

# **The Politics of Fighting Back**

**By**

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Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour for me to stand before you this evening to remember, and honour, Juanita Nielsen. Nielsen was a woman of courage and conviction who literally paid with her life in her battle to save Victoria Street in Kings Cross. I had some acquaintance with Juanita during that period. I was one of those who squatted in the unoccupied houses in an attempt to save them, but after we were all arrested and carted off one awful morning, we pretty much gave up the fight. She was the one who stayed on to fight. In that fight, she took the side of the low income and needy inhabitants against the wealthy and the greedy developers. It was a battle that was partially won, but the price paid was high, far too high.

I now live in Victoria Street, and at least once a day I walk past the house where Juanita lived. I always think of her when I pass her house. It is a small house, that opens up onto the street so that when the door is open you can see straight into the front room. It is a tribute to Juanita and her sacrifice that at least some of what she fought for was won. Although Victoria Street is now a street where houses command very high prices, it is still a place where a variety of people live shoulder to shoulder and where, as her own old houses, attests, gentrification has not totally won out.

Tonight, I want to examine some of the issues we face with today's battles – and to look at the obstacles that we face when we fight back in the contemporary political environment. These will include some of barriers that are placed in the way of non-government organizations (NGOs) as they try to fulfill their missions today.

I will look at some international examples, and also at some local ones. I will look at some environmental issues, a subject that is of course of particular interest to The Greens as a political party, and I will also look at some issues that are somewhat closer to my special field of study, and that is the status and situation of women in contemporary society.

Perhaps you will not be surprised to learn that there are some common elements and issues be faced in contemporary political warfare, regardless of the specific policy subject we are fighting for.

I would make the generalisation that political dissent has become more difficult in recent years. Globally, the possibilities of protest have been

severely circumscribed by government and corporate actions in the post 9/11 period. Locally, the same process began long before, and without the excuse of, global terrorism.

Governments feel able to insulate themselves from, and thus ignore, the views of their constituents. In a democracy this is truly shameful. It means that public opinion counts for little, unless that opinion accords with or mirrors the views that government wants promoted.

Remember March 2003 when more than ten million people around the world marched against the war in Iraq. What a magnificent display of public dissent, or public opinion.

This is the second Super Power, said some commentators, the only force that can counterbalance America. Unfortunately, the first super Power ignored the second one – and the war went ahead. It takes more than ten million people marching in the street to change George Bush's mind.

Similarly, when the US president visited Australia for a day late last year, he refused to submit himself to any public exposure. Unlike previous Presidents – LBJ who had driven in a motorcade in Sydney, and Bill Clinton who had spoken at an open meeting in the Domain – this one was not going to subject himself to the court of public opinion.

Is this any way for a democratic leader to behave?

Our own Prime Minister is picking up similar tricks. Yesterday Mr Howard announced his much-anticipated energy policy. He announced it at a National Press Club address – or so we were told on television last night. In fact, Mr Howard was nowhere near the National Press Club. He was cosseted in the Great Hall of Parliament House which has been tarted up (or should I say, “down” since the Press Club is hardly a salubrious space) in order to make it look like the Press Club.

The Canberra journalists played along with this charade, with the president of the Press Club going through the routines he performs when he presides over a Press Club meeting, and the journalists asking their questions as per usual.

So what was the difference?

Mr Howard did not have to travel the distance – less than a kilometre – from Parliament House to the National Press Club and walk from his car, up the stairs and into the building. Why wouldn't he want to do that? Admittedly, it is a bit chilly in Canberra these days, but that is not the reason. He did not want to face any protestors.

The Prime Minister of a democracy is not willing to hear the shouts and the slogans of a few environmentalists as he prepares to deliver his energy policy. Not that we think a few shouts and slogans would have influenced the contents of his policy. It was clearly too late for that – and Mr Howard clearly does not listen to the environmental lobby in any event.

I think what is shocking about this charade is that, under the name of security, an Australian Prime Minister is dodging voters – not willing to even listen to them. How do we fight this?

The thoughts I want to put before you tonight are preliminary ones, they need a lot more development. This is an ongoing problem that we need a lot of attention because while it is now more difficult to fight back, the need to do so has probably never been greater.

Even worse, the politics of fighting back are now further circumscribed by aggressive acts of repression on the part of governments and corporations that are designed to restrict or prevent protest and to enfeeble dissenting organizations. Such repression has become a calculated tactic, and it has proved very enervating, and expensive, for the organizations thus targeted.

