Constitution Paper

Within the process of this project I sought to tackle the task of creating Social and Environmental rights for our collaborative constitution. I pulled from multiple sources and personal beliefs to accomplish this task, most of which I will mention below.

To begin with, I looked into the topic of social rights. This encompasses many facets of life such as housing, food, and other basic human rights. I mostly used the filter tool in the sidebar of the Constitute Project website to find information. I began with the right to housing, keeping the all inclusive language and guaranteeing the right to affordable and safe housing. The constitutions belonging to countries such as Belarus and Angola inspired my specific writing. The constitution of Belarus states that “citizens shall be entitled to housing and this right shall be safeguarded by state and private housing assistance. Housing should be granted, by the state and local self-government, free of charge or at available prices…no one shall be deprived of housing arbitrarily (Comparative Constitutions Project n.d.).” This was transcribed in my writing of the rights to housing which required an affordable and sanitary condition. I also included the requirement for many housing institutions to meet Americans with Disability Act (ADA) standards. This was inspired by the constitution of Angola which has assurance of housing for both the young and the elderly. For this I used personal experiences through my social group. The first person is my roommate who went through a car accident. He lived in a dormitory that had an elevator at the beginning of the incident, and after the surgery he had he moved into an apartment where there are only stairs for higher floors than the ground. He noted very often the implications of pain from having to climb the stairs. The last example is my grandmother who at this point has issues climbing just three stairs into her home. The reasoning behind younger persons needing housing in our group constitution is because they are more likely to experience accidents that temporarily cripple them, and housing should accommodate for this possibility. As for older persons, not having accessible living forces them to move into housing that can be more expensive and intrusive. In my opinion the constitution of Angola includes these persons in particular to insinuate that their needs should be met in a spheres including disabilities. Housing in America is changing to be more expensive than even the average American afford. The issues have risen from economic issues following 2009, to the point where baby boomers were beginning to greatly struggle with affording their housing. From the article *Housing Affordability for Baby Boomers*, the authors note that those struggling the most involve those with low education, no partner/divorced, and those receiving government income assistance are more likely to have harder housing costs (Sung-jin & Ahn 2013 pg. 104). Along with this came the demographic signifiers of those with less affordable housing which were women and minority groups (Sung-jin & Ahn 2013 pg. 104).

Along with housing comes rights involving food and water quality. Most of the information I gained from reading the *National Economic & Social Rights Initiative* such as the need for nourishing, edible, and affordable foods. I did however find the information from the Constitution of Ukraine to be useful. They state that “persons should have access to information about the quality of food and consumer goods and that this information should be denied the ability to be kept secret (Comparative Constitutions Project n.d.).” From this I included the information that information on the ingredients and treatment of foods and waters should not be hidden from the consumers. When looking for information that pertained to my changes, all that could be found was information on obesity epidemics, so the previous mentioned sources are the only ones for this topic.

For the rights related to water I utilized the Constitution of Fiji to draw inspiration. Their constitution ensures “The state must take measures within its available resources to achieve the accessibility to clean and safe water in adequate quantities (Comparative Constitutions Project n.d.).” One example of this issue comes from Michigan within the United States where a community by the name of London Township became a target for quarrying companies which in turn took advantage of the only water source they had (Butts 2009 pg.2-3). This process tainted and reduced the amount of water that these people had because they were vulnerable and in a more rural area where water supply is less prevalent (Butts 2009 pg. 3). This is but one example on how certain areas can often be left without an appropriate water supply which can sustain them.

Many of the above mentioned rights deal with discrimination based on income or the ability to work. It can be concluded then that work and income are very necessary needs of every citizen. To create this section of rights I utilized the constitutions of both Belarus and Albania. The constitution of Albania states that “Everyone has the right to earn the means of living by lawful work that he has chosen or accepted himself (Comparative Constitutions Project n.d.).” They also include that “Everyone has the right to social security in old age or when he is unable to work. Everyone who is without work involuntarily, and has no other means of support, has the right to assistance.” This was transposed into my rights with the requirements that all persons shall be given the chance to work or have income which will support them through life. I neglected the information about one being able to pick whatever career they wish simply because it seemed self-explanatory to me. The constitution of Belarus has similar rights, along with the requirement that persons be “guaranteed the right to social security in old age, event of illness, disability, loss of fitness for work and loss of bread-winner in the family (Comparative Constitutions Project n.d.)” This can be seen in my mention of protection of citizens in the case of emergency or unpredictable situations which deny them the ability to work. The majority of works on income and work in the United States touches on the idea that income, in the form of income inequality, has a strong effect on many aspects of life. Some of these include retirement age, gendered differences and more frequently health.

This relates to the social right of health or health care depending on the situation. To rewrite this portion I looked into Switzerland’s health care rules because I have heard that it was an impressive system. The constitution of Switzerland states that “Every person has access to the health care that they require (Comparative Constitutions Project n.d.).” I used this in the sense that all persons should have health care that corresponds with their needs. The reasoning behind making health care affordable and accessible is because I have been a victim of having incredibly high medical bills over something small and that was supposed to be “free.” If I could update my rights, I would include the necessity of health care being free. From the article The Quality of Health Care Delivered to Adults in the United States, multiple persons with different needs were questioned on the quality of their care (McGlynn, Asch, Adams, Keesey, Hicks, DeCristofaro, and Kerr. 2003). Most of these participants, including the elderly and diabetic persons who have specific preventative needs, were in the general area of half pleased with their care. This comes into play in the sense that many of these people do not receive required treatments or the treatments that are suggested to make tackling their medical issue (McGlynn et al. 2003).

Another form of social rights which I touched on was protection, which was specifically focused into government establishments like hospitals and police forces. While the premise of protection from government run health institutions stems from the previous information on health care, protection from the police force is something that comes from political turmoil occurring in current society. Recent events, such as the Mike Brown and Eric Garner cases, have caused an interest in the power of the police force. Within my rewriting of the constitution I mention the necessity for these persons to carry out their jobs with the utmost efficiency and to also be taken care of by the government in terms of mental and psychological health. There is little to no equivalent to this information in other constitutions, but there is much information on the internet.

The final social right to touch on is education. I did not change this much from our constitution, beyond the requirement that higher education should be made affordable, accessible, and non-discriminatory. It occurred to me, while looking through the other constitutions, that most other countries offered their higher education free of charge. I think that some money is required to support all that goes into making a system of higher education better though. One author by the name of Galambos (2009) mentions that since the recession college has become more of a challenge (Galambos 2009 pg. 3). This can be translated to the access of higher education becoming increasingly out of reach for many minority groups who never recovered from the recession.

The final set of rights that I covered were Environmental Rights. With this I included waste removal, pollution, and food/water treatment. I utilized the constitutions of Angola and Belarus. From Angola “Everyone has the right to live in a healthy and unpolluted environment (Comparative Constitutions Project n.d.).” And Belarus for both the “responsibility to protect the environment” and for “The State to supervise the rational utilization of natural resources (Comparative Constitutions Project n.d.)” These went into the creation of environmental rights within our group constitution.

Within our group I worked on the social and environmental rights. Most of our work was done in class, with email being the only other form of contact. We each wrote up our own rights and then sent them to Samantha to edit into power point that had a consistent writing style.

References:

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