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Ho Chi Minh is cheered by villagers in the early 1950s.

Ho Chi Minh's Declaration of Independence

Dear Fellow Compatriots,

'All people are created equal. They are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'

This immortal statement appeared in *The Declaration of Independence* of the United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, it means: All peoples of the world are equal from birth, and all peoples have a right to life, fortune, and freedom.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen promulgated at the time of the French Revolution in 1791 also states:

'All people are born free and with equal rights, and must always remain free and with equal rights.'

Those are undeniable rights ...

The French have fled, the Japanese have capitulated, and Emperor Bao Dai has abdicated. Our people have broken the chains that fettered them for nearly a

century; they have gained independence for Viet Nam. They have overthrown the centuries-old system of monarchy and established a democratic, republican system.

For these reasons, we, the Provisional Government of the new Viet Nam, representing the entire Vietnamese people, hereby declare that we break off all colonial relations with France, cancel all treaties signed by France for Viet Nam, and abolish all French privileges in Viet Nam ...

For the reasons stated above, we, the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, solemnly make this declaration to the world:

Viet Nam has the right to enjoy freedom and independence and in fact has established a free and independent country. The entire Vietnamese people are determined to mobilise all their physical and mental strength and to sacrifice their lives and property to safeguard their freedom and independence.

Ho Chi Minh, 'The Declaration of Independence' from Lady Borton, *Ho Chi Minh – A Portrait*, Youth Publishing House, Ha Noi, Vietnam, 2003.

Friends and comrades, the light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere. I do not know what to tell you and how to say it. Our beloved leader, Bapu as we called him, the Father of the Nation, is no more.

Perhaps I am wrong to say that. Nevertheless, we will not see him again as we have seen him for these many years. We will not run to him for advice and seek solace from him, and that is a terrible blow, not to me only, but to millions and millions in this country, and it is a little difficult to soften the blow by any other advice that I or anyone else can give you.

The light has gone out, I said, and yet I was wrong. For the light that shone in this country was no ordinary light. The light that has illuminated this country for these many years will illuminate this country for many more years, and a thousand years later that light will still be seen in this country and the world will see it and it will give solace in innumerable hearts. For that light represented the living truth ... the eternal truths, reminding us of the right path, drawing us from error, taking this ancient country to freedom.

All this happened when there was so much more for him to do. We could never think that he was unnecessary or that he had done his task. But now, particularly, when we are faced with so many difficulties, his not being with us is a blow most terrible to bear.

A madman has put an end to his life, for I can only call him mad who did it, and yet there has been enough of poison spread in this country during the past years and months, and this poison has had its effect on people's minds. We must face this poison, we must root out this poison, and we must face all the perils that encompass us and face them not madly or badly but rather in the way that our beloved teacher taught us to face them. The first thing to remember now is that no one of us dare misbehave because we are angry. We have to behave like strong and determined people, determined to face all perils that surround us, determined to carry out the mandate that our great teacher and our great leader has given us,



Mahatma Gandhi, barefoot and dressed in the simple cotton dhoti, with supporters in the 1930s

remembering always that if, as I believe, his spirit looks upon us and sees us, nothing would displease his soul so much as to see that we have indulged in any small behaviour or any violence.

So we must not do that. But that does not mean that we should be weak, but rather that we should in strength and unity face all the troubles that are in front of us. We must hold together, and all our petty troubles and difficulties and conflicts must be ended in the face of this great disaster. A great disaster is a symbol to us to remember all the big things of life and forget the small things, of which we have thought too much.

Jawaharlal Nehru, 'The light has gone out of our lives' speech. © Mrs Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. Reproduced with permission.



- Father of the Nation
- eternal truths
- the right path
 - mandate
 - great leader



- 1 According to Nehru, in what ways was Gandhi a 'great leader'? In what ways does he convey the idea that Gandhi was the 'Father of the Nation'?
- 2 What is there in his speech to suggest that Nehru himself is a good leader?
- 3 Is this an inspiring nation-shaping speech? Compare it to the 1993 speech of Prime Minister Paul Keating at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Canberra (see *Australian Readers Discovering Democracy Lower Secondary Collection*, Curriculum Corporation, 1999, pp. 42–3).



- opportunistic
- moral precepts
- right conduct
 - shameless
 - propriety
 - abolished
 - lenient



- 1 Why does Ssu-ma Ch'ien argue for fewer laws and punishments? What evidence does he offer to support the idea?
- 2 What do you think of the claim that 'laws ... cannot eliminate the causes that prompt people to commit crimes'?
- 3 How do we cultivate virtues? Is this a better way of changing people's conduct and behaviour than using laws and punishments?

