tools. Our hope is that more people in our nation 'speak out' via submissions and other mechanisms. That is what contributes to a healthy civil society and facilitates a strong rule of law in New Zealand.

The Salvation Army will continue to try and 'speak out' through our submissions, particularly as we hope to speak on behalf of those we are working alongside. We encourage all Kiwis to continue to do the same. In that way, maybe some of Pastor Niemoller's challenge is truly being applied to modern Kiwi society.