Let me give you a couple of examples on the international front of recent actions directed against Greenpeace.

Although I am the chair of the board of Greenpeace International, I am not a spokesperson for the organization and so I usually do not speak about its activities. However, the examples I want to mention have not received much attention in Australia. Yet they deserve the widest possible dissemination because they are, I believe, symptomatic of the new and dangerous world in which we are trying to operate. So I am grateful for the opportunity this evening to be able to mention them to you.

As people who value the right to protest and to dissent, it is imperative that we understand how the world has changed.

The first example I wish to present is a politically motivated court case prosecuted by the US government.

In July last year, the US Justice Department filed criminal charges against Greenpeace in the US.

This was a highly unusual action. Indeed, lawyers involved with the case believe it was unprecedented for the US government to seek a criminal indictment against an organization, as distinct from an individual.

The case arose from a Greenpeace action in Miami harbour on April 12, 2002, when two Greenpeace activists boarded a ship known as the MV APL Jade and displayed a banner that read, "President Bush. Stop Illegal Logging". The purpose of the action was to spur the authorities to search the ship and seize its cargo. The ship was transporting mahogany from the Brazilian Amazon, supposedly an illegal import under US law. The authorities, however, ignored Greenpeace's tip-off and instead arrested the activists and allowed the ship to proceed. It subsequently offloaded its illegal cargo at Charleston, South Carolina. The shipping company was never prosecuted, and the two Greenpeace activists plea-bargained their charges with the authorities before the end of the year.

End of story, one would have thought. Not so.

In July the following year, 2003, more than a year after the action, Greenpeace was prosecuted, with the federal government relying on an obscure 1872 law against "sailor-mongering."

This bizarre law was originally designed to discourage owners of inns and brothels from boarding ships, as they were about to enter port, in order to lure the sailors into their establishments. The law has only been used twice in its history.

Greenpeace filed a request to have the case dismissed, but that decision was postponed. However the judge, Judge Adalberto Jordan warned the U.S Justice department that he might still grant the motion after the presentation of facts at trial. He decided to have the case heard before a jury.

While jury trials are not normally permitted for this level of charge, Judge Jordan granted a jury as a matter of discretion, citing the unusual nature of the prosecution. “This case,” he wrote, “may ... signal a change in DOJ [Justice Department] policy.” He also noted, “The prosecution has generated charges that the indictment of Greenpeace is politically motivated due to the organization’s criticism of President Bush’s environmental policies.”

John Passacantando, Executive Director of Greenpeace USA, said before the case began last month: “We look forward to proving at trial that we are not guilty of the charges and that we were doing the right thing to protect the Amazon.”

“We are gratified that the judge recognizes the significance of this case by granting our request to present the case before a jury,” said Passacantando in a press release. “The unprecedented nature of this prosecution has the potential to transform an important aspect of legal and political life in the United States, significantly affecting our tradition of civil protest. The conduct for which Attorney General, John Ashcroft and his Justice Department seeks to prosecute Greenpeace was, essentially, whistle-blowing -- publicly exposing and preventing violations of U.S. law prohibiting the importation of illegally harvested mahogany wood. The Justice Department’s prosecution of Greenpeace is unwarranted and politically motivated.”

Greenpeace had no option but to fight the case. This of course involved hiring lawyers and assembling a defence team. All this cost a considerable amount of money.

But Greenpeace also decided to fight in the court of public opinion, to turn the case into a campaign opportunity by arguing that the trial could serve as a test case for future of freedom of speech for protest groups in the United States under the Bush administration. Greenpeace decided to make this a First Amendment case, a freedom of speech case and to garner support on that basis.

It was able, on this basis, to enlist the support of all the major non-government organizations in the US, including the American Council for Civil Liberties – no mean feat in a society where such groups are more often at odds with each other than united in common cause. Several of these

groups took out a full page advertisement in the *New York Times* calling for the charges to be dropped.

Greenpeace was also able to gain significant political support. Al Gore denounced the action, as did a number of politicians including Senator Patrick Leahy from Vermont.

The consequences of losing the case were clear – and stark.

Had Greenpeace been convicted, it would have impaired its ability to operate within the US. There would have most likely been a substantial financial penalty, and the possibility of a court order prohibiting Greenpeace from engaging in future protest actions. It could well have signalled the end of the organization in the one place in the world where all our international campaigns, at the end of the day, will be won or lost.

It is not hard to see that this could have been the intention of the Bush Administration.

