

# Peace and Social Justice

*A Newsletter of the NASW Committee for Peace and Social Justice*

## Human Rights and Social Work Practice

This issue of the newsletter of the NASW Committee for Peace and Social Justice highlights, among other issues, the critical connections between human rights and social work practice. In practically every area of social work, one need not dig very deeply to discover human rights dimensions. For example, Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which the United States and most other countries of the world have ostensibly been committed for half a century (1948, <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>) states, "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person." For many prisoners, victims of child abuse and battering, gay men and lesbians, and many people living in poverty, these rights are constantly at issue. Article 4 states, "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." Particularly troubling (as discussed by Dr. Christine Lowery, a social work scholar on human rights) is how often women's and children's rights, including that of protection from degrading treatment, are viewed as somehow "special cases," unrelated to other cases of torture and violations of basic human rights. Article 7 of the Universal Declaration states, "All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law." The obligation to protect this right is clearly inconsistent with current practice in the criminal and juvenile justice systems, in which race and class repeatedly are shown to be associated with differential treatment, up to and including the death penalty (<http://www.essential.org/dpic>). The rights to work, to equal pay, to an adequate standard of living, to medical care, to adequate education ... all are included in the Universal Declaration.

Although issues of human rights have clear relevance to social policy, the connections with practice may sometimes not be as immediately apparent, but they are, in fact, integral. The sharing of power in practice includes acknowledging the oppression to which people are commonly exposed by other people and larger cultural systems, encouraging "critical consciousness" among clients, certainly, but there is more.

*continued on page 2*

## Human Rights and Practice Affecting People of Color

The NASW Committee for Peace and Social Justice is sponsoring a panel at the Social Work 2000 conference in Baltimore, Maryland, in November 2000. The panel will address issues of human rights and practice as they affect people of color from several perspectives. The panelists have been selected because of their knowledge and expertise in this area. The panel will include the following:

- Dr. Christine Lowery (Laguna/Hopi), associate professor, School of Social Welfare, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, speaking on, "Human Rights, Indigenous People, and Social Work Practice." Indigenous individuals, and indigenous peoples, face obvious oppression of many kinds, and these issues need to be addressed in preparation for practice as well as in the process of practice. In addition, however, many other violations of the rights of indigenous groups, just as serious, may not be at all obvious to people who view the world only through the lenses of dominant society-including many social workers. For example, many can understand the rights of individuals, but the concept of the rights of an indigenous people may not be at all clear. For example, there remains much confusion regarding

*continued on page 5*

### *Inside this issue*

- 1 Human Rights and Social Work Practice**
- 1 Human Rights and Practice Affecting People of Color**
- 2 Urban Sprawl as Social Justice Issue**
- 2 Death Penalty for Children?**
- 2 Welfare Reform**
- 3 California Supports International Resolution for Justice**
- 3 Conferencing and Circles**
- 4 NASW Supports the Release of Leonard Peltier**

## Urban Sprawl as Social Justice Issue

In an article in the May/June issue of *Sierra*, author David Moberg discussed the efforts of Minnesota State Representative Myron Orfield to frame issues of urban sprawl not just as aesthetic problems, but as involving serious questions of social and economic justice. According to Moberg, "[S]ocial inequality drives sprawl, and sprawl in turn makes inequality worse. Orfield has come to see sprawl as part of a massive interregional transfer of 'social wealth' (taxes and educated citizens, for example) that benefits the most affluent communities, while the people who are left behind [in central cities and inner-ring suburbs] have to pay" (p. 76).



**What you can do:** Log on to the Sierra Club Web site (<http://www.sierraclub.org/sprawl>) for more information, as well as to connect to a section entitled "Take Action," which suggests action steps readers can take to contribute to efforts to control urban sprawl. ☒

## Death Penalty for Children?

by Connie Calkin

Alex Kotlowitz, writing in the *New Yorker* (January 17, 2000, pp. 23-24), noted, "In this country, David Tanenhaus, a historian of juvenile justice, points to 'a general loss of faith in children and the rehabilitative idea.'" Most states now have provisions to try juveniles accused of certain offenses in adult court. Some states house children in adult prisons. Executing children seems to be a logical extension of such thinking. But that thinking is cruel and perverse. Youth is more than just a chronological fact. Young people are susceptible to influence and impulse, and so they are even less likely than adults to be swayed by the 'deterrent' effect of capital punishment. "The death penalty for adults is an abandonment of hope. The death penalty for children is an expression of despair."



