Demos Journal

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Student Activism

Issue 7


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Acknowledgement of Country

This edition focuses on activism at the Australian National University. We would like to begin by acknowledging that the land the Australian National University sits on—where this edition was written and published—always was and always will be Aboriginal land. We pay our respects to elders past, present, and emerging of the Ngunnawal, Ngambri, and Ngambri-Guumaal nations.

We acknowledge that Indigenous sovereignty has never been ceded to any state or corporate entity. We acknowledge that colonialism never ended in Australia and has only shifted form.

For the pieces in this edition that discuss environmental activism, we would like to acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations have lived here sustainably for millennia and continue to practice and share their unique knowledge in their connection to country.

From the Editors

MIA STONE AND
VANAMALI HERMANS

Mia Stone is an Arts/Law student at the ANU and co-content editor of this edition of *Demos*. She is driven by a desire to help change Australia's shameful treatment of refugees and its natural heritage.

Vanamali Hermans is a Sociology student at the ANU and co-content editor of this edition of *Demos*. She primarily organises with the ANU Refugee Action Committee and the ANU Education Committee.

Student activism has been a defining feature of university life for as long as there have been universities. Young, idealistic, energetic and caught in the throes of an exciting yet tumultuous period of growth and exploration, it is unsurprising that students are often the first to question and challenge social norms and injustices.However, the ways in which students campaign and fight for a better, brighter, and fairer society can vary, raising questions about just what 'student activism' really is. Where are the boundaries between delinquency, social disruption and political protest? Must activism be loud? This is the driving question behind Mia Sandgren's article which explores how an individual's quiet, everyday choices (such as choosing to cycle rather than drive) can be considered forms of 'activism'.

While education has always been a key focus for students, activists engage in many wider social movements and issues such as apartheid, refugee rights and climate change. This inaugural print edition of *Demos Journal* takes a look at several specific campaigns, particularly as they have played out at the ANU and in Canberra. ANU Professor John Minns muses on the successes and challenges of the ANU refugee campaign, as well as the tactics used to build momentum and maintain morale in the face of a stubbornly hostile political environment. The same issue is explored in Vanamali Hermans' poem 'Lonsdale Street' from the perspective of being involved in a direct and confrontational way.

History is a key focus of this issue, and as such, many articles explore the issues which angered the predecessors of today's student activists. Catherine McLeod, Andy Mason, Steve Skitmore and Emma Cupitt all look at issues from a historical perspective, from student protests against the Vietnam War, to support for Indigenous rights and the fight for affordable housing. The latter issue is one which has immediate, personal relevance to Skitmore and Cupitt. As former residents of the Canberra Student Housing Co-op in Havelock House, they have benefited directly from the initiative and bravery of the students who came before them. Their piece, "We Just Needed a Place to Live", also explores contemporary gentrification and the demolition of public housing on Northbourne Avenue. The extensive timeline found at the back of this issue provides a detailed chronology of the ANU's student activist history. In addition to the past and present struggles which are unpacked in this issue there are hints of campaigns to come. Robyn Lewis, in her piece, "Higher Education Activism without Vocation", implores activists not to forget vocational students when campaigning for accessible, quality education. Anna Dennis argues that the fight for free education is meaningless if we remain silent while our institutions wither under the pressures of neoliberal managerialism.

This edition of *Demos Journal* aims to provide a kaleidoscopic exploration of student activism and therefore looks beyond specific movements to the lives of activists themselves. Lizzie Storer and Sylvia Gunn reflect on the influence their upbringings have had in shaping their identities as activists and approach to activism. Esther Carlin and Amelia Filmer-Sankey have curated a poignant collection of responses from ANU activists, past and present, to the question of whether it is difficult to maintain hope as an activist. Other contributors, such as Anna Himmelreich, delve into the apparent rise in apathy and decline in student activism from the heyday of the '60s and '70s. Vanamali Hermans' interview with ANU '70s activist, Chris Swinbank, provides insight into the generational differences that might be behind this.

We hope you enjoy the engaging and thoughtful explorations of student activism our contributors have to offer, and that this publication plays a role in the ongoing project of capturing ANU's history of dissent. There are many people to be thanked for helping us achieve this snapshot.

Thanks must firstly go to Odette Shenfield for helping to initiate this project and making it a reality. This issue would not have been possible without her vision, energy and ideas, not to mention the countless hours spent researching material, soliciting pieces and contacting activists. Thank you to Anna Himmelreich and Shoshana Sniderman-Wise for beginning the collation of archival material on ANU student activism. Their hours of work and research were pivotal in constructing the timeline found at the back of this issue. For making this inaugural print edition a reality, we are incredibly grateful to the Layout Editor, Joanne Leong. Her artistic flair and eye for detail really brought the publication to life. A huge thank you to Mia Sandgren for her ongoing guidance and encouragement throughout the soliciting and editing phases, and to our team of sub-editors—Duncan Stuart, Amanda Dheerasekara, Odette Shenfield, Mia Sandgren and Emma Cupitt. Thanks must go to Chris Swinbank for the invaluable material his scrapbook provided and to Esther Carlin and Amelia Filmer-Sankey for working alongside us to produce the artistic installation of this wider project. We would also like to thank James Connolly and ANU Students' Association for their support, and the ANU Fund who provided a grant for the printing.

A final thank you to all our contributors and the student activists, young and old, without whom this edition of *Demos Journal* would not be possible. We are deeply grateful to these activists for their ongoing commitment to struggles against injustice and inequality, and for their dedication to building a world we may all equally share and enjoy.

From ANUSA

JAMES CONNOLLY

James Connolly was the 2016/17 ANUSA President and Undergraduate Member of ANU Council. Before assuming these roles he was the ANUSA Education Officer. He is currently studying a Bachelor of Laws (Hons)/ Bachelor of Asia-Pacific Studies.

Inherent to the objective of student unionism is the furthering of member interests. Historically and presently, higher education and university administration policy have been seen as counter to these interests, prompting student representatives to explore various means of achieving their objectives. These methods are invariably informed by government policy of the day and the relationship between the student association and university administration. There continues to be debate on the nature of activism and its presence historically and currently on ANU campus as facilitated by the ANU Students' Association (ANUSA).

Having been the ANUSA Education Officer – the Association's focal point for activism, before taking on the role of President – this question has been of longstanding interest to me. With a full view of the Association's activities that only the Presidency affords, I sensed various priorities and frustrations within the Association's membership. For some, the ongoing professionalization of ANUSA's service provision was essential, tangible and practical. FFor others, ongoing professionalization represented a deprioritisation of activism and the transformation of student unions into mere extensions of the university's service provision. With unique access to individuals and information as ANUSA President I had to balance 'having a seat at the table' with a desire to lead a more assertive, activist Association. Furthermore, I assumed the role of President believing that collective action was a key and effective form of activism, which underpinned my consistent support for the deeply flawed National Union of Students (NUS). That belief was balanced by the attitudes of others who were not only sceptical of the NUS, but of collective action at large, believing that our access to Capital Hill afforded us the opportunity to go it alone.

For all these viewpoints, I have made my positions clear, but tensions remain as to the role of activism at ANU. On being approached by *Demos Journal*, I was happy to support this publication as a means of contributing to an important discussion about how activism has, is, and ought to be facilitated by ANUSA. Having completed my time at ANUSA, I still believe that students remain incredibly vulnerable to out-of-touch policy decisions that adversely affect them and that activism via collective action remains relevant and effective. It is now for the student body to determine how they want their student Association to further their interests. My thanks go out to all those who have contributed to the publication of this important issue.

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Students and Aboriginal Rights—From 1965 to Now

Students protesting the exclusion of Aboriginal veterans from Walgett RSL, 1965.

Image Credit: Pat Healy

ANDY MASON

Andy is studying Geography, Political Economy and Indigenous Studies at Sydney University. They have been a campus organiser around environmental and Aboriginal rights campaigns, serving as NSW convenor of the Australian Student Environment Network and helping to establish Students Support Aboriginal Communities.

When most people think of contemporary student activism, they think of students campaigning around federal education policy or local campus issues. Student environmentalism or student protests in support of refugees might get a mention. However, students also have a rich history of engagement with the struggle for Aboriginal rights stretching back over 50 years. This article tells some of the stories from the early days of activism, as well as how students have carried on this legacy in recent years.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Student engagement with Aboriginal rights began in the 1960s as the very first generation of Aboriginal people were able to attend university. The first generation of Aboriginal student activists included people who later became major Aboriginal community leaders, such as Charlie Perkins and Gary Williams (Curthoys, 2003).

Broader changes in the economy and society also increased contact between students and Aboriginal people in urban centres in Australia. From the 1960s, as a result of new legal requirements to pay Aboriginal people award wages, many rural employers who had previously relied on Aboriginal workers sacked them (Irving & Cahill, 2010, p.328). At the same time, many government-run Aboriginal reserves were closed down (Goodall, 1996, p.345). This forced large numbers of Aboriginal people from rural NSW into urban Sydney in search of work and accommodation. Inner-city Redfern's Aboriginal population grew to 35,000 in 1968 from

just a few thousand earlier that decade (Teece-Johnson & Burton-Bradley, 2016). Overcrowding, poverty, health issues and police harassment were serious concerns, and dissatisfaction at substandard living conditions underpinned a surge of Aboriginal political activity in the area. As this radical community was so close to Sydney University, it was natural that they would develop relationships with student activists.

THE 1965 FREEDOM RIDE

Widely seen as a turning point for race relations in Australia, the 1965 'Freedom Ride' saw Sydney University students travel to rural NSW in an attempt to expose and challenge discrimination against Aboriginal people. Led by Charlie Perkins and Gary Williams, 30 students from a group called Student Action For Aborigines (SAFA) raised all funds for the trip and succeeded in bringing the overt racism of country towns into suburban living rooms. The trip drew on Perkins' and Williams' connections with Aboriginal communities around the state, established through the Tranby Aboriginal College, but also on much deeper networks of Aboriginal activists who had been organising around the state since the 1920s (Goodall, 1996; Maynard, 2007). The group included many students who were Communist Party or left-wing ALP members, as well as progressive trade unionists (Mcqueen, 2011).

In Walgett, they supported Aboriginal people protesting the Returned Servicemen's League policy of excluding Aboriginal war veterans from the club. One student held a sign reading "Good Enough For Tobruk — Why Not Walgett RSL?". In Moree, they challenged local council laws which banned Aboriginal people from swimming in the public pool, while in Bowraville they staged a sit-in at the local cinema which was racially segregated at the time. They found widespread discrimination in employment, education, housing, health and services and brought these issues to mainstream attention. In many places the students faced intense hostility from local racists, with a Walgett man attempting to run them off the road and a large angry mob descending on the students at a demonstration in Moree (Curthoys, 2003).

Another student organisation at this time was Abschol, originally established to raise funds to support Aboriginal students to attend university. Over time the group also became involved in political protests, supporting the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders's (FCAATSI) successful 1967 referendum campaign, which gave Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people national civil rights. Abschol was also heavily involved in the Gurindji people's struggle for self-determination. In 1966, 150 Gurindji people walked off the remote Wave Hill cattle station in protest over substandard wages and conditions. They had to work seven days a week from sunup to sundown in return for rations of flour, sugar and tea from Vestey's, the international British-owned corporation which kept the station. After establishing a settlement at Daguragu (Wattie Creek), the community decided they what they actually wanted was to see Vestey's get out of their country altogether. They wanted their ownership of the land recognised, and they wanted to manage the place themselves. Students from Sydney and Melbourne collaborated with trade unionists to raise money to support the Gurindji settlement, organising shipments of food and materials to keep the camp going. Some students also travelled the 4,100km journey to help build fences and houses for the community (Ward, 2016).

Gary Williams and Charles Perkins at the University of Sydney in 1963.

Image Credit: Gary Williams.

The 1970s

Abschol became a hub of student support for the nascent Black Power movement (Foley, 1999). In 1972, it supported the establishment of the Aboriginal Medical Service through fundraising (Honi Soit, 1972). Medical students also volunteered at the first free shop-front clinic for Aboriginal people, which has subsequently become a model for Aboriginal community-controlled health care which now provides services to over 50,000 Aboriginal people (Marlow, 2016). Students were also involved in the establishment of the Aboriginal Legal Service, which began in 1970 as a grassroots initiative to provide legal support to, and record the names of, Aboriginal people arbitrarily arrested (Foley, 2009).

That same year, students at ANU helped to raise funds and organise legal support for Black Power activists who had established an Aboriginal Tent Embassy on the lawns of Parliament House in Canberra (Robinson, 1993; Foley, 2009). This became one of the most iconic protests in Australian history and the protest camp remains on the lawns today as a powerful challenge to White Australia.

Abschol also helped organise the 1972 Black Moratorium march in Sydney, in which 6000 people demanded the Federal Government reverse its opposition to land rights legislation and grant the demands of remote communities like the Gurindji and the Yolŋu for control of their land. Students at Sydney University declared a student strike for the Moratorium and more than 2000 students rallied at the campus before joining the main demonstration in Redfern (Gibson, 2010).

RECENT YEARS OF ACTIVISM

In the last few years, students have carried on this legacy of engagement with grassroots Aboriginal justice struggles. Students Support Aboriginal Communities (SSAC) was founded in Redfern in early 2015 by student participants in a Sydney University-organised 50th Anniversary commemoration of the 1965 Freedom Ride (Jonscher & Hall, 2015). The student delegation was led by Students Representative Council President Kyol Blakeney, a dedicated Aboriginal activist and Gomeroi man. Many Aboriginal people communicated to the students during this trip that while some aspects of their community life had improved since 1965, racism was still a significant issue, with ongoing discrimina-

tion and lack of access to housing, employment, healthcare and services and chronic underfunding of community initiatives and projects – especially those centred around promoting Aboriginal culture.

As a result of this experience, student participants decided to establish SSAC following the student self-organisation model of SAFA. Mentors such as founding SSAC member Evelyn Corr's father, Barry Corr, played a crucial role in educating the group, emphasising the need for a sustained commitment to Aboriginal justice and not simply a one-off trip (B Corr, 2015). SSAC was initially focussed on supporting the Redfern Aboriginal Tent Embassy (RATE) in its campaign for affordable inner-city Aboriginal housing. Since early 2015 SSAC has supported a number of other grassroots Aboriginal justice campaigns, such as the movement against forced closure of remote Aboriginal communities in Western Australia and Grandmothers Against Removals' (GMAR) campaign against the ongoing removal of Aboriginal children from their families.

REDFERN ABORIGINAL TENT EMBASSY

RATE's campaign has challenged the gentrification of Redfern over the last few decades, which has seen its Aboriginal community displaced to other areas due to rising rents. The Redfern Aboriginal Community Housing Scheme, originally established by local Aboriginal activists in 1973 with support from progressive trade unions and students (Burgmann & Burgmann, 1998), was a response to the severe discrimination which Aboriginal people faced in the housing market (Gilbert, 1973). The housing project was fiercely opposed at the time on explicitly racist grounds by local councils and non-Aboriginal community members and its success was heralded as a landmark event for the Aboriginal rights movement. However, pressure from gentrification and police violence over the subsequent decades ultimately led to the demolition of the community housing on the Block. While in 1968 the area was home to 35,000 Aboriginal people, in 2016 there were only 300 (Teece-Johnson & Burton-Bradley, 2016). The racism underlying the gentrification is captured in a 2015 advertisement for new apartments which argued that because "[t]he Aboriginals have already moved out" (Corvini, 2014), the area was now an attractive site for investors.

HOW SSAC ORGANISES

Land (2015) argues that non-Aboriginal solidarity with Aboriginal activist movements should have two broad strategies. Firstly, a commitment to critical self-reflection about settler identity as part of what she terms "reckoning with complicity" in a history of colonial oppression of Aboriginal people. Secondly, a commitment to public political action in support of Aboriginal rights campaigns. She highlights that progressive movements for social justice have often ignored Aboriginal people's rights, or treated Aboriginal people in paternalistic ways, and stresses the need for non-tokenistic Aboriginal leadership of such movements.

SSAC has pursued a strategy of facilitating self-reflection among non-Aboriginal members and in the broader student activist community about racism and colonialism in Australia through organising educational events for students and other young people. These have included reading groups, workshops, discussion forums, and film screenings and have been organised both internally within the SSAC membership and in collaboration with other organisations. Topics have included non-Aboriginal solidarity with Aboriginal movements (SSAC, 2016), relationships between Aboriginal communities and the academy (Corr, 2016), domestic violence and the need for specialised Aboriginal-run support services, the 1965 Freedom Ride, ongoing removal of Aboriginal children (SSAC, 2016), and the over-representation and abuse of Aboriginal children within the juvenile detention system (SSAC, 2016c). Many of the public forums and film screenings have also functioned as fundraisers for Aboriginal-led justice campaigns, and created spaces for Aboriginal elders, academics, activists and community members to share their knowledge with students.

SSAC has also supported Aboriginal activists in their political campaigns using a range of tactics including occupations, rallies, lobbying decision makers, raising awareness and gaining media attention. Members supported RATE's 15-month long occupation of the Block by holding regular fundraiser events, film screenings, organising student contingents to demonstrations, performing regular cooking, cleaning and security shifts at the camp, and collecting donations of firewood (Mason & Hush, 2015). The group regularly encourages students to attend Aboriginal-led demonstrations as a group.

In January 2016, SSAC organised a trip to a number of rural communities in north-western NSW to follow up on connections made during the 2015 Freedom Ride commemoration (SSAC, 2015), as well as support GMAR and Gamilaraay People Against CSG [coal seam gas] & Coal Mining –a group of local Aboriginal activists involved in demonstrations against new fossil fuel projects on their country (Corr, 2016: Cooper, 2016). SSAC member and Sydney University SRC Indigenous Officer, Georgia Mantle, created an online campaign against a video game in which players were instructed to kill Aboriginal people, attracting widespread media coverage and ultimately leading to the game's withdrawal from sale (Thorburn, 2016). SSAC members have collectively and individually published extensively in Honi Soit, on a self-run blog, and on other online platforms in order to draw student and wider public attention to a range of issues affecting Aboriginal people. The group has succeeded in gaining media attention for Aboriginal rights campaigns, such as Dylan Voller's family's campaign against the abuse of Aboriginal young people in juvenile detention (SSAC, 2016c).

By creating a central space on campus for student involvement in Aboriginal rights campaigns, the organisation has succeeded in increasing the numbers of Sydney University students involved in such movements. The group has grown from approximately 20 students in early 2015 to a Facebook membership of 198 in December 2017, and facilitated a consistent student presence at Aboriginal rights demonstrations. Fundraiser events have been successful, with thousands of dollars cumulatively raised for grassroots Aboriginal justice groups.

The campaigns which SSAC have supported have met with mixed degrees of success. RATE was ultimately able to secure a guarantee of federal government funding for affordable housing for Aboriginal people on the Block (McNally, 2015), and the Western Australia government substantially backed down from its intention to close 150 remote Aboriginal communities across the

state (Quartermaine, Booth & Nimmo, 2016). The outcome of many other campaigns is more uncertain. GMAR have had some successes, such as the implementation in the New England region of their Guiding Principles for a culturally appropriate approach to family and community services activities (Thomas & Razaghi, 2015) and a potential federal review of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care (Fitzpatrick, 2016). However, the rate at which Aboriginal children are removed from their families continues to rise (ibid). National outrage following media coverage of the mistreatment of Aboriginal teenager Dylan Voller in juvenile detention has precipitated a royal commission into juvenile detenion in the NT (ABC online, 2016). Nevertheless, many activists are sceptical about the likelihood that such reviews can lead to substantial reform, given a long history of failed policy in this area (Maddison, 2009).

As a small volunteer group, SSAC is relatively powerless to influence large and complex policy areas like juvenile detention or child removal, but insofar as the organisation has engaged greater numbers of students in Aboriginal rights campaigns and built stronger connections between student activists and Aboriginal activists, it has fulfilled its objectives.

SSAC has faced a number of obstacles and issues since its inception. In a general context within which students are increasingly individualised due to the corporatisation of universities (Undercomming Collective, 2016), and high cost of living pressures (ABC, 2013), it is more difficult than in previous decades to engage students on political issues (Manning, 2006). The social distance between most non-Aboriginal people and Aboriginal communities (Land, 2015) and enduring racism on campus adds to the difficulty of engaging the student body in Aboriginal rights issues. Increased visibility is needed to ensure all interested students are able to become involved and to engage with students whose knowledge of Aboriginal issues and racism in Australia is less developed.

SSAC's focus on Sydney University students has also been limiting, and in the future the group should continue to broaden its membership to other universities. Aboriginal students and older activists have consistently been heavily involved with SSAC, but expanding the group's Aboriginal membership will ensure that relationships with Aboriginal communities continue to develop. In the long term, SSAC should also develop plans for connecting with regional university campuses and with Aboriginal student groups outside Sydney. The organisation has recently pursued connections with SEED, a national Indigenous youth network which campaigns on climate change and will develop this relationship further by supporting SEED's campaigns.

The lack of formal statutory status in a student union and of clear roles within the organisation are also potential barriers to sustainability for SSAC. These issues could potentially be resolved by incorporating the organisation as an official collective within the Sydney University SRC, and by assigning defined organisational responsibilities to the membership. On the other hand, having autonomy from the bureaucracy of student unions has enabled the organisation to respond very quickly and flexibly when Aboriginal organisations have required support and kept the organisation focussed on its connections with Aboriginal activists outside the university rather than on the factional squabbles that can dominate within student unions. Similarly, autonomy from the university and from government has allowed SSAC a greater degree of political freedom than organisations which depend on these sources of funding. SSAC has been able to challenge both government and the university when Aboriginal activists have called on it to do so.

CONCLUSIONS

Student engagement in Aboriginal rights struggles stretches back over half a century and is alive and well today. Inspired by support for Aboriginal rights movements in the radical climate of the 1960s and 70s, students in Sydney have recently formed SSAC to centralise their support for ongoing Aboriginal rights struggles. Key to this process has been developing relationships with Aboriginal activists outside the university in order to ensure a meaningful social basis for student activism and address concerns around cultural competence and community accountability. Grounded by these connections, students have engaged in a range of strategies to support local community campaigns. SSAC has pursued consciousness-raising activities such as forums, film screenings, and reading groups to educate the student body about issues affecting Aboriginal people. Students have raised funds for community campaigns, and organised to ensure a significant student presence at Aboriginal-run demonstrations around issues such as child removals, community closures and affordable Aboriginal housing.