There was little doubt that the future of Greenpeace in the US was on the line. So it was with huge relief that the organization greeted the decision of the Judge on May 18, after only two days of hearing, to dismiss the charges.

Knowing what was at stake, Greenpeace had gone into the court with all publicity guns blazing. More than 100,000 messages of support from around the world had been sent to the White House, every Greenpeace office around the world had mobilised and begun actions around the US offices in their countries and a huge media presence was assembled in Miami as the trial began.

It was a victory for free speech and a victory for the Amazon campaign because there is no doubt that the publicity attending the trial also helped to highlight the issue of the trade in illegal timber.

But it also ensured the survival of the organization. Huge financial and organisational resources had had to be diverted into the campaign against these charges. No doubt that was part of the calculation by Attorney-General John Ashcroft.

It is indeed very scary to consider the lengths governments are now willing to go to undermine legitimate protest. We expect democracies to thrive on opposition and dissent.

This is no longer the case.

At the same time, corporations are also becoming more aggressive.

Greenpeace currently faces another challenge in the US, with ExxonMobil suing the organization over a peaceful protest at its headquarters in Irvine, Texas in May last year.

Criminal charges have also been laid against the 38 individuals who were arrested at the protest, most of them for dressing as tigers and running around on the roof of the organization that promises to “put a tiger in your tank”.

This same organization does less to publicise how its product is contributing to global catastrophe in the form of climate change. Just a few days ago Greenpeace tried to remedy this omission by protesting onto the Exxon Headquarters, the same building the tigers entered last year, images of climate change – so that shareholders converging for the corporation’s AGM would know exactly what Exxon oil is doing to the climate.

Closer to home we face related kinds of threats. We have not seen a government prosecute an NGO – and hope we never do – but we are witnessing other forms of government-initiated aggression.

The ability of NGOs to operate within our democracy has been severely circumscribed in a number of ways. You will be aware of the report *Silencing Dissent: Non-government organizations and Australian Democracy*, recently published by the Australia Institute. This report surveyed 200 organizations, collating information on how they operate, and on their attitudes to government.

The results of this survey provide evidence of the way in which NGOs believe public debate in this country has been gagged.

Ninety per cent of the responding organizations stated they believed that organizations and individuals who dissent risk having their government funding cut. Seventy-four per cent agreed that NGOs are being pressured to amend their public statements into line with current government policy.

We have recently seen the attempt by government to use a legislative stick to curb advocacy by NGOs. The Charities legislation proposed to withdraw tax deductible status from organizations that engaged in political advocacy. Fortunately the bill has been withdrawn – for now. But can we be certain that it will not return to the government’s agenda?

This is one example of the blunt use of government power to curb protest and dissent. It one example of how much more difficult it has become to fight back in Australia today.

The very culture of dissent is being undermined.

Probably not many of you watch the television reality program “Big Brother” but perhaps you have heard about what happened on Sunday night when the young man Merlin Luck introduced his own bit of reality to the show. After being evicted from the House and entering the studio where a live audience awaited him, he held up a hand-made sign saying “Free the Refugees”. He was comprehensively booed by the audience, which made it clear subsequently – both on the night, and on the show’s website – that it wants no truck with political protest.

Rather than being shamed at how we as a country treat people fleeing persecution, far too many Australians either agree with putting asylum seekers in concentration camps in remote parts of the country – or simply don’t want to know about it.

Either way, this is a frightening departure from the ethos of the “fair go” where we once tolerated a diversity of opinion. We were also a country where you would give someone “the shirt off your back” - not turn your back on human misery and deprivation.

There are other examples of the way in which we have changed.

We had a tradition in this country of NGOs and community groups working in partnership with governments to identify problems and help in solving

them. This was especially the case with welfare groups and with women's groups.

There was plenty to criticize about this tradition. We were perhaps too close to governments, we became too dependent on government funding for our operations and we were too inclined to search for bureaucratic solutions to most of our problems.

Nevertheless, it was a productive way of working that created good solutions to social problems.

I would nominate women's refuges as one example of where this government/community partnership worked well for a long time.

The days of these partnerships is well and truly over.

The current federal government is only interested in working with organizations that endorse its policies and it has made ruthless use of funding to ensure compliance and kill dissent.

In a recent article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* Adele Horin provided some chilling examples of the government using its power in this way. She cited the defunding of the Australian Youth Policy and Advocacy Centre (AYPAC), a group that represented young people, and its replacement "with a hand-picked 'round-table' of young people which met occasionally, and whose call for an AYPAC-like body to be restored has been ignored."<sup>1</sup>

Horin also gave the example of the withdrawal of funds from Shelter Australia, from the group that represented pensioners and from a number of women's organizations. The most outspoken, and only avowedly feminist, organization, WEL, had its funding withdrawn in 1996 and has received nothing since.

I can provide another, especially tragic, example – one that is described in my recent book *The End of Equality*.

In 1998, the Women's Emergency Services Network (WESNET), the body that had been formed in 1992 to nationally coordinate women's refuges and related domestic violence and emergency services, was forced to merge with

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<sup>1</sup> Adele Horin, "A hush everywhere but the letters pages" *Sydney Morning Herald* June 5-6, 2004

two housing peak bodies as a condition of funding. The inappropriateness of forcing an amalgamation between housing organisations and a women's crisis network soon became apparent and WESNET withdrew from the arrangement. Since then, the only federal government money it has received has been a three-year consultancy under the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence scheme that expired on 30 June 2001. Since then, despite repeated appeals, WESNET has received no federal government funding and has to try to represent and co-ordinate its 400-member organizations by relying on donations and contributions from members.

There are two disturbing consequences from the use of funding power in this fashion. One is that the organizations that have lost funds assume pariah status and no longer have any input into government policy. The second is the development of the charade involved with those organizations that are willing to toe the government line in return for money.

These organizations provide the illusion of consultation and partnership, but nothing could be further from the truth.

Let me give you the example of the women's groups.

Three such organizations now receive federal government funding. In return for agreeing to form secretariats to service other, smaller organizations these three umbrella groups each receive \$150,000 in annual funding – a huge sum in comparison with what these organizations previously had to rely on when they were self-funding.

But there is, of course, a catch.

In return for the money, each of these groups has had to sign a contract that prevents them from making public comment on anything related to women without first getting the written permission of the Prime Minister or the Office of the Status of Women (OSW).

And I bet your were wondering why you had not lately seen any critical comments about the government's policies on women from the major women's organizations!

There is a lack of feedback – and also a lack of input. All this is damaging to democracy. The policy process is polluted, and the outputs are – predictably enough opportunistic and usually inappropriate.

Let me give a disturbing contemporary example.

Late last year OSW produced a multi-media (television and print) campaign targeting young people and domestic violence. Entitled “No Respect, no Relationship” the campaign was due to hit the airwaves just before the peak-violence time, Christmas, and was designed to influence young men about what is acceptable behaviour in a relationship.

As with all government advertising campaigns, this one had to be vetted by the backbench committee that approves government advertising. Unlike most government advertising campaigns, this one was denied approval.

The committee declined to approve it on the grounds that it did not depict “real” violence. The ads. showed a range a violent behaviour, from shouting to actual hitting. The campaign, which had been developed over a period of two years and was based on meticulous research in the one area that OSW these days has any expertise in, was cancelled. There was very little publicity about the cancellation.

It came to light a couple of months later. The government claimed that the campaign was not dead but that it was being revised. One particular problem with it, the Prime Minister claimed, was that the ad. merely referred viewers to a website. He argued that it was necessary to include a 1800 number. The campaign was being rejigged to fix this.

It later emerged that cancellation fees of \$1.1 million had to be paid, and that \$2.7 million was spent on materials that were dumped because, along with the website, they were deemed unsuitable.

(This material included brochures for sports coaches to use with young men to encourage positive attitudes towards women– perhaps the dumped material could be passed onto the Canterbury Bulldogs and the NSW State of Origin team!)

If you have been watching commercial television over the past fortnight you might have seen the results. The “No Respect, No Relationship” theme has

been ditched. Instead, the campaign is branded “To Violence Against Women, Australia Says No”. (And it includes a 1800 number!)

I could easily spend another hour putting the case for what is wrong with this new campaign, and how it is an utter perversion of both the policy process and an efforts to take violence against women seriously. Let me just confine myself to a few points.

First, let me look at the proposition “To Violence Against Women, Australia Says No”. This is a patently false proposition. I refer you to the chapters “Pay Back” and “A Sex War” in my new book *The End of Equality* for a detailed provision of evidence that violence against women in Australia is a widespread and apparently increasing affliction.

There is massive evidence, from the surveyed views of women themselves, to the recently revealed stories of the behaviour of footballers towards women, to contradict the notion that Australia says No to violence against women.

Regrettably, the very opposite is more often the case.