**What you can do:** Examine the Web site of the Death Penalty Information Center (<http://www.essential.org/dpic>), and determine what advocacy steps you might take individually or collectively in your own state or nationally. ☒

Moment by moment in the practice process, there are opportunities to recognize and support, or to ignore, the power that people bring or could bring to their lives and communities. There are opportunities to act respectfully toward someone for whom that is so uncommon, or not to-and to acknowledge when we really can't understand, to acknowledge the errors of sensitivity we make so often. "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (Article 1). Human services organizations and professionals can easily be seduced into colluding with violations of human rights, ranging from disrespect toward people already struggling with mental illness or substance abuse to acceptance or resignation in the face of deprivations of basic human rights. These are hard issues to acknowledge, and most of us need to learn to recognize them over and over again, at deeper levels, in ourselves and in our systems. ☒

## Welfare Reform

by Connie Calkin

The NASW Committee on Peace and Social Justice sponsored a forum on welfare reform in February 1999, with Frederick Seidl as moderator. Speakers included Cynthia Woodside of NASW, Marcia Meyers of Columbia University, Gregory Arcs of the Urban Institute, Jacqueline Ladd and Ted Steege of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, and Kathy Thornton of NETWORK: a National Catholic Social Justice Lobby. The forum examined the current state of welfare reform and its effects and resulted in a commitment to continued attention and action on the part of NASW.

Not surprisingly, welfare reform has produced widely differing results in different states, and further effects will emerge as people approach time limits in many states over the coming months. Results in Colorado reported last year, for example, indicated that despite the strong economy, which has significantly moderated the effects, Colorado's low-income families are not experiencing less poverty and still experience significant barriers to self-sufficiency. As long suspected, lack of job skills, childcare, transportation, and education have severely limited access to adequate employment. Many Colorado families experience multiple challenges to stabilization, with at least a third experiencing five or more barriers. Over two-thirds did not know what time limits they faced.



**What you can do:** Particularly as states move toward the expiration of time limits, state-by-state attention will be needed to track the effects of welfare reform. While NASW national staff will be as active as possible, individual chapters may need to consider activating or reactivating advocacy committees to closely track data that emerge and to draw attention to these data in the policy process, including through work with the media. ☒

# California Supports International Resolution for Justice

by Rita Takahashi\*




On August 23, 1999, the California State Legislature passed Assembly Joint Resolution (AJR) 27, which called on Japan to apologize and pay reparations for the World War II atrocities it committed. This historic action by a state legislature brought the state of California closer to international peace and justice issues. It serves as an example of state government's direct involvement in international policy and sets the stage for further action on the part of the U.S. federal government.

Specifically, the nonbinding resolution asks that Japan convey a "clear and unambiguous apology for the atrocious war crimes committed by the Japanese military during World War II." Furthermore, it asks that Japan pay monetary reparations to its "victims of those crimes, including, but not limited to, U.S. military and civilian prisoners of war, the people of Guam and the Marshall Islands who were subjected to violence and imprisonment." The resolution also calls for reparation payments to "sex slaves" (dubbed "comfort women") who were forced victims of Japanese soldiers and survivors of the "Rape of Nanking."

Noteworthy is the fact that AJR was introduced and sponsored by a Japanese American Assemblyman, Mike Honda (D-San Jose). Many have been heartened by Honda's pro-active stand on this issue, and many see it as a positive move toward greater pan-Asian relations. Honda said it was a giant step in bringing together Chinese Americans, Filipino Americans, Korean Americans, and Japanese Americans.

Speaking about the lingering pain and suffering Japan imposed on its victims, Honda argued that this resolution is a healing measure. He said that actions on the part of the Japanese government would bring greater "closure and reconciliation" to the injustices that occurred more than 60 years ago. It would send a symbolic message to all countries to take responsibility for its past policies and actions and to encourage future initiatives for peace and justice.



**What you can do:** In a related matter, the rights of Japanese Americans also were grievously violated during World War II. Look at the Japanese American Voice Web site, and consider signing the resolution posted there: <http://www.JAVoice.com> 

## Conferencing and Circles




The "justice" system in the United States has traditionally relied on one of two approaches, punishment or individual treatment. The evidence supporting either of these approaches is very weak; the results for perpetrators, victims, and communities have all been limited. Indigenous groups from several areas of the world have taken the lead in developing an alternative model, one that involves restorative justice and that recognizes the connections among the human web. For example, an approach called Family Group Counseling, which grew from Maori roots but was universally applied in New Zealand for most juvenile offense categories, resulted in reductions of almost two-thirds in the number of young people entering juvenile facilities, and dramatically cut recidivism. The approach has been exported to Australia, Canada, and parts of the United States with promising results.

