

Chained to the prison gates: a comparative analysis of two modern penal reform campaigners.
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This report compares the penal reform campaigns of Pauline Campbell and Violet Van der Elst. Though separated by seventy years, Campbell and Van der Elst engaged in similar direct action demonstrations to draw attention to their causes. This report examines their campaigns to reveal who they were, how they campaigned and to develop an understanding of the impact and the reasons for the effectiveness or failure of their campaigns.

Between 2004 and 2008 Pauline Campbell campaigned to raise awareness of the rates of suicide in women's prisons. This followed the self-inflicted deaths of six women in Styal prison in 2003, one of whom was her 18 year old daughter, Sarah. Violet Van der Elst campaigned for the abolition of the death sentence from 1935 until the 1950s.

Using documentary evidence and interviews with people involved in or knowledgeable about the campaigns, the report analyses: the campaign aims, tactics, reaction and impact, press coverage, the personal characteristics of the women in particular their experiences of bereavement and how they repositioned the issue on which they were campaigning in order to garner support. The report finds similarities in the campaigns. Both women demonstrated outside prisons at significant times. For Campbell, this was every time a woman committed suicide in prison. For Van der Elst, each time there was an execution. Both were adept at creating press interest in their causes. Both managed to reposition the issues on which they campaigned as not simply effecting prisoners. They presented prisoners as vulnerable, contrasting their vulnerability with their 'barbaric' treatment in the criminal justice system.

The report examines the campaigners roles in the development of public policy using Cobb and Elder's (1972) model of policy formation. The report compares how the campaigns influenced policy, to what extent the issues entered the policy agenda, what the constraints of the issue were, how easily the campaigns made it to identify with the issue, the speed at which the issue developed and the language and symbols of the campaigns. It then uses Kingdon's (1984) model to identify the variables that impacted on the effectiveness of the campaigns.

The report concludes that there are three major determinants of campaign success: the issue, the campaigner and the context. It concludes that Campbell's campaign benefitted from being triggered by a tangible event that had personal resonance for the campaigner, by the issue being presented as one that could affect all women and by her campaign coinciding with a period of social consciousness around women's rights and a sympathetic government. It also acknowledges the power of direct action to engage the media and put the issues on the policy agenda.

Chained to the prison gates: a comparative analysis of two modern penal reform campaigners. A report for the Howard League for Penal Reform by Laura Topham. Available online at http://www.howardleague.org/chained_to_the_prison_gates0/