In my view, SSAC has been directly responsible for raising the profile of Aboriginal issues within the student left in and around Sydney. Whereas several years ago Aboriginal community events would attract perhaps half a dozen students, now large contingents of students are common at demonstrations and community events. Through its broader communication strategy of holding campus events (sometimes attracting hundreds of people) and publishing widely in student media, SSAC has also contributed to a generally heightened awareness of—and engagement in—Aboriginal rights issues among students and young people. This approach has already shown promise, with tens of thousands of people (mostly university students and recent graduates) attending the most recent Invasion Day demonstrations across the country. Additionally, a majority of young people voted in a recent ABC poll to change the date of the Hottest 100 countdown from 26 January. This signifies a growing understanding among young people of Australia's colonial past and a willingness to support Aboriginal people in their struggle for justice. Student organisers should be encouraged by these trends and pursue this issue on their campus by making and deepening connections between their activist groups and the local Aboriginal community.

Days of Rage: In Conversation with Judy Turner

ODETTE SHENFIELD

Odette Shenfield is a co-founder of *Demos Journal*. She recently graduated from the ANU and likes writing and reading about topics involving the intersection between activism, creativity and social theory.

In 1971, when the South African Springboks toured Australia and played at Manuka Oval in Canberra, Judy Turner was one of 49 people arrested protesting against South Africa's apartheid policy. After an elaborate, month-in-the-making scheme concocted by ANU students to tunnel underground through drainpipes, on the day police were at the top of the drain blocking entry, so none of the underground protestors made it onto the field. Judy and her friend Sue climbed down from the audience and were the only two who reached the oval to protest. Judy remarks, with a certain perplexity, that they must have had to buy tickets to get into the game.

Judy Turner and David Lockwood protesting with the Chile Anti Junta Alliance.

Image Credit: Judy Turner.

This is just one of many stories Judy tells me from her days as an undergraduate student at ANU from 1971-1974, when she devoted far more time to activism than to her formal studies. She was involved in the major ANU activist group at the time: the ANU Labour Club (not connected to or to be confused with the Australian Labor Party), an anti-capitalist activist group that organised heavily in the '60s and '70s on many progressive causes. These causes included fighting against the Vietnam War, South African apartheid and the Indonesian occupation of East Timor, campaigning for low-cost accommodation at the ANU and the democratisation of the University, and supporting Aboriginal land rights activism.

THE ANU LABOUR CLUB

Judy recalls the ANU Labour Club gaining momentum after the 1971 Day of Rage, a demonstration Clive Hamilton describes as, "a rambunctious protest by university students against just about everything." For Judy, the protest was intended as a message from students across the nation that students did not like the world they were about to enter into as adults. From then on, she says choosing campaign issues was almost like choosing university courses. While their campaigns were undoubtedly dictated by their context, they would have group meetings to pick their campaign focus for the year.

IDENTITY AND ANTI-RACISM

In a surprising synchronicity, Judy and I discover that both our families were Jewish communists from Eastern Europe. Her family's left-wing background gave her an early interest in anti-capitalist struggles. Yet, in terms of her engagement in fights around anti-racism, such as anti-apartheid campaigning, it is not her Jewish background she singles out, but rather her years growing up in Papua New Guinea and witnessing racial discrimination there, that she says instilled in her a concern for the pernicious violence of racism.

Judy conveys that she had a strong awareness of the importance of knowing her place in activism—of listening and learning from those whose struggles

Dear Sister,

In line with the general trend of articles in the Orientation Week Woroni the article headed " 1973 – a black year" was unsigned. Consequently my criticisms of this article must be addressed to the editor, who will hopefully pass them on to its author. Though Orientation Week is designed to introduce first year students to various aspects of life at University, and tends to be a fairly introverted occasion, there was this year an attempt to concentrate more on issues of the real world than on faculty introductions and other such trivia. This sincere attempt was not helped by the inclusion in Woroni of such 'self-centered' articles as the one on the Union, and "1973 – a black year", which was obviously written from the point of view of a student demonstration – a student demonstration who combines smugness with ignorance. The general tone of this article is patronizing, and suggests the 'I've been there already' line adopted by a lot of so called radical students to gratify there own egos & give others a feeling of inadequacy and inferiority. The author chides readers with the suggestion that they they are all and insincere as well as being racists of the worst sort, and finishes with the sentence "Will ANU seize this fact as an opportunity to opt out of the black struggle. One wanders why the question was even asked, as the author of "1973 – a black year" is obviously already convinced of the inconstancy of other student radicals. To suggest that the violence & ferocity which accompanied the aboriginal embassy demonstrations had not not been equalled since the anti-apartheid demonstrations of the year before, is to ignore the ferocity and violence which aboriginal people meet with every day of their lives – from a ferocious and violent white society. The author also suggests that the motive force in these demonstrations was the student radicals of the ANU who were 'joined' by the thousands who flocked to Canberra. As an after-thought the fact that blacks themselves bussed in from as far as Brisbane & Adelaide, is mentioned. It is insulting to the embassy organizers and what's more quite untrue, to suggest that ANU students lead the demonstrations outside Parliament House. In fact, with a few noteable exceptions (including apparently the author of this article), the students were painfully aware at all times of the need to be followers not leaders, and of the fact that they were more appendages of the black movement – accepted an suffrage by the blacks, but not welcomed nor asked for advice. They were not 'blacks by proxy' at all – in fact the whites who lend their support (physical & moral) to the aboriginal embassy, were constantly reminded that as whites they were outsiders & privileged to join with

The patronizing attitude adopted by the author of '1973 – a black year' towards the student supporters of the aboriginal embassy, and the totally false view of the situation he or she gives, combine to make this article the most annoying I have read for a long time. Nor does this most concerned of students suggest ways in which ANU students can continue to support the black movement despite the fact that it is unlikely that Canberra will again be a focal point for black action. He or she merely contents him or herself with asking questions & pointing the finger at others. The revolution will not come thus.

Yours sincerely,
Judy Turner

Judy Turner's article, 5 March 1973

Image Credit: Woroni.

she sought to support, rather than attempting to lead or take ownership of the issue. She describes her involvement with the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, and recalls the ANU Labour Club responding to a call from them for bodies on the ground to defend the Embassy against police demolition. The group saw themselves as "shock troops", as the frontline there to face down police. She recalls, "we were kind of like hired muscle, we were pretty aware it wasn't our struggle but we were sympathetic to the cause and prepared to go and offer support."

Trawling through online archives, I find an article Judy penned at the time, responding to what she perceived to be a smug and ignorant portrayal of student support of the Tent Embassy. She decries the patronising tone of the original author in claiming student credit for Aboriginal activism and writes that "the students were ... aware at all times of the need to be followers not leaders, and of the fact that they were mere appendages of the black movement."

While discussing her anti-apartheid activism, Judy frequently repeats the adjectives "fun" and "clandestine". She describes the "mock-guerrilla" activities they engaged in to disrupt everyday events, including having a load of sand delivered to the South African ambassador's driveway. Etched into her mind is the less enjoyable, yet nonetheless exciting memory of camping outside the South African Embassy in the biting cold of the mid-winter Canberra as part of a constantly manned vigil that lasted several months.

O'CONNOR'S AGITPROP

Epitomising the creativity and fun of the ANU Labour Club, Judy tells me of the DIY, activist printing studio they operated out of her share house on Nardoo Crescent in O'Connor. At the time, several share houses filled with ANU Labour Club students operated as bases for organising.

The house at Nardoo Crescent belonged to Judy's parents and was Judy's home for much of her childhood. In their garage, the group designed and printed posters and merchandise to promote their demonstrations and causes. Judy remembers one student, Mark Horridge, designing particularly striking posters in the garage, which the rest of the group would then help to print.

One aspect of the printing press Judy enjoyed most was pasting the posters across Canberra — an activity that was illegal at the time. Judy describes this as a "cat and mouse game" with the police. She doesn't recall ever being arrested for postering, but does remember occasionally being asked to take down images.

After postering, she recalls, "You'd come back at two or three in the morning and be totally exhausted but you'd have this sense of accomplishment that you got away with it and outwitted the police,

Former ANU student and now academic, Mark Horridge with one of the posters he made at the printing studio. Mark gave this print to several Labour Club activists as his parting gift when he left the ANU.
Image Credit: Odette Shenfield.

then everywhere you went in Canberra you'd see the results of your work."

Speaking of the excitement and joy of activism, she recalls, "It was our version of the 60s in a way. There were personal and political freedoms, there were people experimenting with drugs ... it was all mixed up as a young person's adventure in Canberra."

Comparing her experience of university with students today, including her own five children, she believes there was less at stake when she studied. Speaking of her decision to repeatedly risk arrest and confront police during protests, she says students weren't thinking much about how their involvement might impact on their future careers. Compared with students now, she notes that she and her peers were mostly on scholarships and did not pay fees at university. She wisely observes that it is, "somehow easier to be hostile to the system when the system's supporting you than when it's not".

Despite emphasising the social and enjoyable nature of her activism, Judy highlights how firmly she believed in the causes. When I ask Judy if she has any regrets from her time involved in activism, she reflects that being so dedicated to the causes came at a detriment to her own studies. "Do I regret anything? Yes, I regret not putting more time into my studies. But at the time the social aspect was so important to me, and I think to many women. It felt more important to put effort into the things the movement dictated than to my own study." She perceived the men as better able to juggle their studies and their activism, often doing more theorising, while the women seemed to do more of the practical organising. She says the women tended to more readily put their own work second.

THE POLITICAL BECOMES PERSONAL

She tells me she also regrets the group decision to concentrate energy on internal campaigning against the University. During 1974, the ANU Labour Club campaigned for student ownership of the ANU, including control of management and assessment. The campaign pushed to abolish exams and established an unofficial 10-10 committee—ten students and ten academics to manage the University. In April of 1974, Judy was one of hundreds of students who occupied the Chancelry. With both her parents being history academics and faculty members of the ANU, Judy found this personally awkward, but also felt that the campaign unnecessarily alienated previously sympathetic academics. She reflects, "we sundered some of those relationships with the academics ... A lot of my parents' friends were appalled that we had turned our attention to something so benign as the University. We'd started seeing the University as the oppressor, which was kind of naïve of us I suppose."

THE ANU LABOUR CLUB TODAY

I ask Judy whether she is still in touch with anyone from the Labour Club. Remarkably, she tells me she remains friends with almost everyone from those days. Today, Judy works in fundraising for NGOs, and spent several years after university with Amnesty International. Many others from the group, she informs me, have become academics (who the ANU Labour Club had once pejoratively referred to as "accas".) A few went on to

ANU students occupying the Chancelry in 1974.
Image Credit: ANU Open Reseach Collections.

spend lives in activism. Reflecting on student activism today, Judy feels inspired by the activism she sees students engaged in, while acknowledging campuses no longer occupy the central role for activism they once did.

Anna Himmelreich, in her piece in this edition, cautions against romanticising or mythologising student activism from the '70s, arguing that student activism has never occupied a central place for the majority of students at the ANU. Despite this, I leave my interview with Judy wondering what it would take to return the spirit of the ANU Labour Club to the ANU today. Looking at most university campuses across Australia today, it is difficult to imagine hundreds of students occupying the Chancelry in a fight to democratise the University, or to imagine droves getting arrested opposing neo-imperialist wars. Whereas many students once fought against occupation in East Timor, few at the ANU today seem aware of the role our own Chancellor, Gareth Evans, played in supporting Indonesia as Australia's Foreign Minister. Perhaps in learning the activist history of our campus through people such as Judy, at the precise moment when the ANU erases by demolition the key sites of that history, we can begin to imagine a future of the ANU as a site of engaged, creative and critical activism at the scale of excitement of the '70s.

Celebrating the Humanities in an Era of Dehumanisation

GERALDINE FELA

Geraldine Fela has just graduated from the PhB (Arts) program with majors in History and Arabic. She has been active in student education campaigns and the refugee rights movement for a number of years.

At the 2017 ANU December Graduation Ceremony, Geraldine Fela—a dedicated education and refugee activist—delivered the following graduation address. Containing none of the usual platitudes of graduation speeches, Geraldine instead took the opportunity to reflect on the connection between the arts and social sciences, critical thinking, empathy, and the injustice perpetuated by Australia's current refugee policy.

Students delivering graduation speeches are required to submit their speeches before delivery to the ANU. The University was not entirely pleased with Geraldine's speech and requested she change several aspects. She replied she would 'take on board their feedback', but decided to deliver her original speech.

Good afternoon everyone, this is such an exciting day and I feel immensely privileged to be speaking here today.

I think it is important to begin by remembering that today we celebrate on stolen Aboriginal land, the land of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people. Their sovereignty over this land was never ceded and their struggle for justice and land rights continues to this day.

On behalf of the graduating class of 2017, I extend my utmost respect to the Indigenous elders past, present, and emerging, and to all first nations people present today. To the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people in particular, I extend the deepest of thanks. Thank you for having us on your lands to live and learn and now, today, to graduate.

Each of us graduating today has dedicated the past three, four, maybe five years to a discipline in the arts and social sciences. This is no mean feat. For years we have honed our critical thinking skills, developed our ability to write and communicate. Thanks to our dedicated tutors and lecturers, we have learnt to think differently about the world around us, to question what we otherwise might take for granted. And it must be said that our teachers have taught us and we have learned, despite the neoliberal university context that too often does not value things—like the arts—that are hard to monetise and quantify.

For this, each and every one of us deserves congratulations. By dedicating ourselves to the arts and social sciences we have sent a strong message that university should be about more than just ticking boxes and preparing ourselves for the ugliness of the labour market.

For the past few years, we have committed ourselves to understanding the world in all of its complexity and we have engaged with questions that concern our collective humanity. The arts and social sciences encourage us to learn from other people. Whether those people are our forbears, our next-door neighbours or people whose life experience, language, and culture is different from our own. Perhaps most importantly, in the arts and social sciences we are taught to think about other people with empathy, to find common ground.

What could be more important than this? The world we are entering now, as graduands, desperately needs people who think critically and empathetically.

In the last six weeks, as we completed our final exams and waited anxiously for results, a humanitarian crisis was orchestrated by our own government. For 23 days our government laid siege to the Manus Island Detention centre, the prison which has held close to a thousand asylum seekers and refugees for four years. The men peacefully resisted the government's attempts to relocate them to a new prison—an unfinished and inadequate facility. For this they paid a high price. They had their belongs destroyed and the well they built soiled. Finally, on the 23rd day, they were beaten with metal poles and forcibly relocated.

And whilst the humanitarian crisis on Manus is still unfolding, today we are here to celebrate the commitment each and every one us has made to studying different aspects of humanity, whether it be our past, our present, the art and literature we create, the languages we speak, the rituals we perform.

The inhumane brutality of Australia's refugee policy chips away at all those things that we, in the arts and social sciences, hold dear. It chips away at all the best parts of us: the part that creates beautiful things in the world for us to read and study and admire, the part of our humanity that seeks to develop understanding across boundaries and borders, whether they be temporal, physical or linguistic.

The refugees on Manus Island know this too. At the end of the siege Kurdish detainee and journalist Behrouz Boochani had this to say:

> Our resistance had a broader purpose. It was to be a model and present a new way for humanity. We wanted to show how humans have this capacity to be kind and peaceful and care about humanity even in a harsh situation.

Like the refugees on Manus we, as graduands of the arts and social sciences can take a better vision of humanity into the world. One that empasises empathy and understanding but that is not afraid to challenge dominant ideas and to fight for what is right, even when it's not popular.

And what an achievement that is! Congratulations to the graduation cohort of 2017. Congratulations and thank you to our family and friends who supported us and to our lecturers and tutors who inspired us. Let's celebrate today because we've all worked hard. But tomorrow, let's use the insights and skills we have gained to fight for a more fair, equal, and just world.

Reading as Resistance: A History of the Read-In

An Education Action Group Meeting at the Read-In, 2pm Day 1

Image Credit: Louis Klee

Gifts from a sympathetic catering company, Day 2

Image Credit: Louis Klee

Students making banners at the read-in, 2pm Day 4

Image Credit: Louis Klee

LOUIS KLEE

Louis Klee is a co-founder of *Demos Journal* and a graduate of the ANU. In 2017, he co-won the Australian Book Review's Peter Porter Prize. His work has recently appeared in *The Best Australian Poems 2017*.

Beneath the shade of large arch's awnings there is a rectangular window through which you can see out onto rubble. 'A Bold New Campus' is how a placard below the window describes it. These are the remains of Union Court, a place that for many students was synonymous with the ANU for a time. The sight of it makes me recall something a friend of mine said recently—that as an only child, a member of a family of precisely three, she felt a great responsibility as the sole custodian of her parents' memories, as the only repository of all their experiences and stories. Does it make sense to speak of a custodian of memories in a place like this? Is there a repository of the past when undergraduate populations are renewed ever ythree or so years? Should someone, stepping for the first time onto this bold new campus, care what once happened in Union Court?

It is here, I believe, that community projects like *Demos*' history of student activism have an indispensible role. Any official history, relying as it must upon conventional archival material, will find it difficult to grasp the meaning and character of agitation, rebellion, uprising, and insurrection. This was a consideration for Ranajit Guha, who founded the *Subaltern Studies Group* at the ANU in 1981 (something seldom noted in accounts of the movement's history). In his *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983) he asks: how can one represent and reclaim a history which has left behind little, if any, documentation? How can one resist its erasure by official histories? While it would be foolish to compare student protest to anti-colonial uprising, a similar set of historiographical questions emerges in the project of writing activist histories.

It is in this spirit that I have been tasked with revisiting the 'read-in'—a protest that has left a paper trail longer than some, but which is easily misunderstood now that enough years have passed. One problem in reading about the read-in is that the mainstream media's sources are at once the most readily available and the the least representative of what the protest meant to the protesters. I would be naïve to think I could offer a corrective here.

My task in this brief account is not to defend the read-in or to indulge in nostalgia, but to offer a narrative that contextualises and reflects upon the atmosphere and events of the time. In this undertaking I will draw mostly on my only published reflection on the read-in from the time, an open letter 'in admiration and solidarity' to a fellow student protester, Hannah McCann. My hope is not for a more judicious retrospective assessment, but to provide some thoughts and ingredients that may nourish future protest. Perhaps this is a way to think of the proper stewardship of memory.

The read-in was one of many strategies employed by a broad student moment in its successful opposition to the Abbott government's 2014 proposal to deregulate university student fees. It is fitting, then, that this protest strategy was born of contingency during another such protest.

On the afternoon of May 21, 2014, I was among the hundreds of students who gathered in Union Court and marched on the Chancelry to demonstrate against the Vice-Chancellor Ian Young's vocal support for deregulation. Young was the then Chair of the Group of Eight universities and had published his case for deregulation prior even to the Abbott government's announcement of the plan.

As night fell, hundreds of students surrounded the glass doors of the Chancelry, demanding an audience from Young who was believed to be inside. Next to the Chancelry doors is a statue of the Hindu goddess Saraswati, which is, the ANU website explains, depicted not according to convention as "elaborately dressed and holding a plamleaf manuscript," but "as a modern young woman holding a book, more thoughtful and contemplative than grand." I took this as an invitation and waded out across the pool.

It felt powerful sitting beside this goddess of knowledge, as though she herself were in unity with us, reading against Young, against Tony Abbott, against the whole parade of ill-conceived policy decisions that issued from this concrete bastion in my brief time at the ANU—the abolition of tutorials, the dismantling of the School of Music, the routine cuts, humiliations, and contempt for the humanities, the continued investments in fossil fuel companies. And I was surrounded by a crowd bigger than any before, one united by a shared discontent.

The weekend after the protest I had some conversations at the Canberra Croatian Club where some friends were running an event in solidarity with a blockade at a coalmine. What if, combining performance art, the vigil, and the energy of last week's protest, I continued to read in that very spot for a week? Everyone's response was the same: "I'll join you." At home I wrote up a mission statement that I have since lost, save for a few fragments quoted in the media: "As a performative enactment of exactly what these cuts put into jeopardy and the place in which critical thinking in itself is nurtured, I endeavour to make the simple act of reading a book something subversive." These words were influenced by a work I was writing about at the time: Judith Butler's *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (2013). In section 20, "The University, the Humanities, and the Book Bloc", Butler's interlocutor Anthena Athanasiou states:

> One of the most striking modes of protest was arguably the "book bloc," in which protesters marched wearing book shields in the streets of Rome, London, and other cities, in defense of public universities and libraries. […] An image that has been circulated among several blogs epitomizes in remarkably eloquent way, I think, the spirit of the spectre of our time: a policeman raises his baton against a protester who carries a book sign of Derrida's Spectres of Marx. This image of an armed policeman chasing the spectres of Marx reminds us that those recurring spectres still haunt capitalism; it reminds us, above all, that sometimes we have to fight for our books, with our books.

This was what I was prepared to do, and, it seemed, others too. But until the moment when I was joined by a stead flow of people on the morning of May 26—dozens, then hundreds—at the Chancelry doors, I still had no idea how the event would unfold. I was quite prepared for a scenario where I would be reading alone.

The response to the read-in was electric and far exceeded anything I could have anticipated. While the media gravitated to me as a leader, I was determined to shirk that role as much as possible. The read-in was the readers. It was an experimental, non-hierarchical, and anarchic space, an assembly of diverse people united by a shared grievance. For many, it was a space not of agreement but of productive dissensus, where they could share their thoughts, quarrel, and learn from one another in a spirit of solidarity. Many people told me they had discovered a new political consciousness from their presence at the read-in. One protester, Raph Kabo, wrote in City News: "Until the read-in, I did not know how to articulate my views. Knowledge is a powerful weapon, and university administrations would do well to remember that they are meant to be its propagators, not its wardens." This unexpected consequence was one of the read-in's greatest strengths.

But from the first day there were also unanticipated problems. The evening before the read-in began Annabel Crabb published an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, "Students' Soviet-era anti-budget protests outdated in our era of communication." There she reprimanded the student protests, even going so far as to claim that students were hypocrites: "They accuse [Abbott] of extreme conservatism. But if conservatism is the stubborn refusal to evolve, then fighting a war of ideas with Soviet-era artillery strays awfully close to the mark." For Crabb, the "era of communication" had rendered mass demonstration obsolete.

