

# The Reign of Secrecy

Susan Connelly – *Sisters of St Joseph NSW Newsletter* - 19 May 2021

The latest hearing in the long-running saga of Witness K and Bernard Collaery was held on May 17 and 18, 2021. This hearing marked the 50<sup>th</sup> in the list of scheduled hearings. See here for the list: <https://justly.info/the-witness-k-and-bernard-collaery-hearings/>

The level of secrecy in these prosecutions has reached extraordinary proportions, so much so, that the hearing of May 17/18—an appeal by Collaery against the secrecy—was itself held in secret.

The secrecy ensures that government can admit—under the cover of a closed court—to spying against Timor-Leste in 2004, while publicly evading responsibility for such a despicable act.

Of course there are matters which governments must keep secret! This is true of any organisation, within limits. However, it should be clear to a reasonable person that any secrecy serves the public interest.

When the Timor Sea negotiations were spied on by Australia, there was close involvement of government ministers with the petrochemical companies that were set to make great financial gains. As a result, the deal that was struck disadvantaged the Timorese. This Australian conduct raises questions regarding the treatment of other poorer, weaker regional neighbours. Speculation is rife, all fuelled by the highly questionable nature of this outrageous case and the secrecy that surrounds the resulting prosecutions.

The foundations of the Australian democratic system include the right to a fair trial, the provision of open justice, and the presumption of innocence. Each of these elements is under pressure in the prosecutions of Witness K and Bernard Collaery, made worse by the all-pervading secrecy. It is deeply unsettling.

If two men of conscience can be treated like this in Australia, who is safe?

There were demonstrations in Canberra and Sydney on Monday, calling again for the prosecutions to be dropped.

Photos

- group at the Archibald Fountain
- Canberra 17 May

## Some Good News!

As these are political prosecutions, they need a political solution.

An important development is that the four Labor politicians for the Canberra area have just issued a [media statement](#) condemning the prosecutions. They refer to the levels of secrecy and the cost—\$4 million so far. They warn of the effects on democracy.

Would you be able to send a short email to these Labor politicians and thank them for their action in calling for justice for these courageous Australian men? Encouragement goes a long way.

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Thank you Sisters. Bernard Collaery is deeply grateful for support and assures us that Witness K is very appreciative too.

Susan Connelly