There is a deeply imbedded culture of violence in this country whose causes need to be addressed before there is any chance of changing it. Trite, and inaccurate slogans, merely insult our intelligence and are a cruel taunt to the thousands of women victims of violence, those women who are beaten, often to within an inch of their lives. About once a week, a woman is actually killed by her ‘intimate partner’.

Yet what are we as a society doing about this?

Virtually nothing.

In fact, the reverse is true. The government that claims to care about this issue has been unable to spend the money allocated to domestic violence for more than two years now. No wonder it decided throw \$30 million at a worthless television ad campaign and – wait for it – a booklet featuring a photo of the Prime Minister that is being delivered to every home in Australia.

Let me explain. This involves a little backtracking.

The federal government's Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV) established in 1997 has been the federal government's main – probably only – program dealing with domestic violence. Its purpose was initially described as 'in cooperation with state and territory governments, to find better ways of preventing and responding to domestic violence. Through PADV, Australian governments work together with the community to test new approaches, identify good practice and share knowledge'. PADV was promised \$25 million in total funding for the life of the program.

For its first three years, PADV was proactive and prolific, publishing a series of progress reports, evaluations of progress and discussion papers. In the first two years, the 105 projects funded were described by the government as 'designed to test innovative approaches to the prevention of domestic and family violence, to test and refine services which exist to respond to the effects of violence in women's and children's lives, and to test and develop strategies for working with men to prevent and reduce violence'.

PADV's first phase ended in 2000, and the program was extended until June 2003 with further funding of \$25 million. PADV2's priorities were listed as: family violence in indigenous communities, children at risk and working with men. Altogether, \$50 million had been allocated to the program.

But by the time PADV2 began, it was obvious the program was running out of steam. In mid 2003, according to PADV's own website, there hasn't been a publication or a report since July 2001 and the last ministerial speech on the subject had been in October 1999, by the long since departed previous minister, Senator Jocelyn Newman. The then Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women, Senator Amanda Vanstone, appears never to have made a speech on the subject (or at least not one that her department thought was worth posting on its website).

In 2001, PADV's funds were under spent by \$4.3 million. In late 2002, at least six months before the end of the financial year, the government concluded – on what basis, no one knows – that PADV was again going to be underspent and it decided the money could be used elsewhere.

They decided to use it fund the notorious fridge magnet campaign which was mailed to every Australian household in February 2003.

‘Unspent funds relating to the Women’s programmes are estimated to contribute \$10.1 million to the National Security Public Information Campaign’, read a tiny item hidden away in the prime minister’s portfolio papers and spotted by Labor’s shadow minister for women, Nicola Roxon. (The \$10.1 million of women’s money used for this superfluous campaign also included \$2.6 million filched from the National Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault – another program in the prime minister’s department).

That the government could raid the domestic violence piggy bank to pay for a dubious (and, many thought, politically motivated) scare campaign on terrorism speaks volumes about how seriously it takes the question of eliminating domestic violence.

We were entitled to be alarmed, not just alert, to what the government was up to.

At the time, the government justified its actions by saying that these unspent funds that would otherwise be ‘lost’ back to consolidated revenue would be rolled over into future years. They tried to make a virtue out of a problem they had created in the first place. Why couldn’t they spend the money?

Why not at least spend it on an ABS survey updating the 1996 Women’s Safety survey that revealed the shocking incidence of violence in this country?

That survey looked at all forms of violence against women and found that 7.1 per cent of all women – or 490,400 women – had experienced an incident of violence in the twelve months prior to the survey. Almost half a million women. This figure greatly increased with younger women. Fully 19 per cent of women aged 18–24 had experienced an incident of violence in the previous year. Almost half of all the women who had experienced violence sustained physical injuries. It was found that when the question was extended to explore any experience of violence at any time from a previous partner, 1.1 million women reported such violence. This was equivalent to 23 per cent of all women who had ever been married or in a de facto relationship. Children witnessed the violence in almost half a million cases.

Almost one-third of these women reported that violence had occurred during a pregnancy, and 14 per cent of these women said the violence had been inflicted for the first time when they were pregnant.

That was in 1996. Is it any better or worse today? We don't know – and we never will because it turns out the survey that has been 'pencilled in' for 2006 will not be comparable. 'It will be a personal safety survey,' Jill Farrelly, an assistant secretary from OSW, told Senate Estimates in May 2003. 'Because of the way ABS now runs its surveys, it will cover both men and women. It will be a face to face survey which will have common elements similar to the 1996 survey but obviously with some extension of research to match current research requirements.'

In other words, it will compare men and women's feelings of personal safety – and drop that pesky stuff about the violence men do to women. Why can't we have ongoing investigation of the extent of violence against women? We do it with stolen cars.