Opposing unjust law

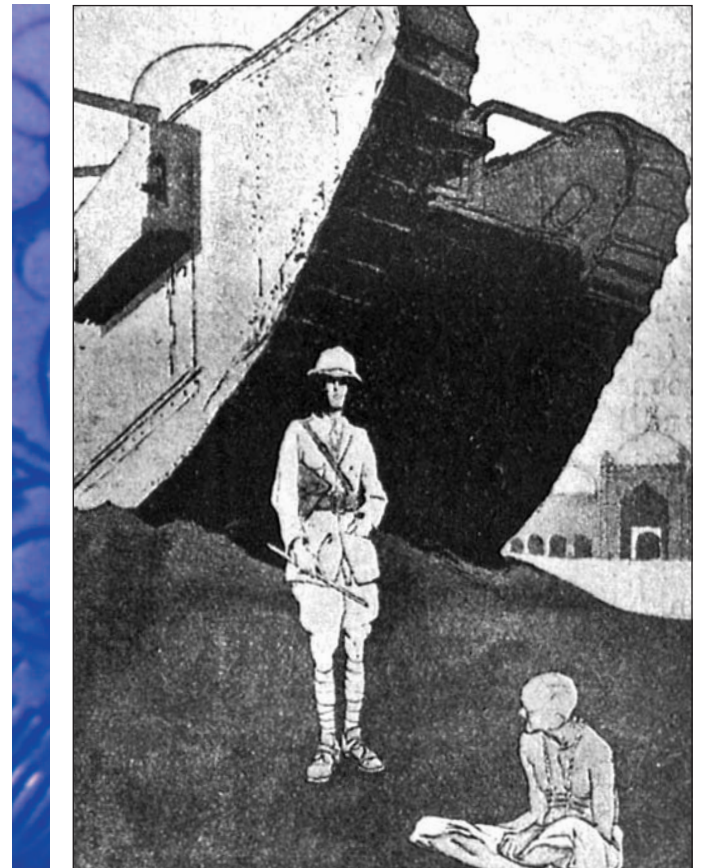
What do we do when we face bad laws? How do we challenge and change unjust law? Law systems can only operate successfully if everyone agrees to accept and uphold the rule of law. But what if you disagree with the law? If you break an unjust law you are still a law breaker and are likely to face punishment. Resistance to unjust law often leads to violence, rebellion and bloodshed. In India a man of peace found another way to oppose unjust law. His techniques have since been used to oppose unjust law in many parts of the world.

When Mahatma Gandhi was born in Porbandar on 2 October 1869, India had been part of the British Empire for over a century. He grew up in a household steeped in Hinduism and his beliefs included *ahimsa* (non-injury to all living things), vegetarianism, fasting for self-purification, and mutual tolerance between different religions and sects. At 19 he sailed to England and studied law there. After a brief return to India, he took legal work in South Africa. It was here that he encountered the prejudice and anti-Indian discrimination that were to turn him into a political activist and the father of Indian nationalism.

He began his political work by opposing a 1906 South African law that discriminated against the Indian minority. He applied a technique for redressing wrongs – resisting the adversary without hate and fighting him without violence, using patience and sympathy. The resistance took seven years and many Indians went to gaol and suffered greatly, but the campaign succeeded in 1913.

Gandhi returned to India and became leader of the Indian National Congress party, which adopted his program of non-violence and non-cooperation in its

struggle for independence from Britain. He travelled throughout India during 1920 and 1922 speaking to mass meetings – often of more than 100,000 people – advocating non-violent resistance to British rule. He was shadowed by police and in 1922 was arrested



'Our weapons are different Mr Gandhi but one of us must finally win.'

Law and the power of rock 'n' pop

Laws can be used to protect us and our liberties, or they can be used to restrict us and limit our freedoms. Censorship laws are a good example. They are used to control what citizens say, what they listen to, and what they see. Sometimes these laws (such as those about sex and violence in the media) are used to protect moral standards or to protect children. Sometimes (such as in time of war or threat) governments use them to restrict citizens' freedoms in order to serve the larger good of national security. At other times, governments use censorship laws to restrict citizens' thinking and expression – simply to stifle opposition and keep power.

Law makers face the need to strike a balance between liberty and restriction. In democracies, freedom of speech and freedom of information are seen as fundamental freedoms, but a question nevertheless

arises: Should these freedoms be unrestricted? The question has also arisen in some Asian countries where there has been a tradition of limited free speech.

In Laos, under the Communist government that formed the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1975, censorship laws were used at first to restrict political opposition and protect the Lao revolution that had deposed the King. Reforms in the 1980s saw growing relaxation, or liberalisation, reflecting similar developments in the sister Communist states of Vietnam and China. Trade, tourism, globalisation and the increasing exposure of Laos to Western culture also have created new pressures. Now, Lao law is being used to control the exposure of its young citizens to foreign pop culture.

The issue was debated in the local media.

VIENTIANE TIMES

Letters to the Editor

Society more colourful

I think that music is something that every culture needs because it makes the society more colourful. The music scene in our country is about to explode because many people are giving the 'next generation' the opportunity to become singers. But I don't think it's living up to its full potential yet. I think there should be more professional artists ... I think that the authorities are giving us the opportunity to fully develop our music. I also think that it's good that the Government puts some limits on what is allowed and what is not. I understand the authorities, if we allow too many foreign influences, our own culture will be lost. Right now artists in Laos have enough opportunities to show their ability and bring their own style to the public.

(Local singer)

Vientiane Times, 27 April 2004, p. 9.

Depends on the content

There is a lot of music out there that we should consider whether we want in our society or not. This depends on the content of the music. I think the music that we distribute to the public should talk about the development of the country or the promotion of Lao culture. It should not be music that is in conflict with or destroying our culture. Some songs are clearly not in sync with the policy and ideas of the Government. We will tell the Lao media not to air these songs. We don't care if songs talk about love or hate. However, it must be in step with a positive vision of our country. Our rules require that every song must be passed by the ministry to check that it suits Lao culture and Government policy. But there are some songs that are not heard by officials, and once they reach the public there's nothing we can do. Presently we can't control this problem because we don't have the means for controlling what goes into the composition of a song. Some songs that talk about subjects like 'begging for money from your wife to pay for a room with another woman ...' This is not suitable, and we will soon be notifying the media which songs are permitted or not permitted.

(Government official)

Vientiane Times, 27 April 2004, p. 9.