Elders among First Nations peoples in Canada indicate that traditionally, offenders in their societies were viewed as needing either teaching or healing. The European justice system is viewed as barbaric, further damaging the offender and producing no healing for the community web that has been damaged. As a result, indigenous communities in Canada have taken the lead in the development of Healing Circles for a number of serious offenses, like sexual abuse, which are viewed as affecting the entire community.

There are several other related approaches, often described under the rubric, "Conferencing and Circles." A book by Rupert Ross, *Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice*, provides an inspirational and persuasive introduction. The book was published in 1996 by Penguin Books Canada (Toronto); it is not available from the usual U.S. outlets, but is available from Canadian online booksellers (e.g., <http://www.chapters.ca>).



**What you can do:** Go to [www.realjustice.org](http://www.realjustice.org) on the Web to learn more about Conferencing and Circles and to obtain information on an international conference regarding these approaches in Toronto in August 2000. 

\*Rita Takahashi is professor, School of Social Work, San Francisco State University

# NASW Supports the Release of Leonard Peltier

In April 2000 the NASW Board of Directors voted to support the effort to free Leonard Peltier, an Anishnabe-Lakota activist convicted of the murder of two FBI agents in 1975, who has been imprisoned for 23 years. The board, in concert with many other organizations and activists, is calling for either executive clemency or immediate parole. As stated by Amnesty International, "Amnesty International considers Leonard Peltier to be a political prisoner whose avenues of redress have long been exhausted ... Amnesty International recognizes that a retrial is no longer a feasible option and believes that Leonard Peltier should be immediately and unconditionally released."

There is compelling evidence that Mr. Peltier's conviction was obtained through government misconduct and misinformation. Understanding the case requires understanding the fabric of coercion, violence, and suspicion present during the late 1960s and early 1970s around issues of sovereignty and indigenous rights in the United States, and particularly in South Dakota. The occupation of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Reservation was a turning point, after which violence escalated rapidly. Peltier was a leader in the American Indian Movement (AIM), "whose members were involved in a campaign to protect traditional Indian lands and resources and had come into conflict with both the Pine Ridge tribal government and the FBI" (Amnesty International). In this conflict, AIM was allied with traditional people and spiritual leaders on the reservation. The case carries enormous political weight even now, as evidenced by the unprecedented FBI media campaign as a parole hearing for Mr. Peltier, scheduled for June, approaches.

Space precludes a full review here; readers are encouraged to visit the Web site of the Leonard Peltier Defense Committee (<http://www.freepeltier.org/>) for much more detail. A few high points, however:

- There is substantial evidence that testimony in Mr. Peltier's and related trials was in some cases fabricated, and in other cases extracted through coercion and intimidation, and that affidavits were falsified.
- Ballistic information was withheld and may have been fabricated.
- Thousands of documents related to the case have been withheld, although it is clear that issues of national security are not involved.
- The federal prosecutor himself, in an appellate hearing, indicated that "we do not know, quote unquote, who shot the agents," when faced with a lack of evidence that Mr. Peltier actually committed the crime with which he was charged.

It is difficult to understand this case, as many other issues with which social workers are familiar, without addressing the context. Many Americans find it difficult to believe that the justice system would tolerate the kinds of abuses that clearly occurred in this case. Knowledge of the tense political situation, the extent to which both the FBI and AIM felt under attack, and the level of violence present at the time makes it easier to understand how the justice system could have been, and clearly was, subverted.

---

**ALL SOCIAL WORKERS, IN FACT, NEED THIS KNOWLEDGE, BECAUSE PRACTICE AND POLICY DECISIONS THAT AFFECT INDIGENOUS GROUPS OFTEN ARE MADE WITHOUT RECOGNITION OF THEIR IMPACT.**

---

The Assembly of First Nations of Canada and the National Congress of American Indians of the United States have jointly called for the immediate release of Mr. Peltier as a matter of justice. NASW has joined in this call, as a matter of justice, in solidarity with the indigenous peoples of North America.



