

# The great wall of silence on human rights in China slated

By MARGARETTA POS



BOB HAWKE and Ronald Reagan came in for a tongue-lashing this week when they were criticised for ignoring the big question of human rights in China.

Helene Chung, ABC correspondent in Beijing (Peking) from 1983 until July last year, said in Hobart that while she was there, not a single world leader publicly mentioned the lack of human rights in China.

"Over 100,000 Australians clamber over the Great Wall each year, and after the Japanese and the Americans, more tourists visit China each year from Australia than from any other country," Ms Chung said.

"But our politicians never take up the issue of human rights — although they are quick to do so with regard to the Soviet Union or South Africa.

"They want to keep China onside with Washington, against the Soviet Union, and they are mesmerised by the prospect of trading with a market of one billion people.

"It is simply much easier to assume that the Chinese people are not interested in freedom."

Ms Chung, who is a fourth-generation Chinese Australian, was born in Hobart and educated at the University of Tasmania.

She is a former ABC radio reporter, and worked in Hobart in 1975 as a television reporter on *This Day Tonight*, before becoming part of the *Nationwide* team in Sydney.

At present on leave from the ABC, she is writing a book about her experience in Beijing, called *Shouting from China*, which will be published later this year.

Ms Chung left Beijing at the height of the "100 flowers" campaign for freedom of expression.

When she left, she sympathised with the aspirations of the Chinese people to achieve material comforts and personal freedom taken for granted in Australia.

Picture: KIM EISZELE.

● Ms Helene Chung . . . a great sadness for the people of China and their lack of human rights.