We have a national database on stolen vehicles that is updated *four times a day*. In mid-2000 it was linked to the New South Wales REVS (Register of Encumbered Vehicles) system for the first time, a move the NSW Minister for Fair Trading said would protect car buyers from unwittingly buying stolen vehicles. NSW police have details of more than 465,000 vehicles. We live in a country that cares more about stolen cars than it does about bashed and violated women.

In my view, it is a scandal that \$30 million of the total \$50 million allocated over five years to addressing domestic violence would be assigned to a single advertising campaign - regardless of its quality.

That it is such a bad campaign and so inappropriately targeted makes it even worse. If this is the best we can do to address a crisis that threatens the lives of Australian women, we need to be very worried about our democracy.

To return to my initial point about the pollution of the policy process...

Have you heard a peep of criticism about this appalling waste of money from any of the government-funded women's groups?

And that is the core of the problem.

There is no input – and none is welcome – and there is no feedback, not welcome either.

How can we have an informed democracy without such interchange?

As our democracy continues to be whittled away, we need to be able to fight back. We need to be able to point out the defects in the process, and in the outcome. We need to be able to show the Emperor is in fact wearing no clothes when the Prime Minister claims he is “doing something” about domestic violence.

We face difficulties in being heard, especially when we cannot get the media to listen. When our criticisms are detailed and complex – and not readily able to be reduced to a single sound-bite – these difficulties increase.

Many of the problems people face today are perceived to be private individuals ones, instead of the social responsibilities they were once seen to be.

A good example of this is childcare.

Today most parents are incredibly stressed out about childcare. It is difficult to obtain and almost impossible to afford. I hear horrendous stories of kids having to go on two year waiting lists, of mothers having to adjust their working days and hours around childcare availability – in some cases having to return to work sooner than they wished so as not to lose a childcare place.

Yet parents suffer these problems stoically and privately. Once they would have caused a virtual revolution. I am still surprised that do not.

We originally got government-funded childcare in this country, back in 1972, because employers demanded it. They needed women in the workforce and they rightly understood that without childcare it would be impossible for mothers of young children to take employment.

That is still true today. It is even more true given the great workforce participation of married women with children. But there is far less pressure on government than there once was. Employers look for private solutions for their staff – and commercial operators leap in to fill the gap.

The largest commercial operator of childcare in this country recently ascended to the BRW Rich List – making a fortune that is assured by the fact that government subsidies, in the form of the Child Care Benefit, guarantee his cash flow. There is no risk in a business where demand exceeds supply and where every place comes with a guaranteed government handout.

Yet who is deciding childcare policy? This is another area that has been abrogated by government.

We have privatised issues such as childcare along with so many other things. Government has succeeded in shedding so many of what once were seen as its duties and its responsibilities. It has created a policy intelligence vacuum. In such a vacuum ideology thrives and that is what we see happening today.

In the place of reasoned argument and informed dissent, we have ideological dictates and mandated prescriptives that pass for policy.

This is what we need to be fighting back against. We have to stand up and say No. We have to disagree, argue, make waves. In doing so, we will be part of a small and getting smaller band of brave souls who are willing to stand up and be counted.

To conclude, let's go back to Adele Horin and her article that I quoted earlier. She began by saying, "Thank goodness for the letters pages of newspapers. And thank goodness for the Internet. In these forums the voice of dissent can still be heard. Ordinary people vent their spleen, criticize government, and mercilessly satirise their political leaders. Elsewhere, from the universities to the Department of Defence, from charities to women's groups, the pall of self-censorship has settled".

As I have tried to argue in these remarks, the consequences of such self-censorship are serious, even on occasions like-threatening. We have to find the courage to fight back.

Adele finished her article by saying: “Too many leaders and academics take the quiet route, mince their words, hide behind jargon, avoid public debate, and never push the boundaries. Will the sky fall in? No point risking it. For cheek, directness, and boldness, I’ll take the letters page”.

Cheek, directness and boldness were qualities that Juanita Nielsen possessed in spades. Tragically, they probably contributed to her death. It is terrible to contemplate that political activism could come at such a high price in contemporary Australia.

We are fortunate that such instances are rare but we must not let even one such death dissuade us from standing up for our beliefs and in taking action where it is needed. We have to stand up to those who would deny us our rights and our voice – be they developers, corporations or governments.

That is the most appropriate way to honour the memory of Juanita Nielsen – and one of which I am sure she would approve.