I wasn't prepared to deal with this fatuous argument, but I had been wary of the misrepresentations that dominated the mainstream media in the preceding

week. Mostly the media condemned students for violence and focused, as always, on the sensational. "A man was arrested after a flare was deployed," begins one such article on May 21, "and protesters clashed violently with police." Cautious of this, I noted in my statement that the read-in was "pacificist" and "humble." But it proved naïve to try to beat the media at their own game.

The mainstream media focused *ad nauseam* on the question of means. Take May 6, when students hijacked an episode of Q&A. The ensuing discussion was almost entirely about whether this was a legitimate act, not what was written on their banners (more brains not war planes fund education). Tony Jones' comments as his program went back on air are indicative of this: "We had a little musical interlude while we got democracy back on track. [...] That is not what democracy is all about and those students should understand that." Jones here purports to speak for democracy—and democracy in his meaning is an orderly public sphere where esteemed speakers and public personas are able to respond to carefully selected questions. Any question that strays too far outside of the established framework, too 'shrill' in tone or not easily intelligible, is inevitably answered with: "we'll take that as a comment."

Ultimately, the read-in was unable to circumvent this tendency. The media's syllogism: (i) student protests have been violent, (ii) the read-in is non-violent, (iii) therefore the read-in is against student protests. This absurdity was only reinforced by the timing of Crabb's article. The first question from *The Canberra Times*: "Were you prompted to do the read-in by reading Crabb?" "I haven't read the article." "Well, what do you think of the idea? That students need to get more creative?" This, I said, I could agree with in principle, though I could never condone Crabb's condescending tone. Not to be deterred, the opening of *The Canberra Times* somehow managed to accommodate both hyperbole and the sensational. The read-in was "an effort to re-frame student activism in Australia" led by a someone "who was a student in Quebec during the 2012 student riots."

This would have been merely a laughable and embarrassing tabloid-style beat-up if it didn't then have ramifications for how students—especially those from outside Canberra—perceived the read-in. In the days after May 26, other read-ins began on campuses around Australia, such as at University of Melbourne led by Ella Farby, who stated: "We've been getting a little bit of shit like, 'go back to class', so we brought class to the protest." But there were also some students who wrote to me concerned that the read-in was a "protest against protests," that it was "conservative," "passive," or "apathetic." At first I was incredulous that anyone could come to such a conclusion—we were, after all, engaging in a form of protest. Perhaps this form of protest was idiosyncratic and unusual, but that hardly made it "anti-protest."

Yet, by far the most compromising aspect of the read-in was the interaction with the Chancelry. At first, they ignored us, even with the television crews from *Prime 7, ABC* and *Win* queuing outside. But on Monday evening some students at the Education Action Group (EAG) meeting crossed paths with Young as he was leaving his office and persuaded him to make an appearance at the read-in the next day. This proved to be a disastrous move. As Kabo described the event: "The first of these visits was seen as a positive step towards student-administration dialogue. By their third and fourth visits, the shine had worn off. [...] Each question was expertly dodged and avoided. [...] They talked pure spin. And every time, their PAs would however behind them, taking more notes than us, snapping photos." The read-in thus became a kind of 'consultation' opportunity for the Chancelry, a way for them to give the appearance of discussion while in fact undermining the status of the read-in as a protest.

Like Kabo, McCann was among the first to point to this problem, writing on her blog *binarythis*:

> It quickly became apparent that the VC benefitted from the image of rational thinking man, where we all appear to figure it out together when in fact we don't (as the CCTV they immediately installed above the read-in demonstrated). [...] [W]e need to be very careful about championing rational thinking man as the figure of success, as this becomes deeply problematic once we enter the realm of rational debate with those already in power. Though reasonable discussion might sound great in theory, issues arise when a minority hold power over the majority, and it is left to the powerful to dictate discourse and discussion.

These objections point to the gravest danger in the direction the read-in took. On the one hand, discussion *between* students remained a powerful aspect of the read-in since regardless of our differences the collective presence of bodies in the space of the Chancelry itself constituted a protest and powerful rebuke. On the other hand, 'discussion' between students and Young altered the nature of the gathering, turning a protest into a mere forum. I was open-minded about the read-in, excited to see where the collective will might take us, but I must take some responsibility for its direction. It was only when it was too late that the damaging farce of discussion with the Chancelry became evident. In a mocking denouement, a member of the Chancelry even offered us a copy of one of the book bloc's books, *Spectres of Marx*.

But as with then, I still have some disagreement with McCann's broader attempt in her 'defence of anger' to characterise the read-in as a dominated by the rational thinking man rather than as what I think it was: a manifestation of the rightfully enraged. For the read-in, from the very beginning, did not stem from a bureaucratic, rational utopianism—a kind of Habermasian commitment to conversation free from domination—but was rooted in the very outrage McCann described. I wrote at the time:

> The read-in was not an action in opposition to emotion, but an attempt to enact emotions in a novel way. [...] It was for that reason that I cited the closing remarks of Butler's book *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* to describe the protest: "the collective assembling

The Read-In continues, 2pm Day 3

Image Credit: Louis Klee

Students discussing strategy, 3pm Day 3

Image Credit: Louis Klee

Vice-Chancellor Ian Young vists the read-in, 12pm Day 4

Image Credit: Louis Klee

The evening 'screen-in' outside the Chancelry, 7pm Day 4

Image Credit: Louis Klee

> of bodies is an exercise of the popular will, and a way of asserting, in bodily form, one of the most basic presumptions of democracy, namely that political and public institutions are bound to represent the people [...]. In this way, those bodies enact a message, performatively [...]" even when they do simple actions, such as reading. [...] [This is part of] the challenge—a task that is as difficult as it is necessary—to deconstruct the binary itself by demonstrating the subtle ways in which emotion and reason intertwine in political life. That is what I found strange and promising about attempting to make reading itself something subversive.

While I objected above to the mainstream media's focus on the question of means as what amounted to a kind of tone policing, the question of means among students is another matter. To discuss the merits and pitfalls of strategy is essential to a successful student movement. It is to that end that I offer this first-person narrative history and, looking back, it strikes me that my only published reflections on the read-in were made in dialogue with other students, written out of serious and thoughtful engagement with those committed to the same struggle, rather than as some plead to the powers that be or public policy document or rational entreaty addressed to the Chancelry. My desire was for my presence to speak my objections to the Chancelry, while the discussion remained *among* students, *for* students. Before our discussion, the Chancelry ought rather to have felt something akin to the Europeans Jean-Paul Sartre addresses in his 'Preface' to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth:*

> Europeans, you must open this book and enter into it. After a few steps in the darkness you will see strangers gathered around a fire; come close, and listen, for they are talking of the destiny they will mete out to [you]. They will see you, perhaps, but they will go on talking among themselves, without even lowering their voices. This indifference strikes home [...]. Their sons ignore you; a fire warms them and sheds light around them, and you have not lit it. Now, at a respectful distance, it is you who will feel furtive, nightbound and perished with cold.

It was this kind of discussion between students around a fire—a fire confrontationally inaccessible to the powers that be—that is, I hope, the lasting legacy of the read-in. Inspired by the events that transpired, Raph Kabo edited a collection of essays by the students and academics, *Squarely in the Read*, and I and some other members of the read-in began a group 'ANU Activists'.

The first face-to-face meeting of ANU Activists took place on 8 October, 2014, in the Food Coop, and had the same spirited mood as the read-in. It was from this group that, late in 2014, the Demos Working Group formed. Demos Journal, launched in October 2015, was thus, in the words of its first editorial, "a project born from a space of collaboration between different activist groups"; from "an openness to the demands of our community [...] celebrating and evolving with the incredible work of critique and creativity already underway."

‘We Just Needed a Place to Live’

Canberra Young People’s Ongoing Fight for Affordable Housing

STEVE SKITMORE
AND EMMA CUPITT

Steve is curious about Canberra’s history and how it bleeds into the present. He has Masters in Archaeology and Community Development.

Emma is a former *Demos* editor and has just graduated from ANU with a BA.

Both Emma and Steve are former residents of the Canberra Student Housing Co-op.

PLACE.

The history of Canberra can be cut many ways. It is, for all intents and purposes, a history of a semi-alpine valley imposed with the burden of Capitol – scoured clean and designed for 25,000 inhabitants, the abstracted ‘smooth faeries’ of Ian Warden’s[1] musings. In reality, we the people grow rogue hairs and hold trauma in our frown lines. The city does the same, with not-entirely-erased road alignments dating back to the 1830s and a palimpsest of planning practices leaving Lego-brick hernias on its northern reaches. Each physical moment inscribed upon this valley, each street and intersection, scarred tree and multi-level apartment block are consequences of and have implications for the notion of Canberra as home.

Across the city’s many building sites there are hanging screens and signs that project a future imagined and promoted, showrooms and turns of phrase, acquired and appropriated artworks. In front of these visions, trucks roll and crack the pavement laid down decades prior for other times and purposes. Shoots of sour thistle, dandelion and petty spurge are quick to colonise the raw aeolian soil. Canberra’s urban stretch marks have emerged from the swell of tension between exploitation and resistance, the weight of trucks and the vegetation flowering in their wake. This is one way to cut the story. It is a story of competing visions of home here in our odd little city. In this way, it is an age-old story about the politics of the structure in which one closes one’s eyes at night.

The theme of this *Demos* is student activism. Students and young people at large are generally not viewed as actively engaging in or even caring about housing and planning policy in the city. Perhaps this is true. The reason so many students live here in the first place is the choice, made a century ago, to situate Australia’s Capital here. With its assortment of symbolic accruements – of which the Australian National University (ANU) is a well-known one – Canberra draws students from around the world. Many pass through, engaging little in the physical foundations of the city.

However, it is not this simple. Those who look out of the windows of tertiary institutions cannot help but wonder at the beauty and mystery of Black Mountain, and those who are able and desire to can experience the pain of running up Mt Ainslie. Ultimately, these are physical and emotional entanglements with place. Of course, there are also those students and young people who have grown up on Ngunnawal and Ngambri Country and have a bodily attachment to this place. So many who have come to this valley have left their mark, and their actions are deeply embedded in the growth and social policies of the Australian Capital Territory.

Along Northbourne.

Image Credit: Steve Skitmore

Footnotes

1. Warden, Ian. 2017. Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahoney Griffin should have planned for a large capital. *The Canberra Times*. 02/11/2017.

Tim squatting at the Cambodian Embassy, June 1985.

Image Credit: Martin Jones, *The Canberra Times*.

CONVENTION.

Tim leans forward in his chair in a Civic café and puts the mug of hot chocolate to his lips. Prior to this meeting, we have only seen him in a grainy black and white newspaper photo in which he is reclining on a plush couch inside the squatted Cambodian Embassy. We're here to talk about the history of the ACT Squatters' Union that Tim formed with his friends in the early '80s. He starts by bursting our earnest bubble: "We just needed a place to live – that's why we first started squatting. First of all, we squatted everywhere in the inner north. We did up resources so people knew the right things to say to the police so we weren't hassled for eight weeks. We got a lot of media. It was the time of the Inquiry into Homelessness in Canberra, and we were the face of it."

The Union had a strong focus on campaigning and broad coalition building. There were influences from youth workers and those involved in the Terrania Creek and Franklin Dam campaigns. Consensus, anti-oppression, local connections and networking, Marxist politics, campaigning via media-friendly actions, a focus on inclusive facilitation formed the basis of the Union. After some time, the Union began to be supported in part by the Builders' Labourers Federation (BLF) who took it on as a special project. Students were involved from the outset – "We had people who were also students involved of course. I don't know, they managed to study on the couches of friends. I take my hat off to them".

"Ah, the Embassy squats", Tim says of the image that brought us to him. "Well I was sleeping on the couch of a friend and a bloke from the foreign office got drunk in the lounge and was talking about a memo he had read about the Cambodian Embassy on Melbourne Avenue being empty, ballroom and all. The next day me and two mates had moved in!" Over the next eight months, over 200 people were housed in the two-story brick residence, one door down from Parliament House. "The cops couldn't move us on – we had read the Vienna Convention and visited the United Nations office, and the Embassy was outside their jurisdiction!" he laughs. "It was like negotiations between two sovereign entities. We spoke down to the AFP [Australian Federal Police] from the balcony of the Embassy, and it took them a good eight months to figure out that they could use the Convention to their benefit too."

We ask Tim what he felt the Union achieved. He shrugs, "Well, we housed people who needed it". He gestures around us, up to the metal and glass monoliths of Bunda Street. "These eight hundred thousand dollar apartments here in the city? Well, that's because of us! They weren't thinking of having housing here in the city before we were here." We laugh, but he suddenly turns serious, "Well, they've been built, and they're in a great spot, and when the revolution comes... Well, they'll make a good place for folk to live". We are left wondering about the possibility of that hope.

UNION.

It was a cold winter in '83, when the fight for Havelock House commenced. The canvas tents were pitched under the pines on Northbourne, and the bitter winter cold taunted the picket line. At the height of a Canberra housing crisis, one of the city's larger public servant hostels had just been handed over to the Federal Police and was in the process of being converted into their Headquarters. It was time for action.

We're on the phone – I am seated on a doorstep in the inner north and Peter is in his garden in Oaks Estate, out Queanbeyan way, with a beautiful veggie patch scratched from the hard-packed earth banks of the Molonglo. Peter is a lifelong unionist and he has lived through one of the most volatile parts of Australia's union history. He gently reminisces, "The Havelock blockade got started by a bunch of young locals supported by the Social Work Union. I was secretary of the Builders' Labourers Federation and we were working on the new Parliament House at the time. There were a lot of housing access issues in Canberra because of that. That's the genesis of the picket line."

Canberra's young folk stood front and centre – youth workers, employment placement workers and union activists. It was the Canberra Youth Refuge who wrote to the *Canberra Times*. There were protests during Bob Hawke's visit and his support was sought to stop the closure. By the end of the months-long picket, Havelock House and its future had been discussed in Federal Parliament and a meeting attended by no less than six Ministers was convened by the Unions.

Peter puts it into context: "It was a time of the black bans. We called a ban on one of the old houses on Northbourne that was going to be knocked down and turned into flats probably. We also had a four-month-long picket of the National Library of Australia and two schools, demanding asbestos be removed from the sites. At the time, the unions had a strong focus on broader social issues."

"So we at the BLF supported the picket of Havelock in no uncertain terms. I think there's still a telegram hanging up there in Havelock House from me to the camp, Stand firm, and you shall prevail. I went down to the frontline many times."

The picket line did indeed hold strong, and a split-off group called 'Havelock House for the Homeless' voted to squat the building. Plywood intervened and many were arrested. In the end however, the AFP and the Government gave in to growing pressure. The Inquiry into Homelessness in Canberra commenced soon after and the building was handed over to the newly formed Havelock Housing Association for social housing in

Metta Young and Beth Jewell at the Havelock House picket in September 1983.

Image Credit: ACT Heritage Library

1988. Peter was blacklisted from working in the late 1980s as part of the Federal Government witch hunt against union organisers. One of his jobs following this period was as a handyman for the Havelock Housing Association.

He sighs and brings us back to the present. "Well, Havelock is still there because of the collaboration and support between the unions and the community groups. It's really awful what's happening now though, with the ACT Government in bed with the developers. They're shutting down all the social housing places and pushing everyone out into the margins, like they're meant to be there. It's appalling." I look out to the Bruce Ridge bush and think of how much we owe this gentle voice on the other end of the line.

MIDNIGHT.

In 2010, nearly thirty years after the last tent decamped, the Canberra Student Housing Co-operative was formed. It now occupies one wing of Havelock House. 'The Co-op', as it is affectionately known, was formed by a group of students seeking more control of their housing situation, a more affordable rental option in a saturated market and a tighter knit community than what typical student housing offered.

One of the founders, Leah, shared these goals when we asked her about the experience of organising in the early days. "We definitely saw it as activism. We would have loved to buy a place but didn't have any cash or institutional support and it was really just a lucky break with getting in at the right time at Havelock. Starting there gave the Co-op idea some legitimacy, and then once students could actually see it and the fun, inclusive culture it was developing, they could actually get behind it."

It may have been a lucky break with the Havelock Housing Association, but the student connection to the building goes way back. I meet Emma, a current resident in the Co-op, in the bright sun outside Smith's Alternative in the city. The wind whips in the gulf between the post office and the Melbourne Building, one of the earliest built in the city. Our backs are to the 1920s colonnades.

"I've lived in ten different places in the last five years. Apart from my childhood house, the Co-op is the closest I've gotten to feeling 'at home'. For me, this space is perpetually in motion. Not that it isn't peaceful; it's one of very few places I have been where silence does not cause anxiety... I sit quietly on the back step, watching the Moore St currawongs. Sam G leaves them some mealworms. Workers cruise past on the way home from work; picking up their kids. Bit of pink sky above the fancy blocks across the road—$500/week for a single bed apartment."

Recently, the allocation of social housing to Havelock House has come under pressure again – this time, from inner-city gentrification and the growing demand for the high value land. Other social housing complexes in the area are being demolished and their residents are being moved to the far north of the Territory. Walking past the boarded-up Northbourne Flats in early Spring, Diane, one of the few remaining residents of the social

Left:
Geocon's Midnight Building.
Right:
Dickson flats

Image Credit:
Steve Skitmore

housing block just up from Havelock, hurtles out of her unit. She looks harried but hopeful and, with only a brief introduction ('Oh! You look like my son!'), goes on to talk of plans being made by a group of residents to secure funding to retain a block of the flats and build a community centre there. People are pushing back again: "Unit 16 faces Northbourne. Those kids wake up to light rail construction and an enormous wall of orange: Geocon's Midnight Building getting a facelift. Molonglo Group is an ongoing dinner joke and an ongoing threat. Should we buy a two-year internet subscription? What if we're not here in two years?"

The axe may have passed over Havelock for now, but the threat has shifted conversations onto why the Co-op is a community worth maintaining. Collaborations with the ANU have been a focus in recent years, with the Co-op seeking support from the University to purchase or refurbish a building on campus. They've campaigned in numerous ways, forming a student political party, approaching the University Council and even hosting the Vice Chancellor for dinner. Unfortunately, most of this has been to little avail. It seems more and more likely that the future of the Co-op will be secured in partnership with the broader housing sector, a sector which past students and young people have played an active role in establishing.

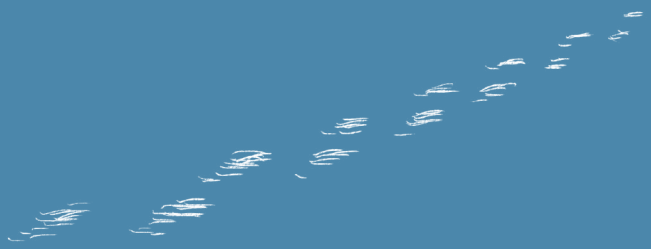
PRESENT/FUTURE.

Stories drip into tiny rivulets and broader streams which carve the channels of the city's history. All of us here in Canberra are looking for places to build community and attachment, not just to sleep. We seek to comprehend the small, semi-alpine valley we have come to live in and to assert some control over its future. The story of housing policy in our city is really a story of collaboration between disparate groups and communities – students, informal action groups, unions, formal housing associations – that have taken action against the harsh, isolating reality of developer-driven construction. Canberra is once again in the throes of 'urban renewal' and expansion; demolition dust is already in the air. Resistance against the harsh settling of this dust has once again begun.

CATHERINE CLAESSENS

Catherine Claessens is an emerging artist and aspiring activist and teacher from Canberra. She works mainly in printmaking, drawing, and watercolour to explore issues of social justice, religion, and sometimes simply the strange and beautiful environment around her. Catherine graduated from ANU School of Art & Design in 2016.

We've Left the University



We've left the university
I walked out wearing my red flag
around my shoulders
You left wearing a beret, chanting:
'The workers, united, will never be
defeated'

We left
As the campus turned into the dollar
sign that it is.
A dollar sign
Which provides delicious 5 dollar
coffees
Served by a million young men who
look like Thor
Only in hipster 80s sneakers.

We've left the university
Every student began the semester
Already defeated.
Our art was banished from the
pavements.

The pavements where we made our art
were demolished.
Demonstrations we used to go to have
been replaced with what they call
'ethical consumption'.
All our services were taken from us.

Was our education ever for us?
Or was it already dripping with coins
into the pit of our poems?
I asked you.
I spoke with the faces as they left,
Faces of students who couldn't afford to
learn what they love.
I spoke with women who never did win
their right to speak.
We are all leaving the university.
The birds are even leaving the skies of
campus,
The skies of campus have now been
filled with the kind of horrible music
you hear in shopping centres.
The music that signals the death of
education.

We only just got out in time.
With all our tears that stained the books
we like to read.
Our books became drenched with our
loss of freedom.
How much longer until you leave the
university?
And where can we build a university we
will not want to leave?

GABRIELA FALZON

Gabriela Falzon is a poet and activist. She is currently an arts student at ANU majoring in Sociology and Gender Studies, she also works for UnionsACT as the Women's Campaign Organiser. She has been accused of thinking that the world is made of poems.

"A World Where It's Easier to Make Friends":

Discussing Socialism, Activism and Legal Education with Professor John Buchanan

ODETTE SHENFIELD

Odette Shenfield is a co-founder of *Demos Journal*. She recently graduated from the ANU and likes writing and reading about topics involving the intersection between activism, creativity and social theory.

Professor John Buchanan is the Head of the Discipline of Business Analytics at the University of Sydney Business School. From 1979-1984, he was an undergraduate student of History and Law at the ANU. During that time, he helped establish the ANU Left Group, a large group of non-aligned anarchists, communists, and socialists. Along with others, he was a founding member of the Law School Action Group – an alliance of independent socialists and small 'l' liberals - that controlled the ANU Law Students' Society from `1982–1985'.

OS: How did you first become involved in activism?

JB: My parents were Presbyterian Christians who started from the notion that if people are poor, it's not their fault. They had voted Liberal in every election until 1972 – but never voted Liberal after then. Throughout their lives they've had a deep commitment to making the world a fairer and more caring place. When I did a history essay in year nine I learnt about social justice and I broke with the family tradition and became pro-ALP [Australian Labour Party]. The next year the Whitlam Government was sacked and I kind of lost faith in parliamentary democracy and looked to alternatives.

I was part of the first intake into the ACT Secondary School College System. Teachers and school administrators encouraged us to form an independent student council. At Narrabundah College students were interested in direct as opposed to representative democracy and our union was based on weekly general meetings of students. During this time anti-uranium activism was big and Friends of the Earth had a big libertarian socialist and anarchist presence. I picked up my politics from those people. When I came to ANU I was somewhat disappointed because we actually had a better mobilised secondary student population than the University population at that time.

In first year, I helped organise the Campus Environment Group, but in second year there was a libertarian-socialist elected chair of the Students' Association, Louise Tarrant, and she wanted to get all the different left forces together. There was a very strong feminist group then, there were the environmentalists, there were left ALP people. There was quite some disenchantment about accessibility of affordable housing as well. We coalesced in a general group called the Left Group.

OS: Do you have any particularly strong memories from the ANU Left Group?

JB: As a representative of the ANU Left in the early 1980s I debated Julia Gillard over the course of number of Australian Union of Students (AUS) Annual Councils. Gillard's line was to get everyone to go to university. Our position was, "education for what? What's the point of getting people to go to university if they're just being cranked through or seeing education in purely instrumental terms?" I've modified my position since then in light of changing circumstances, but still remain committed to engaging with the content and quality of education — not just its quantity.

Gillard, however, remained fixated on increasing "education participation", indifferent to its quality and wider ideological and cultural significance. Her policies about "demand-driven" growth funded by student debt have really strained the university system and all but destroyed quality vocational education.

OS: At least, that's what you say in public?

JB: [Laughs] No no! I'm still strongly a socialist, but over time I've developed great respect for pluralist forms of liberalism.

OS: Can you tell me a bit more about your ideological grounding?

JB: My vision of socialism is about creating a world where it's easier to have friends. That will ultimately require a far fairer distribution of income and far more inclusive and sustainable ways of organising the means of production, distribution, and exchange.

The politics where I started off were out of a libertarian socialist tradition, which is commonly referred to as anarchism or syndicalism. I was particularly influenced by G. D. H. Cole's notion of guild socialism where you could only achieve a fairer society if you had a majority in parliament, but that majority had to be supported by mass democratic organisations beyond parliament, particularly in the economy. That's why it was known as guild socialism — workers organised through collective organisation which shaped production, not just parliament itself.

My first degree was in history and I majored in the history of revolutions. I've gained an appreciation that you have to harness all people of good will interested in a progressive outcome and they mightn't

be socialists, they might have other outlooks. You need an organisational form to harness a plurality of forces. The people who've thought most about that issue tend to be liberal collectivists like Keynes and Beveridge.

OS: I found it interesting that you said the ANU Left Group combined communists, socialists and anarchists. How did that work in practice? Was there sectarianism?
JB: We were all anti-capitalists. We all had a strong, agreed commitment that you had to get beyond the world that sees people either as threats or opportunities because it's a terrible way of thinking. That was a unifying force, and it didn't really matter if people were anarchists, communists, left-wing social democrats, or even social liberals.

If there was a tension it wasn't on sectarian lines, it was more on the degree to which you theorised your practice. I was on the intellectual reflection side, we used to call the other side 'mindless activists'. They called us 'academic wankers'. It wasn't vehement or debilitating but it was a tension.

OS: It didn't matter if some believed in the need for a violent overthrow of capitalism?
JB: The Communist Party of Australia was going through its euro-communist phase which was very much about mass democratic class struggle. There were some Trots but they were marginal – there were the International Socialists but there were only ever about six or seven of them and they didn't work that closely with us.

OS: How did you translate your strong ideological basis into practice? For example, were you using consensus decision making?
JB: There was a very strong libertarian streak and some of the Leninists got pretty pissed off with that. We had a kind of, 'dictatorship of the activists' — if you did the shit work you got to decide the policies. If you made the posters you got to decide what went on them. That was a bit silly — simply because you've got time to make a poster doesn't mean that you should be speaking for everyone in the group.

We did make most decisions by consensus. We'd meet weekly and amongst the Left Group you'd never have less than ten and normally you'd have 20-25 people. There were specific campaign groups, so my friend Bill Redpath and I were in the education collective, Ed.Coll. There were also Accommodation and Peace groups. Left Group was an umbrella, we got together for things like Student Association elections and AUS.

When the organisation worked the best was when AUS was under attack in 1982. The Left Group formed the Friends of AUS group, we had an information committee to figure out our line, a campaign committee and an activist telephone tree. It was at least 75, it might have been 100, who were involved in the campaign consistently over the six weeks. We ended up winning that campaign by a margin of 60/40 on a large voter turnout. This was at a time when the Australian Liberal Students Federation successfully campaigned for several campuses to disaffiliate from the AUS.

OS: What is an activist telephone tree?
JB: We didn't have internet or text – to get a message out you'd phone one person and they'd be organised to phone another on the tree. You might have five branches, so you'd only have to phone five and they would get the message out.

OS: Could you tell me a bit about how your education activism in the ANU College of Law began?
JB: When I started in 1978 a progressive group had already captured the Law Students' Society, led by a guy called Michael Bozic. These people were very involved in the Redfern Legal Centre, Fitzroy Legal Service, and the legal centres movement. They were an inspiration, but they were more concerned individuals, they weren't out to transform capitalism.

In my Honours year I did an Althusserian analysis of G. D. H. Cole's history of thought [*A History of Socialist Thought: Socialism and Fascism* 1931-1939], which gave me quite advanced analytical tools to then turn on the Law School. At the end of Honours, Bill Redpath and I formed the Law School Action Group and we won the Law School Society elections. These were highly polarised elections because we ran on an explicit left program. Bill and I were clearly Marxists but there were also small 'l' liberals and ALP members. In Law Schools, there are always people who just want to make a lot of money and traditionally they had control of the Law Students' Society, but we won those elections for four years in a row with voter turnouts that involved upwards of 40 per cent of the student population.

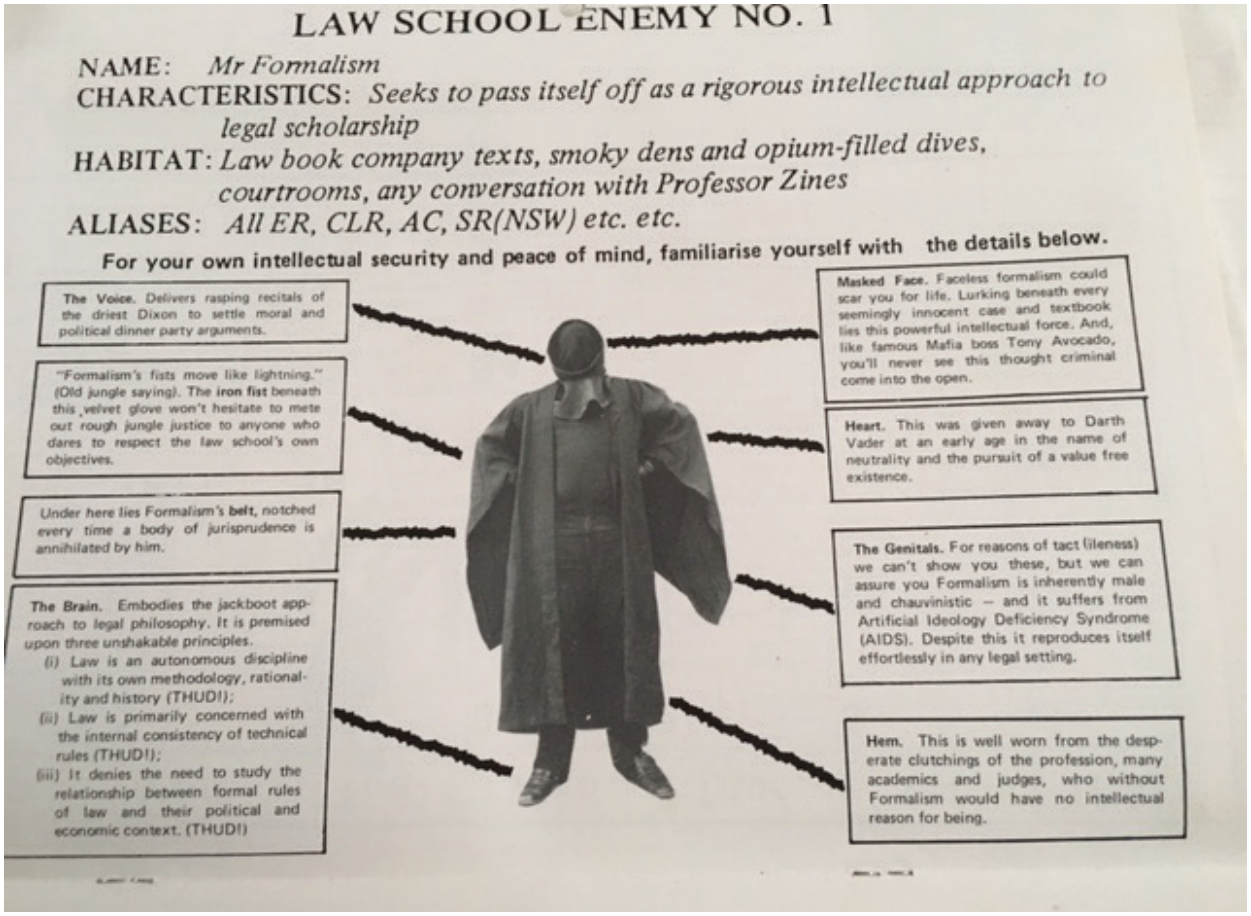
OS: What sorts of things did you do in the Law School Society?
JB: The first thing we did was to produce an Alternative Law Handbook with genuinely alternative (i.e. critical) content. Until that point the handbooks had been chummy sets of essays put together by staff and students that celebrated life at the law school. We said you should have critique of the law, not just a celebration. We included critique on the law and legal education, and student commentary on each unit.

After releasing our first handbook we were threatened for defamation. This was because we reported student feedback that noted the opinion of a number of students that one of the lecturers was leery and sexist. There was widespread opinion amongst students at the time that this lecturer had a terrible reputation for being sexist – teaching criminal law and being sexist while teaching laws around rape and things like that.

OS: I guess if any college will sue you…
JB: We had just reproduced what students said. We learnt later to say, "In the opinion of one student or several students…". If we'd done that we would've been fine.

OS: What motivated your curriculum activism? I recently spoke with another former ANU student activist, Judy Turner, who mentioned regretting her involvement in education activism for being too narrowly focussed. Did you ever feel that way?
JB: We saw universities as playing a critical role in

Extract from the Alternative Law Calendar 1985 (Centrefold Section) based on material used in the Great Law School Show Trial of 1984. Content for this page prepared by Christian Mikula, Bill Redpath and John Buchanan.



Extract from the Great Law School Show Trial of 1984. FORM refers to Formalism and DEF is Defence Counsel.

CLERK: Do you swear to tell the truth, and nothing but the truth? Repeat after me, 'so help me God'

FORM: So help me God.

DEF: Would you please tell the Court your name and academic position?

FORM: My name is Legal Formalism and most Australian Law schools adopt my approac to legal education. The ANU Law school is a particularly loyal adherent of mine.

DEF: And what is your basic theoretical conception of Law?

FORM: I conceive of law as a self-sufficient, autonomous discipline with its own methodology, rationality and history. Accordingly, I uphold the use of a highly-trained legal profeesion: the maintenance of a complex hierarch of rules and institutions, anachronistic language - and of course, a judiciary shrouded in mystery and distanced from societal influence.

DEF: How do you fit in with, or relate to, the other schools of Jurisprudence?

FORM: (WITH GUSTO) There is only ONE way to think about law; MY way.

DEF: Would you describe to the Court what your view of legal education is?

FORM: Firstly, it is crucial to inculcate students with the belief that the law is certain, neutral and objective. Hence, I believe that excessive emphasis should be given to case law and precedent. After all, the professi just wants lawyers who know the rules and can apply them - not creative, progressive ones who would go and upset the apple-cart!

the reproduction of bourgeois ideology – that's where we were coming from. Law Schools basically saw themselves as adjuncts to the profession and we wanted more than that.

If you look at what economics and political science departments have been turning out over the past fifty years – these are massively wasted opportunities in teaching people how to ask really useful questions. Political science now is all about game theory – what does game theory tell you about Trump? Most economists failed completely to understand — let alone predict — the 2008 global financial crisis.

I think a really close engagement with the intellectual enterprise of the university is important, but in a pluralistic way. We probably had the vision of the university being a 'red base' in the transition to socialism. Althusser and that school of thought was highlighting the importance of ideological and cultural struggle. Marxism provided 'science' as a way of seeing through the dominant ideology. If this could become widespread, universities could help make the world a better place. I'm more ecumenical now. I think the growth of new knowledge comes through reasoned debate and deep engagement with information and data — qualitative and quantitative. Institutions that do this are rare and universities are now under attack for doing just this.

OS: Were you inspired by critical legal theorists?

JB: Totally, we were looking at people like Duncan Kennedy at Harvard and [William] Twining at Warwick. We had the Critical Legal Studies Reading Group. We were meeting fortnightly reading different essays. We got the faculty to pay for a series of discussion papers. For example, I wrote one on how the ANU Law School was dominated by a perverted form of legal positivism. That was an official Law School publication, it would be sitting next to where people picked up their compulsory readings for the week.

It was out of that culture that the Great Law School Show Trial emerged. It was a culmination of a whole lot of stuff we'd been doing.

OS: Can you explain the Great Law School Show Trial?

JB: As a group, we'd studied and been involved in the left for a while. One thing that was part of the left tradition was street theatre. The anti-uranium movement had used this quite a bit, the kind of, medieval, allegorical play form of demonising the enemy.

Being able to project what your enemy looks like was a lot of fun. We made legal formalism look like Darth Vader. Students would glaze over when we talked about perverted forms of legal positivism. They'd just say, "What the fuck are you talking about?" Whereas, you put a play like that on, it's a way of explaining quite complex concepts in a concise and accessible way.

OS: When I was looking at online archives, I found an article describing you as an extremist. How did you feel about being a spokesperson and being personally exposed in that way?

JB: People used to laugh at that because, while I was an Althusserian Marxist, personally I was very influenced by G. D. H. Cole and he had this notion that he was a 'sensible extremist'. The real problem was capitalism. Capitalism causes massive suffering and wrecks the environment. I thought, "You might call me extreme but I'm extreme for a reason, anyone sensible and concerned with these issues has to respond in the way we are". Being called an extremist didn't threaten me.

My friends on the left just laughed because they always regarded me as one of the more mild-mannered of the group — a very strong adherent of alliance politics.

OS: Did your activism ever take a personal toll?

JB: Activism destroyed my first *de facto* marriage. We went out for seven years and bought a house together. I took my student activism into trade union activism. I got obsessed with the struggle for social justice and a better world. After I finished my Law and Arts degrees at ANU, I went back to do an Economics degree part time. If you study part time and are an activist, it doesn't leave much time for anything else.

Activist culture can be very damaging to your personal relations. You can justify anything in the name of making the world a better place. I do regret not spending enough time with my friends and my lover. I've since taught myself mindfulness meditation – not because I've become a conservative but because destroying yourself won't help the cause succeed.

OS: Do you maintain hope in the success of the causes you believe in?

JB: I'm still totally socialist. Capitalism does great things but, boy, it does really, really bad things too. I'm completely committed to making the world a fairer, more sustainable place. From where I sit now, universities are one of the few places where people still take ideas seriously, where rationality still counts for something. That's the way I think I can help the cause. That's not to turn universities into sites for socialism, but for them to be sites where people can think and question and generate new ideas and have them subjected to serious scrutiny.

OS: So, are you infiltrating the Sydney Business School or is it a sympathetic place?

JB: [Laughs] I'd say I'm a respected academic! Business schools have a reputation amongst some people as just being adjuncts to the business community, which is incorrect. Engagement with 'industry' is important. But 'industry' is defined very broadly to involve public sector organisations and NGOs [non-government organisations], as well as private sector firms. And within business schools there is a lot of critical literature.

I came in through the industrial relations field and built on the labour process, labour market segmentation, and critical working life traditions. If you're in the business world and go into the business school, by in large you're interested in ideas, not making money, so the fraternity isn't instrumental. There's a big constituency there that wants business — and those involved in managing the public and NGOs sectors — to think critically.

The Deficiencies of Education Activism in the Modern University

ANNA DENNIS

Anna Dennis is currently completing her Honours year in Sociology at the ANU. She is a long-standing activist and contributes to many progressive campaigns, particularly higher education, refugee rights, and LGBTIQ+ rights.

I picked up a banner for the first time and joined the fight against fee deregulation as a second-year student in 2014. The experience of being part of a vibrant and winning campaign is crucial for any activist – personally, I came to realise we have the power and responsibility to identify problems within the current system, develop alternate visions, and fight for them. Education activism at Australian universities during recent years has been focused on resisting the Government's various manifestations of fee deregulation. In the midst of calling for the affordability and accessibility of higher education, we have made the assumption that debts and barriers to enrolment are the main problems facing universities today. An important message, albeit one which overlooks the pervasive structural problems characterising modern universities. Over the last few decades universities have come to be organised and managed in a new way. These changes have often corresponded with a degradation of education and research, and changes to the traditional goals and purpose of the university institution. While students are aware of deregulation and federal budget cuts, we rarely discuss what is happening on our own campuses. The example I want to focus on is the ANU's redevelopment of Union Court. This is a project which has already had negative impacts on student and staff and will radically change the future of education at the ANU. It encapsulates the damaging tendencies which characterise modern universities – tendencies which we rarely examine, let alone fight. Education activism will not achieve a better future until we begin to unravel the problems facing modern universities, envision alternatives, and take courage from our past campaigning experience to fight for a future we believe in.

The Union Court redevelopment is a project which can be best understood in the context of the increasing corporatisation of universities, particularly through the concept of the 'managerial' university. Universities are one of the many public institutions which have been subject to the ascendancy of 'managerialism' in recent decades. Managerialism broadly refers to the application of particular management practices to production, for the purposes of increasing efficiency, productivity, and profitability. In the context of higher education, the re-organisation of management has resulted in the collapse of the 'traditional' university and the rise of the 'modern' university – associated with the pursuit of profit, aggressive performance management, and the prioritisation of measurable efficiency outcomes and research output over quality of education – the standards of which consequently decline. The practical results of managerial reforms in universities have been aptly described by former ANU Associate Professor David West, in his *Demos* article '*The Managerial University: A Failed Experiment?*'. The logic of the managerial university in effect undermines the social role of the university as a place of teaching, learning and intellectual freedom. West identifies that the pressure put on academics to produce quantifiable results and a high research output leads to a neglect of teaching and research quality. The need to raise revenue through increased enrolments means educational standards are watered down. Managers themselves are assessed based on performance – the more reforms and restructures they introduce, the better their CV looks. As standards of education drop, management become motivated to use expensive marketing materials to attract fee-paying international students into expensive degrees, even though in many cases, the declining quality of education does not match the standard advertised. These conditions run deep, and they are directing the future of our universities today.

Running the university in an increasingly corporation-like way and operating under the same demands faced by private businesses in a market produces market pressures - to compete, to treat students as customers, to increase productivity, and to force down wages and conditions. These imperatives are pursued at the expense of staff, students, and the purpose of the institution. A puzzling example of this logic playing out to the detriment of the university itself was the restructuring of the School of Culture, History and Language (CHL) at the ANU in 2016. A loss in profits justified the gutting of a school regarded by Vice Chancellor Brian Schmidt as ANU's "jewel in the crown" – job losses, casualisation and the cutting of Asian language courses were met with disbelief. Despite the outrage, cuts to departments and

courses in the humanities are becoming increasingly common as budget-balancing measures. Management reassures us the coinciding push to online learning and reduced contact hours is not a profit-making venture. Rather, these changes are supposedly pursued in the interests of student and academic 'flexibility'.

The restructuring of CHL belies a motivation to protect the business interests of the university at the expense of the integrity of the institution as a place of learning. The actions of management in the Union Court redevelopment project suggests a continuation along this trajectory. The demolition of the Manning Clarke Centre, a 30-year old lecture venue with a capacity of over 1000, has been accompanied by the same vague phrases about 'flexibility' and 'innovative teaching and learning styles' in consultations. The concerns of students and staff about the destruction of our dedicated lecture theatres has been met with the offer of a flat-floor, reconfigurable room designed to be a "multi-purpose, multimodal, flexible learning space" to "facilitate new modes of teaching delivery" – a clear move away from lectures and tutorials, and towards large seminars and online courses. Underneath the rhetoric of innovative and improved learning styles is a desire to save resources on teaching staff by cutting down contact hours and increasing the student-to-teacher ratio, despite concerns about the impact of these changes on educational outcomes. The somewhat unintuitive rationale of a university protecting their financial interests by disinvesting in education – cutting courses, firing respected academics, shortening semesters, casualising and underpaying teaching staff, and replacing contact hours with online modules - predictably results in falling rankings and reputation. The chain reaction established by this institutional logic then impels the university to spend millions on marketing to recuperate funds from full fee-paying international students. The redevelopment project encapsulates this desperate attempt to market a university on image, rather than quality of education.

Buildings like the Manning Clarke Centre and the ANU Union, described as decrepit by management, will be replaced with modern spaces built with cheap and poor-quality material designed to house privately-owned businesses, accommodation, and student services. Our spaces in this university have been taken from us to build more profitable and marketable ones. The ANU bar, housed in the ANU Union building, was the symbol of our university – always full, welcoming, and unassuming – a space which felt like it existed just for us. Its demolition was justified by the unsightly exterior and a lack of diversity in food options. Our student spaces were replaced with expensive bars and food trucks in the "Pop-Up Village" which was explicitly being promoted as Canberra's 'newest dining destination', with price-points catering not only to students, but public servants as well. This new "precinct" does not in any way feel like a space for students and staff, and that is because it is not. The trendy and elite new campus is designed for the market – to compete with other elite international universities in order to award as many expensive degrees as possible.

Crucially, as described in West's article, these decisions have not been made on the merit of the redevelopment itself – they have been made because ANU management are performance measured themselves on the 'restructures' they initiate during their time at a university. The imperatives of managerialism lie beneath developments which will have a serious and detrimental effect on the quality of education, research and teaching at the ANU. Perhaps most emblematic of the sheer disregard for education during this project is that these millions were spent at the exact same time when ANU management attempted to reduce the penalty rates of library and IT staff during enterprise bargaining in 2016. Students and staff have struggled with continuous construction work drowning out classrooms and offices, students have been forced off campus for exams and lectures, and the construction has been gradually encroaching on the small amount of space we have left. Despite these affronts on our ability to teach, work, and learn, we have seen no concerted push-back against any part of ANU management's agenda.

While the practical effects of the managerial university are alarming, in everyday life these kinds of projects pass by unquestioned as part of the inevitable march of progress – part of a rationalised, neoliberal logic in which restructures like these are necessary for financial sustainability. This perhaps explains some of the apparent indifference at the ANU. However, as activists, we also know that every moment we let this logic go by unopposed is a moment in which it becomes further entrenched. We know universities are changing and if we want them to change for the better we need to intervene in this procession and demand alternatives. Attacks on students and staff from university management are not new – the nature of a capitalist economy forces downward pressure on wages and conditions everywhere – but the lack of resistance is a concerning trend. Nonetheless, there have been some recent examples of education activism which upholds a legacy of holding management to account. At the ANU in 2013, students had an anti-management campaign in protest of the cancellation of tutorials. Their refusal to give up and the ongoing escalation of the campaign resulted in a mammoth win for students. This is just part of a long history of inspiring education activism at the ANU and universities internationally. We know we have the ability, power, and experience to take on difficult campaigns – we've been doing it for decades. Now, with so much at stake, we cannot afford to be complacent. We cannot continue to provide consultations with management through our student unions which only serve as a tick of approval to bulldoze our campus. We need to be prepared to campaign against management – because their interests stand in stark opposition to ours. Their decisions, motivated by powerful social trends, are slowly destroying our university. And of course, we need to continue to fight for free education, but it will be futile if we don't also fight to protect the quality and value of our education itself. At the very heart of activism should be a preparedness to thoroughly examine power structures, identify whose interests are being served within them, and to challenge them when they generate injustice. We have a responsibility to take the university into our own hands and make it a place which prioritises education, to no end other than the value of education itself.

Higher Education Activism without Vocation

Swan River Mechanics Institute, Perth in the 1980s.

Image Credit: National Library of Australia

ROBYN LEWIS

Robyn Lewis was the ANUSA Education Officer from April to December 2017, and is a long-time education, environment, refugee and economic justice activist studying Politics, Philosophy & Economics.

Action on higher education policy is a core aspect of activism at universities. While this work is important and necessary, something is fundamentally missing from our demands and our narratives. Education activists demand the opportunity for everyone who wishes to attend university to be able to do so, and to be able to do so for free. This demand is of fundamental importance and the fight for free university education must continue until it becomes a reality. However, not all higher education happens in universities and not everybody who wants or needs further education will attend one.

Vocational education in Australia is in a state of disarray. If our demands for higher education policy reform are to be coherent, far-reaching, and truly inclusive, we should be fighting in solidarity with TAFE and other vocational students. The quality of vocational education in Canberra has plummeted; courses are changed while students are partway through them, and training often leaves students in debt while not meeting the minimum standards for the job pathways advertised.

Around the country, the problem is significantly worse. The influx of private providers combined with course cuts to publicly funded institutes and TAFE centres over the past decade has left vocational students vulnerable to exploitation by for-profit con artists. These private 'colleges' often recruit students for whom the courses are blatantly unsuitable by using salespeople on commission. There have been incidents of salespeople signing intellectually disabled students up for $25,000 courses without their knowledge or consent. Some providers charge upwards of the cost of a medicine degree for a low-quality diploma which offers few skills and few prospects upon completion.

A report by the Australian National Audit office in 2015 found that some qualifications had a completion rate of just 7%. Students incurred hefty debts while providers gained large profits while delivering very little. Meanwhile, the public providers are struggling to cover the basic costs of teaching with their meagre funds, let alone spending on the necessary resources and additional support staff for students with disabilities and limited English.

Prior to coming to the ANU I completed a Certificate IV through a private vocational provider. I was lucky enough to have the cost covered by my employer at the time, as the qualification has now been rendered virtually useless. The trainers have been fined nearly seven million dollars for meeting none of the minimum standards for their courses and taking negligent shortcuts and liberties with government and student money, for profit. My story is not an uncommon one; this situation is widespread and implicitly condoned by government policies and regulatory inaction.

Needless to say, the current Liberal government, with its contemptuous rhetoric and policies towards public-funded education, is worsening the situation. The past three years have seen more cuts to TAFE funding and deep cuts to the number of courses for which students may receive government support. State governments in New South Wales and Victoria are threatening further funding cuts as well. Why then, are we not fighting for the re-regulation or re-nationalisation of TAFE and protesting for free vocational training too?

It is undeniable that not all employment, or the pursuance of all interests, requires a university degree. I remember in my final years of school, those who chose to pursue vocational training rather than university education were treated with quiet derision. Yet, the knowledge they were pursuing was immensely valuable, both in terms of self-enrichment and in terms of the skills with which they would be equipped to contribute to society. Buildings would not be built, water systems would not be plumbed and animals in veterinary offices would not be nursed if it were not for vocational training.

Where is our solidarity with vocational students, current and future? Our demands for free education ring hollow when instead of fighting for equal access to quality training, we implicitly continue the pre-existing dismissive attitudes towards TAFE and endorse the idea that university is uniquely deserving of full status as a public good.

This year, the National Union of Student (NUS) campaigned on the platform, "Make Education Free Again." As in previous years, the message was that we must work to stop cuts to university funding, abolish tuition fees, and resist the corporatisation of the education system. This message goes hand in hand with those of campaigns to protect TAFE. Similarly to the NUS, TAFE staff and students have struggled to prevent funding cuts and similarly to the work we do at universities, protests have been held at TAFE campuses for years now, with active staff and students working tirelessly to resist the erosion of public-funded education. There is so much potential for joint action: holding days of action together, engaging in stunts together, making shared demands on government, making demands in solidarity with each other to our administrations and more.

As the ANUSA Education Officer for most of this year, I have organised protests, solidarity actions with stunts (such as ANU students interrupting Education Minister Simon Birmingham in the press gallery, making the national news), written submissions and made endless calls to crossbenchers. If I could have my time over again, the one thing I would change is trying to start making these changes. Something always feels missing, no matter how valuable and worthwhile national days of action and other protests are, when we narrow the concept of higher education just to universities. This is not to downplay the importance of university activism. Rather, in the face of the corporatisation and underfunding that sweeping across almost all public institutions, we need to advocate for systematic change that is as widespread as possible.

One of the biggest barriers to building solidarity with vocational students is the disparity in student representation between universities and vocational training institutions. While the NUS struggles to prevent the closure of university student unions around the country, many TAFE institutes have already lost them. Students at private colleges do not have any representation at all and online students are often so isolated from each other that they may not even know anybody else in their courses.

However, it would be a shame to let these differences detract from finding ways to work together. We would do well to work out how to build solidarity with vocational activists, and to share in their vision for the future. Breaking down the barriers between vocational and university students will allow us to work for higher education changes that do not leave anybody behind.

CATHERINE CLAESSENS

Catherine Claessens is an emerging artist and aspiring activist and teacher from Canberra. She works mainly in printmaking, drawing, and watercolour to explore issues of social justice, religion, and sometimes simply the strange and beautiful environment around her. Catherine graduated from ANU School of Art & Design in 2016.

Lonsdale Street

VANAMALI HERMANS

Vanamali Hermans is a Sociology student at the ANU and co-content editor of this edition of *Demos*. She primarily organises with the ANU Refugee Action Committee and the ANU Education Committee.

A few messages later and there's
Ten or twenty of us in a park near Braddon,
armed with banners and badges, a megaphone,
desperation and rage.
We've tried everything else
years in the making and it only gets worse.

Garema Place doesn't cut it any more.

The Lonsdale office is occupied for twenty
Maybe thirty minutes before they come in and
arrest us.
For the students three hours north, the same
is unfolding.

They fit three of us in a paddy wagon,
holding hands and chanting as we're driven
away,
dried blood on the walls.
We're lucky it's not summer and we're not
black.

Unloading us in processing cells,
only a mattress and stainless steel toilet
and still, as criminals, we have it better than
Behrouz, Walid.

They serve us egg sandwiches and tea as we
wait to be charged,
'Why are you making this so hard for us?'
'Why didn't you move on?'
There's no egg sandwiches and tea on Manus.

'You ladies shouldn't have to see such human misery',
but it's that misery that drove us here.
One officer—arrogant, orange beard—tells us of
'weed beds and roses',
of people in here so stunted by the world around
them it won't let them grow,
won't let them go.

The time doesn't go anywhere, neither here nor there,
We're lucky to have each other.
Five of us, all up, wrapped in blankets
Occupying ourselves with stories and old protest
songs.

I wish I had my phone
had Facebook, had Twitter had anything and
could see what was happening.
Not knowing is the hardest part of being locked
away.

Finally
they take us
One by one
Our weight, our height, eye colour, fingerprints.
I'm second-last to go,
Relieved I won't be the last one, alone.
We wait for the click, click, click each time
Running to the window as the gate opens,
watching each other leave.

The others wait up across the road,
With food and cheap wine and a piece of paper
that says
'Not to be within 20 metres of the Department
of Immigration and Border Protection Office,
located at 3 Lonsdale Street, Braddon in the
Australian Capital Territory (ACT)'.
It's 7:30, nearly 8, and it's getting dark in Civic,
probably Manus as well.

Refugee Activism at the ANU: Why We Must Keep Fighting the Good Fight

DR JOHN MINNS

Dr John Minns is an Associate Professor in Politics and International Relations at the ANU. He has been heavily involved in activism and writing on refugee politics since 2000 and is a member of the Canberra and ANU Refugee Action Committee.

The refugee campaign in Australia has been one of the most visible and tenacious movements of social activism of the last four or five years. In it, many thousands of people have fought to establish a basic principle – that people seeking refuge should not be locked up and treated like criminals. But ever since the introduction of mandatory detention of asylum seekers in 1992 and, even worse, the "outsourcing" of that detention to Papua New Guinea [PNG] and Nauru in 2001, Australian policy has only become worse.

At the Australian National University (ANU) there has been a vibrant campaign involving students and a handful of staff over several years. We have learned a lot from it and from the broader campaign about activism. I have been involved from the beginning and here is a little of what I think we've learned.

IS ACTIVISM WORTH IT?

It is a common complaint that young people just aren't interested in political activism. When I'm handing out leaflets at ANU, what astounds me most is not when - very occasionally - someone disagrees with what's on our leaflet. It's when they won't even take or look at one. There are many reasons advanced for this apathy: that the "greed is good" message of the 1980s and 1990s created an atmosphere of self-centredness rather than enthusiasm for changing the world; that a more competitive job environment forces students to focus more on getting a good career; that almost all students have to work many hours per week to make ends meet; or that a generation brought up with Facebook, Instagram etc. aren't inspired by marches and meetings.

I think that there is a more important reason than any of this. The level of disillusionment with traditional politics, parties and politicians is so high that the idea of politics itself has become discredited. Ironically, activist campaigns like ours – although they are actually an antidote to traditional politics - also suffer as a result. Few people actually believe that their own activity can make a difference in the world – so why bother? We usually get a fair reception when campaigning on campus. There is not often open opposition, the response is closer to indifference. So the question could reasonably be asked: why do we continue to fight?

Why we should bother is that with the two major sides of politics putrid on the issue of refugees, our campaign is the only real opposition. Besides, Australian policy and Australian money is still destroying the lives of the asylum seekers themselves. More broadly, how we treat the more vulnerable has a profound impact on the kind of society we are. Once a group is scapegoated for political gain, there is no guarantee that others won't be added. Pauline Hanson's 1996 speech said we were in danger of being "swamped by Asians". By 2016, Asians were forgotten. Now, apparently, we are being "swamped by Muslims". We do make a difference, even if it's only in making sure that a generation of kids do not grow up thinking that scapegoating and torturing asylum seekers is acceptable or that there is no alternative to it. We make a difference to our own community.

It is also critical that we demonstrate to the world that millions of Australians do not support these horrendous policies. With far-right groups in Europe, chillingly, calling for an "Australian solution", we have a special responsibility to denounce the government policy. Finally, between 31 October and 24 November, the men on Manus Island staged one of the most inspiring struggles for their rights - and for human rights in general – seen in recent years. They did so under the most appalling conditions until they were finally brutally evicted. We are not about to give up.

YES WE ARE "PREACHING TO THE CONVERTED"

All the polls show that our side of the argument has at least 25-29% support. This is true even when the most difficult question – whether or not respondents support

boat turn-backs – is asked. On questions about bringing the asylum seekers who have languished on Manus Island and Nauru here to Australia, opinion is usually evenly divided, but the "bring them here" response rose significantly during the Manus occupation. In the ACT, public opinion is much better than anywhere else in the country with between 70% and 80% wanting to bring them here. Furthermore, pro-refugee sentiment is higher amongst younger people and amongst those with more education. So a university campus in the ACT should be the very best place to campaign to support refugee rights. Given that, one question is often raised - is there any point to campaigning here at all? Aren't we just "preaching to the converted"? This is commonly raised in the broader campaign as well. Why hold rallies when the people who come already agree with us?

But success in building movements depends, crucially, on the number of activists on the ground. We are not likely to convince people who are very hostile to us at this stage. Nor are we likely to draw people into activity who are in the middle – without particularly strong feelings either way. We want to talk to the people already on our side – the converted – and give them both arguments to make to others and activities that they can carry out. It is these minority communities of activists who always drive the great social changes that make the world a better place. At the ANU this means turning some of the thousands of ANU students who agree with us into activists.

"SECURE YOUR OWN MASK BEFORE HELPING OTHERS"

We've all heard the talk before the plane takes off. "In the unlikely event of a sudden fall in cabin pressure ... secure your own mask before helping others". If we want to help refugees, we've got to make sure that the activists here in Australia are looked after as well. For activism to be sustainable it has to allow people to be involved at whatever level they can. There will always be a need for "super-activists" who put in a huge amount of time. But a campaign that only has room for super-activists won't work. There are too many other things happening in people's lives. Activism has to be sustainable. So there have to be multiple pathways into it and different ways of doing it. Holding a stall at the pop-up village is important. But it's not for everyone. Some people have been involved in organising music gigs for refugees, others in social media. The message we've tried to put out is that whatever time or talents people have, they're welcome in the campaign.

"BOREDOM IS ALWAYS COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY"... AND COUNTER-ACTIVIST

The situationist Guy Debord is reputed to have said that "boredom is always counter-revolutionary". The slogan later appeared on Paris walls during the upheaval of May 1968. Whatever implications it has for revolution, boredom is certainly the enemy of activism. I think there are three reasons why the refugee campaign has tried to come up with new, creative and interesting things to do and ways to protest. The first is obvious – people are more likely to open an interesting-looking package and to respond to activities done with flair. But, just as important is the realisation that what we're actually selling is not just a message about how refugees should be treated and not treated. We are selling our own activity – because we are trying to get others to do the same – to attract them as activists. So if it looks like we're doing something boring, we won't succeed. There is a third reason. This has been a long campaign and many of the tens of thousands of people in Canberra who have come to some activity in it have been to many more than one. It's not that they are physically tired of coming back to another rally or meeting. But, without victories to show for their efforts, they can feel a sense of futility. "Here we are doing exactly the same thing again and nothing's changed". Even small, innovative changes in the protests and in the routine of the campaign can help relieve this feeling. On campus, we've done things like bake-sales, little bits of street theatre, and held "Amps Not Camps" gigs. Moreover, a campaign is not like a workplace which is held together by a cash incentive. It is entirely voluntary and those in it need the support of like-minded people, of which social interaction is an important part. Something as simple as drinks in the bar or a party can help to keep a campaign going.

YOU CAN'T JUST SAY "NO"

Outrage at the horrors inflicted on refugees is the main reason why most people have joined our campaign. There are more than enough of these horrors on which to campaign. But we've found that to say what we're against is not enough to convince people. As is often the case the government has created a narrative in which it seems that there is no viable alternative to their policy. The key to this used to be that without tough border controls, millions would come. Now, it dresses up its policy in a fake humanitarianism – that without offshore detention, the refusal to allow anyone who attempts to come by boat ever to set foot in Australia and mandatory detention, there would again be large scale drownings at sea. One simple way of exposing the hypocrisy of this is the lack of even the least concern for those who have been successful "deterred". There has not been a single word from our leading politicians inquiring about what has happened to these people. Did they die somewhere else? Did they return to squalid camps? Were they forced back to places of persecution and danger?

However, we can't win the argument with people who are genuinely concerned about drownings at sea without presenting an alternative policy. People often first respond with their heart to the suffering of the refugees we lock up and ban forever. Good! But then our campaign has to present an alternative to be truly convincing. We have to be able to show that there are other ways of taking refugees that avoid the need for them to take dangerous boat journeys. We can be pro-active – processing people's applications in the transit countries in which they find themselves and then bringing them safely here. Up until 1992, Australia took many refugees but never had mandatory detention. Until 2001, we never had offshore detention in PNG and Nauru. Until 2013, we did not permanently ban those who attempted to come by boat. And the sky did not fall in!

Our campaign often emphasises the heart, but our arguments then need to move to the head – showing that we can do things very differently. It is that alternative for which the campaign at the ANU and throughout the country must, and will, continue to fight.

SHANNON B

Shannon B is a recent graduate of Macquarie University and a lifelong resident of Western Sydney.

Hope and Activism: Is it Difficult to Maintain Hope as an Activist?

ESTHER CARLIN

Esther Carlin is studying visual art and anthropology. She lives in Canberra. Her work has previously been published in *Demos, Bossy* and *Woroni*.

CHRIS SWINBANK:
Involved in anti-apartheid activism, anti-Vietnam War activism and student support for the establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, late 1960s-early 1970s

Oh I would never get depressed, the battle went on always. It was like a full-time occupation, I'm serious. In those days it was, there wouldn't have been a week or almost a day where we didn't do something. It was really a passion.

I wasn't looking for press coverage, I was looking for recognition, not for us but for the cause, to get people thinking. The members of Parliament weren't just conservative, they were reactionary, well it's not much better today. A lot of them were very dreadful men, there were very few women in Parliament, the ones who were there were like Bronwyn Bishop. The men a lot of them were just really common, but they still are today. Bob Katter, imagine trying to convince him of anything.

I guess our aim was to bring change. I suppose there has been some change hasn't there? The Vietnam War didn't continue because there was so much protesting against it, not just here but everywhere around the world. Aboriginal people have got some rights now but not very many. South Africa is run by a monster so that hasn't been a big success. Rhodesia is run by an even bigger monster, Mugabe. So the results have been mixed.

RASHNA FARRUKH:
Involved in the establishment of ANU Ethnocultural Department and founding editor of *Bossy* Magazine, 2014-2017

I think I am always hopeful honestly. I don't really find it very hard to maintain hope. It's just because I can see there's always change happening, positive change happening. Of course there are times when we take a really giant leap backwards, and there's been really good examples of that this year. I can't even start. I mean I can, but I don't want to. I think like despite those backward leaps happening, there's always people in our community, that are moving forward and doing really creative and engaging stuff that I'd never even considered that have really moved me. Just like people that I'd known in high school even, going out and playing amazing music or writing poetry or just like working at Ernst and Young. That's even like a big thing for that space to have more diversity, I think anyone who is doing anything is creating a change and they don't even realise it. It's just important to acknowledge that it's not just people who are picketing and running for seats as politicians that are the ones that are creating change, even though that's important because then you get that whole representation. I think it's just like even the smallest things that people do, like I don't know, joining your local netball team, because they're all white people [laughs]. It's a giant step forward. I really like to stop and appreciate smaller things that are happening around me, and I think if you do that it's really a lot easier to maintain hope.

STEPH COX:
Involved in environmental activism, Mining the Truth Roadtrip and anti-deregulation activism, 2012-2017

Mmmm. I think hope is a really tricky thing to maintain. Often when you're in a group you're all sort of invested in maintaining a sense of hope and a sense that the campaign will be successful, which makes sense. If you started saying things like this campaign has already failed before it's even begun and what's the point of any of us being here and the problem is too big or something like that, no one would continue in your campaign. And I don't think that's a bad thing. That's necessary but I think it also means that it can make it hard for people to incorporate into their narrative of what's happening in the campaign experiences where things didn't go to plan. It can be hard to come to terms with the way the campaign has been successful in some areas but unsuccessful in others, or the way that it's had really unexpected outcomes or maybe its outcomes were totally imperceptible and you're like we did all this work and we didn't achieve the main goal and its not clear to the people involved immediately where that work has gone - has it just dissipated? Often the effects of activist work aren't immediately apparent. The disjuncture between talking in a really hopeful sense when the group is together but then privately entertaining doubts and confusions, or the disjuncture between during the campaign having really hopeful rhetoric and then after the campaign people being like no it didn't work, is, can be, alarming, or can feel confusing, and I think in fact that makes it harder to trust that hopeful tone in campaigns. Sometimes I think it can come across to people as forced or unrealistic, and that takes a real toll I think.

So Dan (Perez) and I have talked a fair bit about hope and Dan has a lot of really interesting things to say. They've done a bit of reading of [Rebecca] Solnit's book called *Hope in the Dark* and some other texts that I can't remember right now. One quotation from Gramsci that Dan mentioned and that I am maybe drawing on in this mini three-page comic I am making is, I mean I don't know it exactly, but it's something like, "it's important to have pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will". And I think that really resonates with me how hope can't be maintained without a sort of critical eye that's willing to consider the worst outcomes that are possible, but also with a real sense that regardless of the worst possible outcome, you've still got the ability, you've still got some kind of capacity to take action. And I think sometimes in campaigns, the success of a campaign seems so important and so crucial that people feel like it's a really fragile thing that they can't disrupt that narrative of success during the campaign or maybe after the campaign they feel like they can't talk about it with some people, as if, like they can't talk about the problems they had with some people.

ODETTE SHENFIELD:
Involved in Fossil Free ANU, environmental activism and co-founder of Demos Journal, 2013-2017

I think it is very hard to maintain hope, particularly at university where a lot of what you're studying challenges a lot of mainstream ideas about how far we have progressed. I think I came to university thinking that progress was linear and slow, but that it was linear. And then being at university really threw that on its head, and also made me question my own subjectivity and my own embeddedness in oppression and injustice. I'm still working through all of that. I think I am maybe a more pessimistic person than a lot of activists and I don't know if I can answer the question if I have hope or not, in some ways. I'd say some days I do but a lot of days I don't, especially with climate change, not just climate change but all of ecological risk. I think it's hard, some things are hard to articulate.

I read Rebecca Solnit's, well I read most of her book *Hope in the Dark*. At the time I was like this is really great, yeah this is spot on. Then I feel like I found her line of reasoning of almost like a strategic hope, you do it to keep you trying, and I think I've always taken this mentality of even if it's hopeless you still try because it's better than not and you've got nothing to lose by trying". I still do things out of that, but I think it gets harder, especially as time moves on. Growing up as a kid with the knowledge of "oh we have until this time to do something about climate change", and then seeing us reach that time now and not do it is really terrifying. So I think, yeah, I'm still working through how to have hope.

They're quite existential questions really, like it sort of makes you question a lot of different things, what existence even really is. I guess some days I do and some days I don't, but I'm not really sure how you maintain it. I think it is important to have people around you who you can talk to. I feel really lucky that I have such good relationships, and I feel really happy and lucky in those. I think that kind of keeps you going, but whether that's deluded in the grand scheme of how bad things are I'm not sure.

JUDY TURNER:
Involved in ANU Labour Club, anti-apartheid activism, anti-Vietnam War activism, low-cost housing activism and co-founder of Agit Prop Printing Press, 1971-1975

You had to have hope, I mean you would have not been part of the radical left if you didn't; if you weren't optimistic. So you had to believe that change could be affected and was being affected by your actions otherwise you would have just given up I guess. So yeah, I think we maintained hope. I mean life was easier for us, you know university was free, it was easy to get a job.

I guess there was one point when we had less hope. All of our friends used to go and work on the building sites, in the holidays, all of our male friends, they'd get work really easily and they'd get well-paid. One of our friends decided to become an activist, he dropped out of uni, Dave Shaw - have you heard of him? He was a really committed member of the communist party from a very upper-middle class family in Sydney, and he dropped out of uni and went to Sydney to become a building labourer, and become part of the union. He was training to be a rigger I think, and he fell from scaffolding. It was a kind of frosty day or cold day in Sydney, and he died. That was a tremendous blow to all of us, I think that was either when we'd just left uni or it was in our final year. And it was kind of a, I don't know why, but it was a wake-up call for a lot of people that life is actually hard, it's not just a game, and that his joining the struggle in that way had led to his very early death, a very much admired and loved person of great integrity. He went to work in a building trade because he believed that the struggle was the most important thing, and I think things like that sort of shook us, but I wouldn't say they destroyed our hope at all.

The thing that maybe destroyed my hope in the end was factionalism, and the fact that so many people went into Trotskyist movements and they got involved simply in fighting each other. That seemed so useless and such a waste of time that I went off into Amnesty International where I thought you could do valuable work and make people's' lives better and not waste your time fighting each other. But that was later, I think when we were at university we were very optimistic. We formed a new party at the end, you should talk to somebody else about this, we called it the new group or the new way or something. We thought it was a whole new political movement that we were engaged in, and then of course we all left Canberra and went in different directions, and the whole thing fell apart, and everybody joined something that was pre-existing, so you know the serious activists went into the Communist Party or one of the Trotskyist groups.

STEVE WILLIAMS:
Involved in environmental activism, co-organiser of Students of Sustainability conference held at ANU in 2013 and community archaeology work with an Aboriginal elder, 2014-2017

I think that's been one of my biggest struggles. The more you do work which involves envisioning futures and alternative futures, and critiquing the status quo and encouraging yourself to think in ways that are different to the structures we have set up to go down and the paths we are told we have to go down, it becomes really destabilising. And I think hope is such an incredible force that you need to hold onto, you need to also see around you. So I've been involved in groups where people have really lost hope, and people who aren't here anymore because of that. Even when the campaigns that you're working on and the visions that you have for the future aren't coming to fruition there are really exciting things that are happening in the world. I think that's often one of the things about future-based activism that we miss, is that transformational work that is happening all around us in the communities around us. And you do need to give yourself the space and time to immerse yourself in the really positive things that are happening around you because there is so much stuff that is happening. And I think that's why most of us do this work, because we have a really optimistic vision of the future. The people that aren't doing the work are actually the ones that don't have much hope.

Full-Time Troublemakers: A Conversation with Chris Swinbank

VANAMALI HERMANS

Vanamali Hermans is a Sociology student at the ANU and co-content editor of this edition of Demos. She primarily organises with the ANU Refugee Action Committee and the ANU Education Committee.

"Full-time troublemakers". This is how Chris Swinbank describes student activists he campaigned with during his time at the ANU from 1968 to 1971. After reading about Chris and the anti-apartheid campaign in a chapter of *The Making of the Australian National University: 1946-1996* (2009) by Stephen Foster and Margaret Varghese, I found Chris on Facebook and met with him one afternoon in Cafe Garema, where he shared with me some of the history of ANU's activist culture, stories of past campaigns and photo upon photo of rallies and arrests. Meeting with Chris was an important exercise—not only in preserving histories of radical action and dissent, but also in connecting faces with names and understanding what motivated the people who, like my comrades and I, spent their years at university as student activists.

Former student and Editor-at-large at *The Canberra Times* Jack Waterford is arrested during the 'Day of Rage'.

Image Credit: Chris Swinbank.

Whilst many of these motivations are the same—socialist roots, a deep commitment to social and environmental justice, and an interest in and concern for human rights—speaking with Chris revealed to me the changing nature of students' lives and how this has shaped the activism we engage in. Perhaps most starkly, our opening conversation about our backgrounds emphasised the barriers student activists now face fifty years on: not only on campus, but in our everyday lives as people living in an increasingly divided and unequal world.

As a graduate of Melbourne Grammar, one of Australia's most elite private schools, Chris told me that he and the majority of the student activists he organised with during the late sixties and early seventies came from well-to-do backgrounds. Whilst holding little relevance to Chris, I couldn't help contrast this to the activists I work with today, many of us publicly educated and coming from working class families. Throughout the great many stories and escapades Chris and I discussed, rarely had wealth acted as a limitation. This is a far cry from the conditions we organise under today, in which many activist groups struggle to retain core members who must spend their time in hospitality or call centres so they can afford to eat the next day.

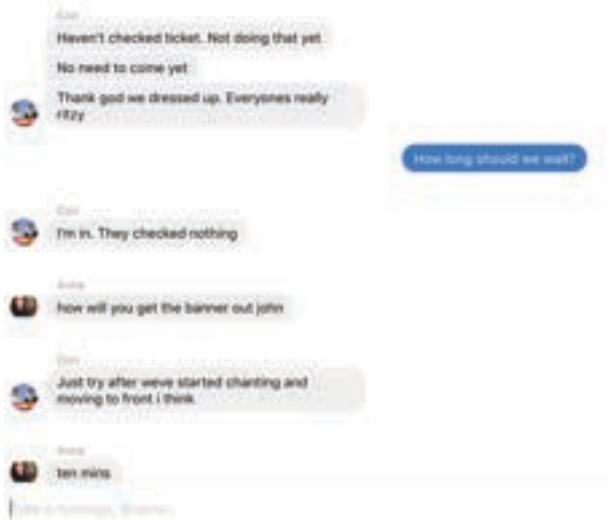
This, I believe, is worthy of reflection when we write about student activism and consider the organising we participate in today. As inequality continues to grow under austere "budget-saving" measures, students are living below the poverty line on Youth Allowance, moving from one precarious sharehouse to the next and struggling to find casual work (with penalty rate and workplace entitlement cuts on the off-chance we do find employment). The increasing pressures that neoliberalism is exerting on both young people and social movements answers in part, then, the disparity between the grandeur and energy of the student activism Chris recounted, and the apathetic and fragmented student population we now struggle to mobilise.

The picture Chris painted of activism during his years at the ANU was one of overwhelming enthusiasm and commitment; the kind of intoxicating

A vigil roster kept by student activists during the anti-apartheid campaign. Image Credit: Chris Swinbank.

student militancy we now yearn for. As he meditated on the thousands of students who had overtaken Civic on the "Day of Rage" against the Vietnam War, Chris nostalgically pointed over my shoulder, identifying the exact spot—only metres away from our cafe table—where Jack Waterford had been arrested during the demonstrations. Chris repeatedly emphasised the lack of apathy and big activist culture, mainly organised by word of mouth and Friday morning meetings at Tilley's.

One particular example I found of this culture was in the scrapbook Chris lent us, filled with newspaper clippings and propaganda he had kept. Towards the back of the scrapbook was an old roster that had been drawn up by anti-apartheid activists, delegating names to specific windows of time during an astonishing six-month, 24/7 vigil outside the South African Embassy. With almost fifty students prioritising the vigil over nearly every other aspect in their lives, the rigour and dedication achieved through one piece of paper was palpable. This is especially impressive considering the level of organising that was undertaken without social media and the technology student activists now rely upon.



A Facebook conversation used by education activists to plan interrupting Education Minister Simon Birmingham's National Press Club Address. Image Credit: Vanamali Hermans

Almost daily the student activists and groups I'm a part of, groups like the ANU Refugee Action Committee, use platforms like Facebook, Wickr and Wire to arrange stalls, advertise rallies and events, and coordinate more subversive activities such as occupations and the interruption of events. When I and three other student activists (Anna Dennis, John Dove and Con Karavias) crashed Education Minister Simon Birmingham's National Press Club Address, we could not have effortlessly and secretively scoped out security, entered the venue and timed our disruption without instant messaging at our disposal.

This is not to say social media has *revolutionised* the way students engage in activism. In fact, organising online often lacks the same accountability physical organising produces. Nevertheless, Chris and I both identified technology as a distinguishing factor separating our generations of student activists. Whereas we now use online petitions, or try and register as many tickets as possible to subvert formal events held by ministers like Peter Dutton, Chris and the student activists of the seventies would throw huge house parties, requiring attendees to physically fill out conscription forms with fake names and addresses to protest against the Vietnam War and clog the conscription process.

Bearing in mind our different uses of technology and ways of communicating, I was interested to ask Chris how, if at all, students had connected across campuses to campaign together and converge as a united student movement. Perhaps we take for granted the value of Skyping into cross-country meetings, or the use of Facebook in organising simultaneous occupations, as

Students perform on the lawns outside Chifley Library for the Aquarius Festival.

Image Credit: The Canberra Times

student refugee activists did this year. Regardless, Chris keenly labelled Canberra as the centre of protests, with Parliament House acting as a political hub and meeting place that brought students from across the country together; many travelling to Canberra for the establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, for example. Likewise, big counter-cultural events of the seventies, such as the Aquarius Festival which was held in Canberra in 1971 and coincided with the "Day of Rage", brought student activists together.

Despite all of these differences and generational gaps—the backgrounds we come from, the conditions we live under, the technology and tactics we use and the ways we communicate with each other—I found, after spending the afternoon with Chris, that the campaigns we dedicate ourselves to as student activists are remarkably similar. For Chris, his trouble-making years were largely spent rallying against South African Apartheid; dropping banners and postering campus with spray-paint cans in hand.

Chris used the same sorts of tactics countless student activists use today, for example in the Refugee campaign. We talk to as many people as we can, disrupt public space and risk arrest in our attempts to raise awareness and rally against injustice. Northbourne Avenue has surely hosted us all, from "Toot Against Apart-

Left: Graffiti left by student activists on the gates of the South African Embassy.
Image Credit: The Canberra Times

Right: Messages painted by student activists the night before the closure of Union Court.
Image Credit: Gabi Meek

Left: An anti-apartheid poster used by student activists like Chris.
Image Credit: Chris Swinbank

Right: Posters put up by the ANU Refugee Action Committee, demanding the university cancel it's Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.
Image Credit: Madeleine Andrews

Left & Right:
Members of the ANU Refugee Action Committee drop a banner from the Baldessin Carpark.
Image Credit: Madeleine Andrews

Left:
Chris and late Gary Foley are arrested at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy after police attempt to dismantle it.
Image Credit: Chris Swinbank

Right:
Two undergraduate, three postgraduate and two other young people are arrested after occupying the Department of Immigration.
Image Credit: Vanamali Hermans

heid" on sunny afternoons in the seventies, to "Toot Against Offshore Processing" during dreary Canberra mornings throughout 2017.

Of course, divisions amongst activists were among the similarities Chris and I identified. During Chris' time as a student activist, Trotskyists, Maoists, Anarchists, Labor Left students, as well as all other brands of revolutionaries competed with one another for media, recruitment and credit when organising. An inevitable fact of leftist activism, this division hasn't changed. We do, however, work together more often than we don't, and possess the same comradery Chris buoyantly reflected on when I asked about his fellow activists, commenting that many of the friends he organised with still share coffee and reminisce about what they used to do.

Like Chris and his comrades, student activists today share a close-knit sense of community. Now, more than ever, we rely on each other for support: helping each other find work, a decent feed, and networks which allow us to survive not only at university, but also off-campus in the "real" world. Although we spend much of our time trying to transform the inequalities and injustices we see, we (like Chris in a different era) also spend our time transforming the little worlds we live in so that every day we can rise again to the struggles that lie ahead.

Students gather at the first 'Who Owns the University?' Forum.

Image Credit: Esther Carlin.

The Privilege of an Activist Upbringing

LIZZIE STORER

Lizzie Storor is an Arts/Law student from Brisbane near to completing her degree and hoping to follow her mum's steps into community and social justice work.

My earliest memory of parental-encouraged activism is when, at the age of ten my mum told me to go harass the Premier of Queensland. To give context, my mum was involved in the campaign to stop sand mining on Stradbroke Island (known as "Straddie"), a beautiful and relatively undeveloped spot about an hour from Brisbane via ferry. Up to Anna Bligh I went and repeated what mum instructed me to say; "Hi Anna, it would be really great if you could stop sand mining on Straddie!". I can't remember Premier Bligh's response precisely but it was something along the lines of "Yes dear I'll see what I can do about it". This was my first taste of a sensation common to student activists: giddy excitement mixed with an unassailable sense of powerlessness.

These days I am extremely grateful that I grew up in an activist household. When visiting my childhood home in Brisbane I look fondly at small reminders of it around the house, like the peg bag in the laundry covered with badges advocating for women's right to chose and banning the bomb. I recall countless election parties, from the euphoria of John Howard's downfall in 2007 when my 1996 birth year champagne was unapologetically popped (and the only time I've ever seen my dad truly plastered) to the depressed haze that fell over our house on Campbell Newman's election night in 2012.

When I compare myself to other people my age and from similar backgrounds, the only real differentiating factor I perceive is my mother. She motivates me with her tenacity, having practised activism since she

was getting arrested in protests against Jon Bjelke-Petersen in the eighties, to campaigning for Children by Choice in the nineties and, after having me and my sister, becoming one of the key players in the fight to end sand mining on Straddie. She also inspires me with little acts of compassion. My dad jokingly complains that mum has always gotten rid of our best cleaners because time and time again she has helped overqualified migrants working for her to get their skills recognised and find more fitting jobs.

However, I wasn't always so thankful to have such a radical mother. In Year 6, fuelled with adolescent angst, I coveted the idea of having a regular mum, like the glamorous mothers at my primary school who had washed in with the gentrification of my inner city suburb. Watching them pull up in their convertibles with Louis Vuitton handbags and Ralph Lauren polos, I cursed my mother for her eco-friendly tote bags and practical footwear. Of all the ways in which I've matured since I was 11, the change I'm most thankful for is my newfound understanding and appreciation for the gift my mother gave me in the form of unapologetic activism.

Being raised in a household where it was normal to talk politics at the dinner table after the initial "how was your day"s had subsided fostered an interest in ideas and activism that I don't see how I could have ever built up otherwise. Mum dragging me to protests, some good – like an anti-uranium mining stunt where where an eight year-old me enjoyed the free yellow cake – and some bad, gave me an early understanding of the emotional effects of demonstrations. It is never easy attending a protest and feeling energised and inspired and then returning to the apathetic "real world", but at least I came to grips with this with my mum at my side.

Because my mother's influence has had such a profound effect on my willingness to engage with activism, I have a great deal of admiration for those who get involved with no familial encouragement. On the other side of the coin, I am also sometimes frustrated with implicit attitudes that I feel some activists have about people not engaged in activism. I feel strongly that if I had been raised by one of the designer-clad mums that I longed to be parented by as 11 year-old then I, too, would likely have been at risk of disengagement. Coming from a wealthy background sheltered from the structural atrocities spawned by neoliberal capitalism, I know firsthand how distant problems facing other Australians can feel. While a lack of personal experience shouldn't excuse a lack of empathy, I still think that, realistically, people who have not had to deal with structural inequality are much more likely to be apathetic about the way it affects other people.

So how can we seek to bridge this divide, without the help of a family member who has helped them to do so? While I do not claim to be an expert on answering this question, I believe part of the answer lies in attempting to increase understanding on both sides. My involvement with activism has varied from different forms of active participation, to being non-existent in semesters when I have prioritised academic and paid work. I have, therefore, been able to see student activism from both an "insider" and "outsider" perspective. I think the main difficulty with engaging with student activism as an "outsider", apart from general apathy, can be the sense that those already involved in student activism will be doing rings around you in terms of confidence and organising ability.

For students who feel like this, I would suggest that the best thing to do is just to go to a meeting for a group that organises around a cause that you care about and stick at it for a while. The 'power' dynamics of most student activist groups are inherently unstable because of the emotional labour and practical time pressure that activism places on students' paid work, study and personal life which makes it difficult to maintain individual momentum. Therefore, it is often the case that after attending only a couple of meetings you can find yourself becoming part of important organising that can make you feel like a proper, contributing member of the group and assuage feelings of inadequacy.

In terms of what can be done by student activist groups to reach out to people who might be interested in activism but have not had a role model to give them the confidence to proceed, it might be useful to remember that an unwillingness to connect with student activism can be rooted in emotions such as embarrassment, guilt, and shame. These emotions can be rooted in a person's awareness that they should be doing something, but instead disengage. Student activists should keep this in mind, even though it can be frustrating when faced with the apparent apathy of the student body when trying to collect petition signatures or hand out leaflets. Ultimately, there is little anyone can do to force people to overcome these emotions and get involved in activism besides being as friendly and approachable as possible, which isn't a problem for nearly all the student activists I know.

Student activists could benefit from ensuring that people whose upbringings have not encouraged activism should not be ignored or alternatively be instantly rejected for their lack of solidarity. Meanwhile, people whose childhoods have been imbued with political apathy should remember that becoming part of a student activism group is often a far less intimidating experience than imagined. The impact of upbringing is only one small part of what leads people to student activism and how it affects them once they are involved.

All I can say is that it is important not to dismiss people who appear disinterested too readily. It is not beneficial for either party to make assumptions about the other. University is, for everyone, a time of intense personal and emotional growth. Regardless of whether a student arrives already prepped to get involved because of their own experiences or exposure to a positive role model growing up, or whether they take a little longer to gain confidence and overcome negative emotions, everyone can make a valuable contribution as a student activist. That's not to say that upbringing isn't incredibly powerful, however. I'm certainly incredibly grateful that my mother gave me the privilege of an activist head-start in life.

"Are You Fucking Serious?"— A Response to Student Union Supporters of Nuclear Energy

Speech by
ROXLEY FOLEY with
an introduction by
ODETTE SHENFIELD

Born of the 80's punk rock Aboriginal land rights movement and raised by some of the country's deadliest-minded activists, academics, and criminals, Roxley Foley is a keeper of a story from a side of this country many have never seen or heard.

At the 2015 National Union of Students National Conference, the Labor Right faction (Student Unity) submitted a motion supporting nuclear energy. The motion lauded South Australian Premier Jay Weatherill's "leadership" on nuclear energy amid his plans to dump nuclear waste in South Australia and his Royal Commission into the Nuclear Fuel Cycle.

As an ANU delegate to the Conference, in fury, I wrote a motion opposing nuclear energy which I moved from the Conference floor. I sent a message to then Fire Keeper of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, legendary activist, and friend Roxley Foley, requesting he write a statement supporting my motion condemning nuclear energy and Premier Jay Weatherill's pro-nuclear actions.

As a result of Roxley's speech, the motion opposing nuclear energy was passed without a single vote in opposition—Student Unity abstained.

A message to the National Union of Students (NUS) from Roxley Foley, Fire Keeper of the Tent Embassy, Canberra.

RE: proposal to support nuclear technology for future sustainability.

Are you fucking serious?

NUS, I'm disappointed we even have to have this conversation but let us make sure we are together on the same page.

Let me get something straight from the start. I ain't no raving "hippie" or "leftie". Many are familiar with my father—Gary Foley's—work, but may not be familiar with the work of my mother's father. My grandfather Dr Dennis Matthews was a professor of nuclear physics at Flinders University. He studied in America at the height of the dream of the atomic age when the West thought the atom would save the world. What he discovered in his studies and from direct experience was quite the opposite and he became one of the lead whistle-blowers of the nuclear industry.

I was privileged to learn from his knowledge and to witness his example. I grew up surrounded by archives of the litany of accidents

and abuses perpetrated by the industry and travelled the country to witness the destruction first hand by his side.

So forgive me, but I take this battle personally. It's personal because it's my communities that are removed to mine the uranium. It's my communities that are sued when we say no to the dumps.

Why is it always the land and people that suffer so that men can circle jerk over their egos and play games of God and money?

Let us be clear, every independent report ever released has stated the same thing...Nuclear energy in Australia is a joke and a bad and dangerous joke to the extreme. Cost efficiency is a forgery. Look at the history of the industry. General Electric and Westinghouse are prime examples. Perfection of technology is myth. Go for a holiday in Fukushima or Chernobyl if you disagree. I'll await your postcard. Safety of storage is a fiction. Just go look at the decaying and leaking facilities already in place.

My People hold ancient stories about those rocks in the ground you covert so much. It was our duty to make sure they were never disturbed, lest great sickness be delivered upon the land and people.

We have witnessed that death and sickness first-hand because we are forever on the frontlines. Cheap and dangerous extraction methods driven by profit, leaving behind poison and a land devoid of life. Weapons of mass destruction to uphold power over people that now threaten the existence of the planet. Don't even pretend the two are not connected.

My people still suffer the fallout of those early testa in the dessert. Your soldiers are remembered etched in stone memorial. My people remembered in shadows burnt into rock.