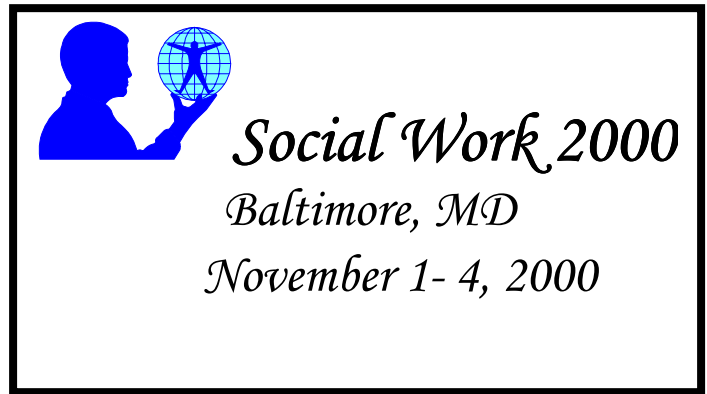
**What you can do:** Go to the Leonard Peltier Defense Committee Web site (<http://www.freepeltier.org/>), explore the evidence, perhaps read Peter Matthiessen's book, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*, then go to the "Get Involved" page of the Peltier Defense Committee site for action recommendations.

Beyond this single case, the rights of indigenous peoples are a critical international issue. Readers can explore the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which is working its way through United Nations processes, at <http://www.hookele.com/netwarriors/dec-En.html>. The declaration states, "Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, economic, social and cultural characteristics, as well as their legal systems, while retaining their rights to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State." For social workers working with Native American, First Nations, and other indigenous groups who need to understand the critical differences between the rights of individuals and the collective rights of peoples, the Draft Declaration is a place to begin. All social workers, in fact, need this knowledge, because practice and policy decisions that affect indigenous groups often are made without recognition of their effect. ☐



the Indian Child Welfare Act, which cannot be resolved without really understanding the sovereignty of indigenous nations, and the matrix of identity in tribal societies. Internationally, an enormous range of human rights issues face indigenous groups. Social work practitioners need to know about and know how to work with these issues. In this presentation, Dr. Lowery will discuss and open the needed dialogue.

- Dr. Joanne Hessmiller, assistant professor, School of Social Work, Marywood University, will speak on "Organizing against the Death Penalty: Passion into Policy." The social work profession has long affirmed the dignity and worth of the person and a commitment to social justice. When the state acts to kill a human being, these social work values are violated in the most horrific way. We know from social science research that the death penalty is racist and classist in its application and that it does not deter crime. Presently, the recognition of the large number of innocent people released from death row in a number of states, most notably Illinois, is presenting us with historic opportunity to re-open a dialogue on this issue. Social work professionals have knowledge and skills that are critical in the work to end state killing. We must not let any opportunity to participate in this dialogue and associated activism to pass. Many lives are at stake.
  
- Dr. Rita Takahashi, professor of social work, San Francisco State University, will address "Asian American Activist Causes for Peace and Justice." Asian Americans have been hard at work on civil rights and social justice issues facing the United States today. This paper and presentation will address activist activities that continue to transform and shape communities and societies. It will briefly trace the history behind these movements and address current events and agendas that are particularly important right now. Five activist causes will be highlighted, discussed, and analyzed:
  1. The 80-20 Initiative (to expand political influence and agenda-setting by pooling collective voices)
  2. Campaign for Justice (to garner redress for Japanese Latin Americans who were kidnapped from Latin America, held in the United States for hostage exchange with U.S. prisoners of war, and forced into U.S. concentration camps during World War II)
  3. Chinese for Affirmative Action (to expand equitable representation and equal access)
  4. National Japanese American Memorial Foundation (to construct a memorial to



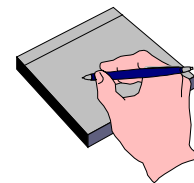
"patriotism" but which, in the process, undermines principles of equity, justice, and integrity)

5. East Asia-U.S. Women's Network against U.S. Militarism (to stop militaristic and oppressive actions on the part of the U.S. government, which violate and exploit women in many Asian countries)

This paper/presentation will conclude with an assessment of how these issues relate to social work, and it will pinpoint the significance and implications for culturally sensitive social work practice.



**What you can do:** Consider attending this panel at Social Work 2000, and encouraging others to do so, to extend the dialogue around these issues into the fabric of social work practice. ☒



*Committee for Peace and Social Justice*

*Connie Calkin, chair*

*Lloyd Lyter*

*Mark Mattaini*

*Judith Palais*

*Rita Takahashi*

*Leticia Diaz, NASW Staff*

National Association of Social Workers  
750 First Street, NE, Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20002-4241  
USA

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED