



“Gone is the era of large scale protests like the Springbok tour, where New Zealanders were willing to stand up for what they believed in. We are now in an era that has some similarities to that of the Chinese during the Tiananmen Square massacre, where the people are powerless and have to submit to the state because the state, the police and the army have absolute control. “

SMACK THAT ASS

“People should not be afraid of their governments. Governments should be afraid of their people.”
V in the film *V for Vendetta*

by Brad Heap

Mention the name Sue Bradford on any street corner, pub, workplace or university lecture hall and one topic will immediately spring to mind - the Anti-Smacking debate. Bradford's

Crimes (Abolition of Force as a Justification for Child Discipline) Amendment Bill 2005, or the Anti-Smacking Bill as it is more commonly known, has become the topic on the lips of every person in this fine nation of ours in recent months.

Most of the debate on the smacking bill has been focussed on whether or not everyday 'normal' parents would become criminals under the new law. While I do believe that

there will be some parents unfairly prosecuted for lightly smacking their children, that particular can of worms is not what I am here to debate. I am attempting instead to highlight an issue to do with the bill that most have missed. That is, the removal of power from the individual.

You see, the current government is of the opinion that they know how to bring up the country's children better than the actual parents themselves. This is a dangerous situation because it means that, not only does the government not trust you, they are infringing on your human rights to be a free individual. The issue here is not to smack or not to smack, the issue we should be concerned with is that the government is directly and deliberately interfering with our day-to-day lives, something they should not be doing. Rather than providing people with guidelines relating to the boundaries of what is acceptable and unacceptable, this bill is telling people how to live and act, and directly inciting fear into every parent in New Zealand in the process.

You need to be afraid of this bill, very afraid. Not just of the removal of your rights, but also of the people who will enforce this bill. As with all laws, the people charged with enforcing it are our supposedly just, honest and upright police force. That's right, the same police force whose members have been known to rape under-age girls, threaten them into silence and then claim it was all consensual. You see, a parent may not be allowed to smack his or her children, despite being their legal guardian. However, it seems you can be sure that the cops will be allowed to rape your 15-year-old daughter, threaten her, silence her and call it consensual.

As those of you who bother to pick up a newspaper every now and again will know, Dame Margaret Bazley's Royal Commission of Inquiry report into police conduct (or should that be misconduct?) found many serious incidents in which the police abused their powers and often broke the very laws that it is their duty to enforce. During the last 25 years, there have been 313 complaints of sexual assault laid against police officers, of which 141 were serious enough to lay criminal

charges. That is a rate of more than one complaint a month. And yet we still trust these people to uphold the law and protect us from 'bad' people.

Some of you may say most of the stuff in the Bazley report happened more than ten years ago, and is being acted upon, and wouldn't happen now. Really? How about taking a look at the Taser trial and then try telling me that police are still not abusing their powers. Despite only being in action for the past six months, the Taser has been produced 85 times and fired on 13 of those occasions, including once on a pit bull dog and multiple times on people already subdued by police. The most recent major case of this was in Henderson, Auckland on March 22 when a teenager already subdued by police was pinned down, held still, and Tasered in front of the general public. The shock to the body left the teenager unable to walk and he was dragged into the back of a police car. Our society has become so used to police blatantly abusing their power even in front of the general public that we have reached a point where we are too scared to stand up for our rights. As police Tasered this teenager, did one single person of those watching say, "Hold on a second, you cannot do that"? No, of course not, because they would have known that, had they opened their mouths in protest, the Taser may well have been heading for them next.

Gone is the era of large scale protests like the Springbok tour, where New Zealanders were willing to stand up for what they believed in. We are now in an era that has some similarities to that of the Chinese during the Tiananmen Square massacre, where the people are powerless and have to submit to the state because the state, the police and the army have absolute control. The Taser was meant to be introduced to reduce the number of times that police have to present firearms to stop offenders. Instead, it is being

used as a tool of control, the Taser is being produced by police about once every two days to show off their new toy, their weapon of massive intimidation as they continue to abuse their government-given power.

So where does this leave us with the smacking debate? The bill is idiotic and undemocratic because it takes power away from the individual. Laws should be put in place to protect citizens from the few low-lives society

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is unfortunate enough to harbour and should definitely not be designed to incriminate the majority of the public. They should also be enforced by people who value and uphold the law. We do not need this law because it removes power from the people, the people who know best - the parents.

The smacking debate is therefore much more of an issue than just smacking or not smacking. It is about protecting our human

rights, and our freedom as citizens in a democracy. We should not surrender our ability to make choices to the government. The public should hold the government to account, not the other way round. After all, this is not *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *V for Vendetta*, Tiananmen Square or any other piece of fact or fiction. This is New Zealand, a 'democratic' country where the citizens are supposed to have the final say. Let's do our best to keep it that way.