Recently the testing sites in Maralinga were handed back to our people. We were told to build a community there and if we just turned over the dirt with shovels we would "probably" be fine.

Thanks, but no thanks. We know better, we know our lore.

There are times when you should listen to those with experience. This is one of those times.

I speak not only as a representative of my family and ancestors who still uphold our duty as custodians and guardians of the land. But also as a student of modern development, world history, and cold hard facts. My agenda is protection of land and people.

My message is simple: To support this motion is to spit in our face and stomp on everything we stand for. Do not expect us to ever walk with you if you choose this road.

I have many friends among your circle, friends I highly respect. It is now up to you to ensure you walk the right path for the future of our land and children.

I have confidence you will all make the right decision.

Trashing the Joint: An Interview with Former ANU Radical Feminist Julia Imogen

BRONTE MCHENRY

Now that it is 2018, Bronte is officially a fifth-year arts student (woah) who has spent the past four years regularly changing her major, undertaking subjects that don't count towards her degree, and productively procrastinating by filling her plate with media-related extracurriculars. She is a proud intersectional feminist with much to say and much to learn.

I have often wondered what it would have been like to be an Australian feminist in the 1970s. To be frank, I have always thought it would have been wildly fun and, accordingly, have often wished I had been born in the late '50s.

This is not just because of the tube tops, t-shirts and sundresses, culottes, tracksuit pants, platform shoes and vests. Neither is it because I am delusional about the disadvantages women faced back then, or because I don't believe we have made significant progress since then.

It is because of the sheer mobilisation of women – something I long to experience. The feminist movement – in the mobile, everywhere-you-look, cannot-escape-it sense – is not alive in Australia. Feminism, of course, is still alive and kicking (the patriarchy in the balls) – but the movement aspect isn't quite there.

Julia Imogen attended the ANU in 1973. She was one of the founders of the ANU Radical Feminists and describes her 1970s-self as a "teenage anarchist". I was fortunate enough to be able to interview her about her glory-days at the ANU, during which she bestowed on me numerous pearls of wisdom.

BM: Tell me a little bit about the founding of the ANU Radical Feminists.
JI: The first meeting was called as a meeting for women's liberation. I would say there were at least 50 people in the room – which is pretty big. I did my year 12 in America the year prior and was radicalised there because of the books I read. [In the meeting] I moved that the group not be called women's liberation, but rather, radical feminists.

BM: What did the word radical mean back then?
JI: I am not sure what other people thought it meant, as they might not have read the same books as I had ... A radical feminist was somebody who was not a member of a left-wing, male-dominated group; we rejected these groups because they were just hopeless. But we still had class consciousness, so we rejected middle-class feminist. We also rejected feminism as an adjunct to other left-wing politics. Radical feminism was radical because it went to the real root, which was, patriarchy. Radical feminism saw the fundamental classes in society as male and female.

BM: I find this fascinating because I would interpret the term differently today.
JI: Radical feminism came from America, because of people like Shulamith Firestone and Robin Morgan. Women's liberation came out of the UK, and was more often connected to left-wing politics. The use of the term liberation refers to liberation politics and liberation movements in third-world countries. By adopting the term liberation, which had referred to anti-colonial movements, it showed women were being seen as colonised to a certain extent.

BM: That is understandable given the rich history they adopted along with it. Can you describe the political climate on campus and the successes of the Radical Feminists at the ANU?
JI: We were just angry. We were really, really angry. But, society had conspired to present us with the perfect platform for enacting our anger for about five years. We won the Students' Association at an election and you could say we trashed the joint.

BM: Can you elaborate on what you mean by "trashing the joint"?
JI: When an angry minority takes over an organisation, the takeover will have often been enabled by preceding

left-wing politicos but won't be inherently disciplined or tied to existing power structures. This was true for us. When we attended meetings and undertook our duties we accepted no authority and then we began to fragment and our internal fights were more important than any others. Meanwhile, a reasonable number of "normal" students were quite interested in politics, democratising the University and shining a light on Indigenous issues and even women's issues, but they were just turned off by us. We weren't thinking of recruiting and building a movement on campus for students. This helped to form a vacuum into which truly ghastly right-wingers stepped, who were able to play on perceptions of us as shrill, alienating, irresponsible trashers. It wasn't all our fault, though. It was partly a natural turning of the circle, especially as some older students who had been radicalised in the anti-Springbok tours and Vietnam campaigns were finishing their Honours or postgraduate degrees and leaving.

BM: It sounds intense!
JI: And I should mention that Liz O'Brien, SA president, was an older, more stable operator. Towards the end I withdrew, though, because it became very sectionalised. It was supposed to be a collective, with no power politics, but there was the most incredible one-upmanship going on through political correctness. This was especially true when political lesbianism entered the scene.

BM: Political lesbianism as a way to avoid patriarchal sex?
JI: Exactly. The idea was that if you engaged with heterosexuality you were sleeping with the enemy. Quite a lot of women became lesbians as a political choice, rather than because of a sexual desire.

BM: It sounds quite divisive.
JI: They were incredibly paranoid. You could enter a room and instantly feel the paranoid vibes shooting around.

BM: Was this true of all feminists, and all factions of feminism?
JI: No, this was just students. There were also women a bit older than us – who married in the '60s, who might have already had children – who were fighting in other ways.

BM: What did they think of you?
JI: They were very dubious about us young and wild radical feminists. They didn't want to be associated with us. Then there were people who had graduated – often with law degrees – who had been recruited into the public service. They were lobbying, networking, interacting with the government and securing funding; they set up the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre. But it was us who ran the Centre, which was largely a phone service back then.

BM: Was there a huge demand for these services?
JI: There would be about one serious call every few weeks.

BM: What do you mean by serious?
JI: A woman who seriously wanted help because she had really been raped.

BM: That is incredibly interesting; demand far exceeds supply for these kinds of services today.
JI: That's because you just couldn't talk about it. Nobody talked about it … We also went to court with people if cases went to trial. The police saw us as opposing them; all authority instantly reacted to anything feminist. We were actually called into a meeting with the police commissioner … I didn't go but I was told he said that there were understandably more rapes in spring because of the hormones. Because it is mating season.

BM: That doesn't even make sense.
JI: [Laughs] He might have sounded more sensible if he proposed that because it was warmer it was more congenial to be out late at night stalking women.

BM: Most rapes occurred, and still occur, in the home, by acquaintances, where there is heating!
JI: Exactly.

BM: So, would you say that activism was effective in the '70s?
JI: I think it was effective. It did change things. Take police commissioners as an example – there has been a big shift in public discourse. You had police commissioners talking about hormones in spring, and now you have them talking about domestic violence.

BM: And what made feminism and activism so effective?
JI: We took inspiration from history; we drew strength from past struggles. Hmmm…although I should also say we also were very influenced by hippies.

BM: Part of me doesn't want to ask this, but I can't help myself … what you do think of feminism today?
JI: I meet a lot of amazing young women, through my work largely, and they really impress me. But the lack of historical knowledge is astonishing. I often just feel like I have been there, done that, seen all this.

BM: What do you think has caused this?
JI: In part, I think that there are just so many books out there geared at young adults specifically. Think of the rise of young adult fiction; everyone has read Twilight! When I was growing up, these books didn't exist. You went from children's books to adult books at the age of 14.

BM: So, this growing genre is to the detriment of teenage awareness and education?
JI: Well, I'm only talking about what I see through my work. Reading books is just one way that kids learn about the world but it was important for me, personally.

BM: [Chuckles] You work in publishing …
JI: Ironically, I work with young adult fiction authors and books. I do think some of these books have a lot to

offer. The issue is that people keep reading these books until they are 25 and never stop because this is what they have grown up with. It would be heresy to say this at work though!

BM: There really are just so many books out there now – and this isn't even considering the online literary scene or the media.
JI: It is just incredibly difficult to find great books today, because of the sheer number available, which means people don't read them. It just frustrates me that everything always has to be relearnt and that society is so ahistorical now.

I used to wonder what it would have been like to be an Australian feminist in the 1970s. I need not wonder any longer, however, as Julia's stories have satisfied my curiosity and painted a clearer picture of life as a second-wave feminist.

Looking at feminism on campus today, I do not feel the division that Julia described, and I do not feel like I am in competition with the other feminists around me. In fact, I am privileged to attend a university where student leaders of all gender identities identify as feminists and where these student leaders have held power for many elections past. I am also proud to be an active member of the ANU Women's Department, where solidarity and support are BYO-ed by the bucket load.

Ultimately, comparing 1973 to 2017 got me thinking: if today's feminists are diverse in identity, united in aspirations and bonded by ideology, when they weren't in 1973, then surely a stronger and more sustainable feminist movement is feasible?

Perhaps our nostalgia will be satisfied sometime soon. Perhaps, just as velvet and corduroy came back in fashion and took us all by surprise so too will feminism, and we will have our movement once again.






“She Wouldn’t Leave Well Enough Alone”

KIRA GODOROJA-PRIECKAERTS

Kira is a Canberra based artist working primarily in the disciplines of drawing, printmaking and painting. Her works often explore social issues with a personal perspective. She is a proud feminist. You can find her works on her Instagram @kam_gp.

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT
Image Credit: ANU Open Research Repository
1. Penelope Hope, left, past President of the ANU Club for Women and Helen Crompton, right, then President, blow out the candles on the Club’s 21st birthday cake, 1983.
2. Bluestocking Day rally in Union Court, part of national celebrations held to draw attention to the needs of women studying at Australian universities and colleges, 1982.
3. Meeting of the campaign to establish a Women’s Studies program at ANU, 1974.
OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT
Image Credit Women’s Electoral Lobby history project
4. Women’s Electoral Lobby 1992 National Conference: Betty Little.
5. Women’s Electoral Lobby members Celebrating the passage of abortion law reform legislation in Western Australia, 1998.
6. Women’s Electoral Lobby 1992 National Conference.

This work is inspired by the generations of female activists in the ANU community. All the faces are based on images of activists from the ANU archives.

Based on archival images (OPPOSITE PAGE) from the ANU Open Research Repository and the Women’s Electoral Lobby history project

Driven by Duty (Or, How to Radicalise Your Friends)

SYLVIA GUNN

Sylvia is a PPE Honours student who spends her life thinking obsessively about how to be a good person, supposedly preparing for her moral philosophy thesis. She also loves drawing, travelling, and cooking extravagant meals for her friends.

When I was a child, my parents were part of a group called Friends of South West Rocks. They, along with a few other local greenies, were outraged when the Council approved a development that would destroy a pristine environment and cut off a wildlife path used by endangered species. Rather than standing by, they contacted the Environmental Defenders Office to help them sue the Council. After a gruelling campaign and a long court case, they won. There was nothing in it for them. In fact, our lives became much harder; suddenly, local developers weren't especially keen to hire them for their architectural work. Eventually, we left the town. Despite this they never looked back – they both continue their activism and they instilled in me a fierce determination to fix the world's problems as I encounter them.

In the campaigning sphere, we spend day after day convincing people we've never met to come to events, sign our petitions, vote our way, or donate to our cause. Those who agree and comply are good people, while those who don't are somehow doing something wrong. Sometimes we claim this as our own failure. We could have tried harder, phrased something differently. However, sometimes the people we target don't care enough, or in the right ways.

When they say yes, it's often because a passionate campaigner inspires them – they aren't driven by duty or calculated altruism. They'll throw a 20 to your campaign just because you took the time to talk to them. Volunteering for Fossil Free has been no different. The academics at the ANU will sign your open letter provided you smile at them, don't waste their time and act like everyone is doing it. Of course, according to the behavioural economist, this is only natural – but it's hugely frustrating. It doesn't just delay progress; it makes us feel like some people will never truly care.

What is even worse is getting the same responses from your friends – the ones you can't manipulate with smiles and cupcakes. Activism and campaigning is often enjoyable, but it is not just a hobby. When your friends won't come to a protest, you're not just confused or frustrated because you want to hang out with them. The idea that activism is not important to someone you love, despite them holding similar political beliefs to yourself, is near incomprehensible.

Friends seem like the ideal recruiting ground, because you understand them so well and have a fair gauge about how sympathetic they are to particular issues. But more often than not, the people who join already engage in many different campaigns and already link their political opinions to behaviour. You will see the same faces at a Fossil Free sit-in, as at a RAC protest, as at a protest against university fee hikes, and most of them will have a rainbow filter on their Facebook DP, or have shared something about Streets ice cream. This may give you the impression that people are either oriented towards achieving social-change or they're not. But I do not agree.

Often, those who don't engage in social movements still care about the relevant issues; they follow them in the news, talk about them and even study them. For some, it is simple because they physically or practically cannot engage, and this is quite understandable. These are often the people social movements are fighting for, or people whose time and energy is dedicated elsewhere – positive influence is certainly not limited to activism. For others, what is missing is the belief that their work can make an impact. Although they want political change, they don't see their own action, at least not in the activist sphere, as the catalyst for it. This is a perfectly rational position and no one thinks they are God's gift to the movement. Rather, activists are driven by more than purely a consideration of their personal impact. This consequentialist outlook, although predicted by political scientists and economists alike, is neither universal, nor especially helpful. Leaving this position behind opens up opportunity for impressive group impact.

Little Bay, South West Rocks, 2013

Image Credit: Sylvia Gunn

For the activist, or the volunteer, motivation comes from a place of emotion and ethical intuition. Some of this is self-interested: we want to look like good people in others' eyes and gain the approval of members of the organisations we like. There is a certain element of selfishness in most actions we take, but this does not necessarily make us bad – simply human. Additional to this, many have a deep emotional connection to politics; they are devastated by campaign losses and joyous about campaign wins, celebrating each small success along the way. For others, action stems directly from a sense of duty.

With these outlooks in tow, it makes sense to be frustrated at people who are unwilling to contribute to the cause. How can others fail to feel morally or emotionally obliged to do *something*? This is not to say that activism and campaigning always feels burdensome. Ethics is not just about doing things you don't enjoy because it is your duty to do so. It can mean choosing the enjoyable thing with the most positive impact or pushing yourself to enjoy different things because of their moral value.

Perhaps you feel that we should make the world better simply because we can, or that we should improve the conditions for those that have been wronged, in the name of justice. Perhaps you see group responsibility as divisible into tangible individual parts, or perhaps you want to do as much as you feasibly can. There is value in considering your own ethical drive and discussing it with activists and non-activists alike, to find common ground. Rather than approaching ethics as a judgement between good and bad, we should approach it with concepts of moral intuition, acknowledging people's different upbringings, concepts of "the good", and sense of ability to promote it. This can help us understand our friends, our family members, and ourselves better. Moreover, it can promote a deeper understanding of meaning in life and might even draw the least expected people towards activism.

Ultimately, not everyone shares the same ethical intuitions. However, people are often more adaptable than we expect. In campaigning, it is generally most efficient to appeal to existing values, establishing a captivating narrative to generate action from those who are already somewhat on side. That said, we are part of a world – and at ANU, a university – dominated by neoliberal rationalism, where we are told to follow our passions but given little guidance as to what those should be. In our own lives, we have the time to get down to the nitty-gritty, to question existing norms of individual behaviour and choice, dissipate judgement and help make the people in our lives, ourselves included, better activists.

Dissent and Disengagement: Canberra Student Protest Against the Vietnam War

Article on protests outside Parliament House. The Canberra Times, May 7, 1970.

Image Credit: The Canberra Times

Two views expressed by demonstrators outside Parliament House yesterday.

1,000 march in war protest

About 1,000 demonstrators clustered under umbrellas outside Parliament House yesterday to listen to Federal Labor Parliamentarians and the ALP candidate for the ACT, Mr K. Enderby, during the Canberra Vietnam Moratorium.

Police estimated that 800 people, many of school age, marched from Garema Place to Parliament House where they were joined by other protesters and spectators. A handful of anti-moratorium demonstrators were in evidence, including some members of the National Socialist Party of Australia.

The Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Senator Murphy, the first Parliamentarian to address the crowd, said the Vietnam war was "dragging humanity down", and Australia should get out of it immediately.

Mr Calwell (Lab, Vic) was cheered when he said he had consistently held the view since 1964 that the Vietnam war was unwinnable.

The Leader of the Opposition, Mr Whitlam, told the crowd to express their opposition to the war by voting for Mr Enderby in the forthcoming ACT by-election.

Mr Whitlam cautioned against violence at moratorium demonstrations which he said was just what the Government wanted.

Dr Cairns (Lab, Vic) said, "The war in Vietnam is a war that plans the methodical extermination of a people".

Dr Cairns will hold a press conference outside Parliament House at 5pm today, to provide information and answer questions about the moratorium campaign.

Mr Enderby said people had told him not to get involved in the moratorium because he might lose votes.

"You have got to stand up and be counted", he said.

About 800 people had gathered in Garema Place soon after 11am. Many of them were moratorium badges — about 2,000 were sold for the demonstration —and many others were stickers.

ANNA HIMMELREICH

Anna is a recent ANU graduate in History and Indonesian Studies with an interest in uncovering the intersecting histories of protest, (de)colonisation and the city.

This article was first published in the *Futures* issue of *Demos* on May 15 2017.

The 1960s, student activism and the Vietnam War conjure images of protest, change and radicalism. At the time, radical Australian students were referred to by politicians as "political bikies who pack-rape democracy" (Billy Snedden, 1970) and have since been referred to as a "whole youth generation who were edgy, who directly confronted the dominant mainstream with demands for change" (Simon Marginson, 2005). But what about Canberra? How did students at the Australian National University protest Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War? In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Canberra and the ANU were both small and relatively newly established. The ANU had a small undergraduate population and was dominated by older, part-time students, as well as the children of public servants. Canberra also lacked the union presence that contributed to demonstrations and stop work actions in Melbourne and was full of government employees who were less likely to vocalise their dissent or to strike. Given this, it is not surprising that student protest in Canberra was smaller than in other Australian capital cities. However, there was still dissent and protest from students who used a variety of protest methods that amplified their small numbers. From the ANU Students' Association, *Woroni* and *The Canberra Times* archives a narrative emerges of a vocal minority of Canberra students who protested the Vietnam War. We should bear in mind that the archives of many smaller, more radical groups are kept privately and so the image is weighted towards institutions whose history is publicly recorded.

ANU STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

On the whole, the ANU Students' Association (ANUSA) — the representative body for undergraduate students — kept itself removed from politics and the debate over the Vietnam War. However, with a new Student Representative Council (SRC) elected each year, ANUSA's position was far from static. An "anonymous" contributor to the 1967 *Current Affairs Bulletin,* who was known to be University of New South Wales student Richard Walsh, wrote that due to its location the ANU "might well have been expected to prove the most dynamic and involved campus in the country," but "undergraduate life is distinguished by its apathy, conservatism and indifference to national causes" (Foster & Varghese, 2009, p212). The conservatism of ANUSA can be seen in a long running debate over whether the SRC should take a position on any political matters or hold itself independent. In May 1965, a motion for the SRC to condemn the sending of troops to Vietnam was lost as some thought the SRC was "not a competent body to issue dictums on student opinion" and that the motion "set a dangerous precedent" (ANU Archives: ANUA 331.15, SRC Minutes, 1965). The SRC decided instead to call a Special General Meeting to discuss the motion and later passed a motion declaring itself incompetent to decide "political questions in the name of the student body' (ANUA 331.125, SRC Minutes 1965). In 1966 ANUSA conducted a survey of ANU students and found that their views generally mirrored the general population in supporting Australia's involvement in Vietnam. 65 per cent of students, from a 20 per cent sample group, supported Australia's military commitment to Vietnam, but only 32 per cent supported the sending of conscripts (ANUA 331.3.8.354).

The SRC was beleaguered by internal problems and infighting, even passing a motion to disband in 1971 — although this motion was later declared void (ANUA 331.5.17, President's Report 1971). This affected their ability to carry out advocacy work as much of their focus was directed inward. During this time ANUSA campaigned for internal campus issues, including for a dentist on campus and a childcare centre (ANUA 331.1.15 15, SRC Minutes 1965). However, ANUSA also supported the establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in 1972 and campaigned for the first scholarships for Aboriginal students (Abschol) through the late 1960s, demonstrating that students were willing to engage with external, national issues as well as internal politics.

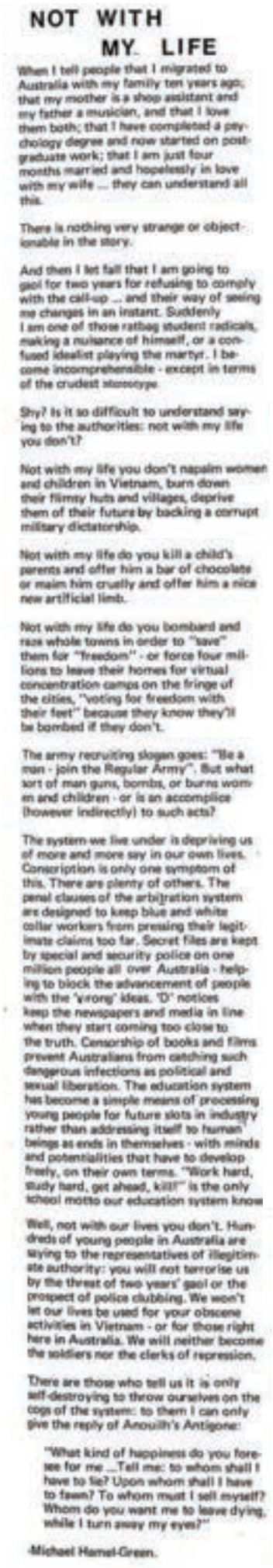
Changes in feeling toward Australia's involvement in Vietnam in the general population were reflected within ANUSA. Towards the end of the 1960s ANUSA and ANU student activism increased. The 1969 *Bulletin* survey of university campuses ranked student activism from "frigid" to "hot". The ANU was in the middle with a rating of "simmering steadily" (Foster &Vaughan, 214). An example of this is the AGM of 1969 passing a motion declaring the ANU a sanctuary for draft resisters, requiring the ANU to provide accommodation and physical assistance to any men resisting conscription. While the motion passed at the AGM, it generated sufficient controversy for a student referendum to be called on the matter, where the motion was soundly defeated (ANUA 331. 3. 8 Minutes 1969). While ANUSA remained preoccupied with internal problems and were reluctant to speak on behalf of a diverse student population, active students gravitated to the ANU Labour Club.

ANU LABOUR CLUB AND VIETNAM ACTION COMMITTEE

There was a core of protest organisation in the ANU Labour Club. Labour students first mobilised at the Australian Labour Students Federation (ALSF) Conference, held in Canberra in May 1965. This led to one of the first student protests against the War, a sit-in on Alinga St which resulted in 15 students being arrested and fined £10 each (*The Canberra Times*, 1965, p4). In April 1966 the Vietnam Action Committee (VAC), with a membership of 50 students, was formed within the ANU Labour Club. Its aims were to "organise peaceful, educative protests"'and to "reprint important articles from overseas journals" (ANUA 336, ANU Labour Club minutes, 1966). The VAC achieved its second aim with a campus newsletter, as well as publishing articles in the ANU Labour Club publication, *The Crucible*. Much of this organising was based in a nondescript house in Ainslie — 30 Canning Street. This house was a hub of activity for the ANU Labour Club and its many affiliate groups. For some time there were weekly Tuesday organising meetings at Canning Street and it was the contact address for many demonstration organisers.

Jack Waterford (Canberra Times, 2014) writes of the Canning Street house:

> (It) housed at any one time between six and fifteen people, plus people crashing while travelling to and from Sydney or Melbourne. We had



NOT WITH MY LIFE

When I tell people that I migrated to Australia with my family ten years ago; that my mother is a shop assistant and my father a musician, and that I love them both; that I have completed a psychology degree and now started on post-graduate work; that I am just four months married and hopelessly in love with my wife ... they can understand all this.

There is nothing very strange or objectionable in the story.

And then I let fall that I am going to gaol for two years for refusing to comply with the call-up ... and their way of seeing me changes in an instant. Suddenly I am one of those ratbag student radicals, making a nuisance of himself, or a confused idealist playing the martyr. I become incomprehensible - except in terms of the crudest stereotype.

Shy? Is it so difficult to understand saying to the authorities: not with my life you don't?

Not with my life you don't napalm women and children in Vietnam, burn down their flimsy huts and villages, deprive them of their future by backing a corrupt military dictatorship.

Not with my life do you kill a child's parents and offer him a bar of chocolate or maim him cruelly and offer him a nice new artificial limb.

Not with my life do you bombard and raze whole towns in order to "save" them for "freedom" - or force four millions to leave their homes for virtual concentration camps on the fringe of the cities, "voting for freedom with their feet" because they know they'll be bombed if they don't.

The army recruiting slogan goes: "Be a man - join the Regular Army". But what sort of man guns, bombs, or burns women and children - or is an accomplice (however indirectly) to such acts?

The system we live under is depriving us of more and more say in our own lives. Conscription is only one symptom of this. There are plenty of others. The penal clauses of the arbitration system are designed to keep blue and white collar workers from pressing their legitimate claims too far. Secret files are kept by special and security police on one million people all over Australia - helping to block the advancement of people with the 'wrong' ideas. 'D' notices keep the newspapers and media in line when they start coming too close to the truth. Censorship of books and films prevent Australians from catching such dangerous infections as political and sexual liberation. The education system has become a simple means of processing young people for future slots in industry rather than addressing itself to human beings as ends in themselves - with minds and potentialities that have to develop freely, on their own terms. "Work hard, study hard, get ahead, kill!" is the only school motto our education system knows.

Well, not with our lives you don't. Hundreds of young people in Australia are saying to the representatives of illegitimate authority: you will not terrorise us by the threat of two years' gaol or the prospect of police clubbing. We won't let our lives be used for your obscene activities in Vietnam - or for those right here in Australia. We will neither become the soldiers nor the clerks of repression.

There are those who tell us it is only self-destroying to throw ourselves on the cogs of the system: to them I can only give the reply of Anouilh's Antigone:

"What kind of happiness do you foresee for me ...Tell me: to whom shall I have to lie? Upon whom shall I have to fawn? To whom must I sell myself? Whom do you want me to leave dying, while I turn away my eyes?"

Michael Hamel-Green.

An article in Woroni criticising conscription for the Vietnam War. July 21, 1970.

Image Credit: Woroni

> learned to silkscreen posters, and the house was the starting point for expeditions going out leafleting, postering or painting up the town – because of which, a police car was sometimes parked up the street, waiting for people to return home with incriminating materials, such as paint brushes.

Many students supported the efforts of the Labour Party in 1965 and 1966 as Arthur Calwell focused much of his campaign on Vietnam and conscription. However, after the Liberal Party won the 1966 election with an increased majority, many were demoralised and were reluctant to trust campaigns for change that used traditional tactics. This led to a splintering of groups and diversification of protest methods, with students engaging in non-compliance and action outside of traditional political structures.

ALTERNATIVE PROTEST GROUPS

In the late 1960s new groups emerged on the ANU campus: the Draft Resisters Union, the Vietnam Day Moratorium Committee, the Conscientious Objectors Advisory Committee and Students for a Democratic Society (NAA, A61222). Perhaps unsurprisingly, few records from these groups are easily accessible. Much of their history lies outside of the public record. However, the limited mentions of the groups in ANUSA Minutes and *Woroni* articles suggest that they had limited numbers and influence on the general student population. Students groups were often aligned with the various philosophies of Maoists, Trotskyists or other splinter groups gaining traction at different points in time (Curthoys, 1992, p 91). At the ANU these groups all competed for students' time and attention. Many students were alienated by the radical and militant tactics of some groups, or were confused by the different philosophies and struggled to engage meaningfully with the protests. Another deterrent for student protest was that many actions were organised by small groups of elites with closed ranks.

On the other hand, there were protesters who said that students did not go far enough. In a letter to *Woroni* Terry Maher wrote that the "'May sit-in' and all other 'peaceful protests' are INEFFECTIVE and hence futile... a positive example of an EFFECTIVE protest is the student uprising in Paris... I suggest that Australian students should learn from that a basic lesson in power politics" (1968, p 2). Clearly, when it came to protest, students' aims and ambitions varied greatly.

METHODS OF PROTEST

Methods of protest used by ANUSA, the ANU Labour Club and other smaller groups varied but were often designed for maximum media impact. They included teach-ins, sit ins, demonstrations, anti-war concerts, vigils, and protest meetings. Many of the tactics came from other Australian campus groups and also mimicked movements in the USA. The first ever teach-in in Australia was held at the ANU, in Childers St Hall in July 1965. Around 800 people, the majority of whom were students, attended from 7pm to 2.30am (ANUSA 336, 1965). The ANU teach-in garnered significant press coverage, with *The Australian* reprinting the speech of ANU Professor of East Asian History CP Fitzgerald in full (Curthoys, p 91). Teach-ins were seen by students to be a "striking advance in a rational approach to the problems of life and international co-operation" and an alternative to more rowdy demonstrations (Woroni, 1965, p 4). The rational aspect was appealing to students reluctant to engage in direct action. Teach-ins quickly became a tactic used by various groups, but particularly university groups with their easy access to academics. Monash and Melbourne Universities held teach-ins in the weeks following the ANU teach-in and not long after this churches started to hold preach ins.

Another popular tactic in anti-Vietnam movements was the sit in. Some sit ins aimed to disrupt daily life to garner attention and media coverage. These were often on major roads, causing traffic delays and getting the attention of many in the community. Major sit ins took place on Alinga St in 1965 and 1971. In 1971, 190 students were arrested and it garnered significant attention from crowds of onlookers, as well as from the media (NAA, A432.2, item 302). This sit in was part of a "Day of

Megan Stoyles wearing a "Make Love Not War" shirt on October 20, 1966, during an anti-Vietnam war protest. Octover 21, 1966.

Image Credit: The Canberra Times

Rage" where 2000 people demonstrated in Canberra City Centre. Other sit ins occupied public space so as to voice their opposition to the powerful. There was a sit in held on Adelaide Avenue, outside The Lodge in May 1968 and another inside the Vietnamese Embassy in July 1969. Every Friday in the month leading up to protests at the American Embassy on July 4th 1969, the ANU Labour Club occupied a different government building in Canberra (NAA, A432, item 311).

A defining image of Vietnam War protest in Australia is the streets of people taking part in the Vietnam Moratorium. The first and the biggest Moratorium march took place on May 8th 1970. An estimated 150,000 people took to the streets of major cities, with up to 80,000 people in Melbourne alone (Wood, 2013). The Canberra Moratorium was significantly smaller and was held two days prior to the national Moratorium. It attracted 800 people who marched from Garema Place to Parliament House, where other protesters met them for a teach-in on the topic of "Vietnam in the World Context" (Canberra Times, 1970, p1). ANUSA asked for all lectures to be cancelled on the May Moratorium Day, so that students could attend (Canberra Times, 1970, p 5).

Action against conscription was another part of protesting the Vietnam War. Methods of protesting National Service and conscription largely involved non-compliance, including refusing to register, burning draft cards, and filling in false draft cards (NAA, A432, item 319). "Fuck the Draft" pamphlets were distributed with instructions on how to resist and people hosted "Fill in a Falsie" parties, where people were encouraged to fill in false draft cards to clog up the systems of the Department (Woroni, 1970, p5). However, not many students participated in these actions, with the majority content to register and defer their service. In 1972, 11 students, two of them members of the SRC, wrote publically that they had refused to comply with the National Service Act (Canberra Times, 1972, p3). It was this small group of students who attracted significant media coverage.

The Vietnam War is often called the first "Television War", as the nightly news was full of coverage from Vietnam. The protests against Vietnam were then the first "television protests". This may go some of the way to explaining how the opposition and protests were able to occupy the media and nation's imagination. The actions of protesters were designed to garner maximum media exposure. Shock tactics like burning the Australian or the American flag, or smearing red paint on soldiers at marches, could be done by a small number of activists and generate significant media attention. ANU Student Helen Jarvis who was involved in the ANU Labour Club, was part of a protest outside the Lodge in 1966 where protesters were arrested for burning the Australian flag. Jarvis said: "Unfortunately for the authorities, when they went to charge us, they found there was no law against burning the flag. The only possible charge was the misdemeanour of 'burning rubbish in a public place'. They couldn't call the flag rubbish, so they decided not to charge us" (Green Left Weekly, 1995). Some protesters were intent on going to jail and did not pay fines deliberately so that they would be imprisoned (The Canberra Times, 1969, p 3). This provided added publicity for a minor offence. A good example of this is the protests against President Johnson's visit to Australia. While 500,000 people turned out to support and see him in Sydney and Melbourne, much of the media focus was on the protests. Only 300 people demonstrated at the Rex Hotel — where the President was staying — but it made international news. ANU student Megan Stoyles achieved notoriety after a photograph of her wearing a "Make Love Not War" t-shirt appeared in a 1966 edition of *Time Magazine* (Curthoys, p 72).

Students' motivation for protest varied, but the majority can be drawn into the categories of either Old Left or New Left. Some of the earliest protests were organised by the Old Left, including the Eureka League, the youth wing of the Communist Party of Australia. Some of the ALP groups were also from the Old Left. They supported the National Liberation Front in Viet-

nam through collections of money and campaigned for North Vietnamese victory, rather than an end to the conflict.

The New Left was part of a broader movement of dissent against society. They were non-communist and generally from the growing middle classes, which included many students. One Canberra student who epitomised the New Left was Stephen Padgham. Padgham, whom Jack Waterford refers to as "Canberra's most prominent draft dodger" was an ANU Law student from 1968 onwards (The Canberra Times, 2012). He went to jail twice, each time for seven days, for refusing to register for the draft. He also had two periods on the run from police. He spent two months living with his girlfriend in the then all female Ursula Hall, where staff knew of his whereabouts but kept quiet (Foster & Varghese, p214). He was finally sighted by two plain-clothes police officers on campus and was taken into custody after being plucked from Sullivan's Creek, where he had attempted to make a getaway.

In an interview with *Woroni* just before he went underground he said: "The Draft Resistance Movement is just a small part of a revolution, a revolution to enable the fullest and freest flowering of the human personality. We are trying to escape from becoming cogs in a machine, we are endeavouring to become human. No longer can we dream or pay lip service to ideals when humanity is being crushed around us" (1972, p 3). Padgham's protest against Australia's involvement in Vietnam and against conscription tied into a broader narrative of protest against societal norms. This can be seen in student support of Aboriginal people, with students active in the Freedom Ride, the establishment of the Tent Embassy and the Abschol (Aboriginal Scholarship) program (ANUA 331.15 minutes 1972). It was also linked to protests against South African apartheid and the Springbok Tour, support for feminism and women's liberation and nuclear disarmament. ANU student Helen Jarvis, who participated in the protests against President Johnson's visit, chained herself to the Civic Hotel bar in 1965 and demanded service (Green Left Weekly, 1995). Jack Waterford and others from the Canning St house regularly spray-painted "Smash Apartheid" on the walls of the South African Embassy (NAA, A12389. A30.9.87 1972). These actions took place outside the usual political party structure and were part of an emerging rejection of traditional political action.

Students today might ask "Whatever happened to student activism?" Nostalgia and mythologising have created a picture of the late 1960s and early 1970s as the glory days of student protest and counter culture. But the conservatism of the majority of Canberra students shows that student activism was never a large part of student life. Students were hindered by varying aims, ambitions, and philosophies, a disengaged and often apathetic population, and an inwardly focussed Students' Association. Canberra and the ANU were never centres of protest against the Vietnam War and were overshadowed by bigger and more established capital cities. However, the actions of the small number of students involved prove that a concerted push from a few can have an impact that bears remembering.

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Redefining Normality with Acts of Everyday Activism

MIA SANDGREN

Mia Sandgren is a *Demos* Editor and has just graduated with a Bachelor of Philosophy (Honours) from the ANU. During her studies, Mia completed and tutored courses in geography, sustainability, and environmental science.

Like many students, I came to university hoping to find a way to make the world a more just and sustainable place. After a few environmental science courses that explored the causes and consequences of climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, food insecurity, and resource depletion, I was overwhelmed by the scale of these challenges. I questioned whether I, as an individual, could play a role in addressing them. How could turning off the lights or choosing re-useable shopping bags help? Surely I would need to become the Secretary General of the United Nations, or achieve something similarly as out-of-reach, to make any real impact on the major challenges confronting humanity and the environment! Despite my initial scepticism, however, I have become convinced that our individual actions are important and influential.

As students, we are in a particularly good position to engage in acts of everyday activism. We can use our everyday actions to redefine normality and initiate societal changes that will help to address major environmental challenges. I propose that behavioural changes and attempts to change ourselves, induced by education and reinforced by systemic changes, are true and important acts of student activism.

STUDENTS: THE IDEAL EVERYDAY ACTIVISTS

As attested to by the other articles in this issue, many students are inclined to fight for social change and to live more sustainably because we are exposed to the most up-to-date evidence about the challenges facing our world. For example, many learn about the injustices caused by climatic changes world-wide and wish to reduce the incidences of those injustices. Thus, we choose not to eat meat, we avoid wasting food and electricity, we choose recycled paper, we volunteer our time to causes we care about, and we seek to do ethical, meaningful work rather than simply following the money. I believe that these are all meaningful acts of student activism. These actions can stem from our privileged position as educated young people but help reform a deeply engrained system for the benefit of many.

Regardless of our political views or level of environmental consciousness, we as students often live relatively environmentally and socially sustainable lifestyles because our budgets constrain our behaviour. For example, many students are financially unable to own a car and so use low-emission transport options such as bicycles and public transport. As students, we choose to deliberately reduce our level of income. This forces us to reduce our level of resource consumption. In our everyday lives, while still living within a capitalist economy, we challenge the assumption that high incomes, fancy possessions and rampant consumerism are the keys to happiness and contentment. We choose to gain a sense of belonging and fulfilment from our learning and interactions with others, rather than our possessions.

I consider such personal behaviours which contribute to producing favourable social or environmental outcomes as "acts of everyday activism". Acts of everyday activism work to change notions of normality and alter systems so that they are more sustainable. The concepts of normality and systems can help us further unpack why acts of everyday activism are important.

EDUCATION → ALTERING BEHAVIOUR → REDEFINING NORMALITY

We know that people's actions are guided by what is considered normal (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002; Shove and Walker, 2010) and are driven by the systems in which they live (Burkhout, 2002; Urry, 2004). That is, we might not be able to choose whether to live sustainably or not, simply because of the options available to us. It takes a remarkable amount of mental energy, sometimes financial capacity, and often physical effort to resist norms and work outside of systems (Gifford, 2011). The two previous observations about why students are everyday activists suggest that changes to personal behaviours are, firstly, encouraged by education, and, secondly, enforced by systems. Indeed, there are, broadly, two sets of circumstances in which we are willing to make sacrifices and change our behaviours for a wider good.

Firstly, we might take action when we really, really care about the consequences of our actions (Stern, 1999). This is where many students find themselves, constantly working harder to make a small contribution to saving the planet or improving society because they know and care about a bigger picture. Indeed, education can sometimes encourage behavioural change.

Secondly, we tend to make these sacrifices when it becomes normal to make these sacrifices (Schultz, 2014; Costanza et al., 2017). It may become normal to make sacrifices through a process of gradual transition: perhaps a large group of students may sacrifice their personal meat consumption because they learn about and really, really care about the impact of animal agriculture on the environment, or find meat prohibitively expensive. Over time – as these values and new ways of living are passed on to the next generation – a new social norm can be created. Others begin to make the same sacrifices because the system begins to accommodate a new type of behaviour and the co-benefits of the behaviour become easier to recognise. More restaurants serve vegetarian food, the cost of meat alternatives decreases, and evidence may emerge that the new behaviour improves physical health. Academics would say that the system of protein consumption would have undergone a "paradigm shift" (Dyball and Newell, 2015). This suggests that to harness the environmental benefits of behaviour changes, it is necessary to change what is "normal".

Transportation in Canberra is another example. Many people buy cars because it is relatively normal to do so and because urban layouts and the system of streets in cities encourage and sometimes even necessitate car dependency. To not have a car becomes an inconvenience and can be socially isolating if alternative transport systems are not available. Yet, many students cycle or take public transport; it is almost normal for a student to not own a car. Concurrently, while it is far from a majority of people who cycle to university or work, more people cycle in Canberra than elsewhere in Australia (Belot and Westcott, 2014). Consequently, Canberra has better infrastructure for cycling, such as dedicated bicycle lanes, paths, and racks in most areas. This, in turn, encourages more people, including students, to cycle. From many small individual actions, a reinforcing loop can be created which encourages both sustainable behaviour and systemic change.

Thus, everyday actions of individuals when undertaken by large groups can have profound systemic impacts. Students are generally young, educated, and just developing their notions of normality – starting to redefine their habits as adults. We have the power to change our own actions and, thereby, change systems and change the world.

PROTESTING AS AN EVERYDAY ACTIVISM

Unfortunately, changing notions of normality is a fraught and slow process. Mass acts of activism such as

protests and boycotts can be crucial, as they seek to redefine normal by encouraging those in power to change according to what we, the People, believe to be right (O'Brien, 2015). In 2010, then ANU student Phoebe Howe led the "Canberra Loves 40%" campaign that successfully encouraged the ACT Government to introduce ambitious renewable energy targets. This campaign, which engaged Canberrans from many different social groups in political activism, challenged the idea that electricity produced from fossil fuels is acceptable. The campaign encouraged systemic changes, in this case to the energy mix, that help everyone live more sustainable lifestyles without even having to think about it. These campaigns can be powerful.

Thus, the act of protesting, in itself an individual action that gives power to a broader whole, ought to be a norm. As a student with a flexible schedule, I have made a habit of attending rallies, marching and holding placards to convince elected officials to "keep coal in the ground". I join other students at these protests, gaining a sense of solidarity. Such communal action can both encourage further action and alter notions of normality, such as by making protesting feel acceptable and worthwhile. Each participant's beliefs, values and decision to take action give power to these campaigns.

Before engaging in these campaigns, we first adopt a set of values and beliefs that support our participation. In this sense, our lives become activist and our activism becomes part of our lives. Acknowledging the importance of individual change encourages students to translate their values into meaningful sacrifices and actions that can be part of their journey to changing the world.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS AND THE NEED FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGES

There are certainly limits to the impacts of individual actions, notably because our actions still occur within system structures that usually cause harm to the environment (Maniates, 2001). It would be reasonable to point out that considering everyday actions as activism could serve to justify small, possibly insignificant changes to already over-consumptive lifestyles. Why, some would ask, are we not making more radical changes more quickly? I would argue that while many of us have the power to change our everyday behaviours, we have limited options for radically and completely changing our lifestyles due to systemic constraints and existing notions of normality. For example, it is normal and necessary to earn money through employment to feed, shelter and clothe ourselves, so we cannot all move away from (arguably unsustainable) metropolitan areas that provide employment to (arguably more sustainable) off-grid lifestyles. However, we can, should and do press for systemic changes that will make our metropolitan lifestyles more sustainable through our protests and we can make smaller changes, within existing systems, that move towards sustainability. We need to encourage small-scale individual behaviour change because otherwise it is too easy to convince ourselves that there is nothing we can do.

To change the world, we must change ourselves. As students, we are in a great position to change ourselves, change our actions, change conceptions of normal, and try to speed up the dawdle towards a better world. Every day, we seek a better world through our acts of activism.

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"My Real University Education": An Interview with Rick Kuhn

Rick Kuhn speaking in solidarity with Palestine at a rally.

Image Credit: Rick Kuhn

LOUIS KLEE

Louis Klee is a co-founder of *Demos Journal* and a graduate of the ANU. In 2017, he co-won the Australian Book Review's Peter Porter Prize. His work has recently appeared in *The Best Australian Poems* 2017.

Rick Kuhn is an Honorary Associate Professor in Sociology at the ANU. Since his first appointment at ANU in 1987, he has researched and taught in political economy, the history of the labour movement, race and racism in Australia, and Marxist economic theory. His book *Henryk Grossman and the Recovery of Marxism* (2007) won the international Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Prize "for a book which exemplifies the best and most innovative new writing in or about the Marxist tradition." When I met him in his office in the Beryl Rawson Building on a hot summer afternoon, he had just arrived back from a rally outside the gates of the United States (US) Embassy in Yarralumla. He had addressed the rally, 'In Solidarity with Jerusalem', which was a response to President Trump's announcement that his administration intended to move the US Embassy in Israel from its current location in Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

-Louis Klee

LK: So what did you say at the rally today?
RK: My initial argument was that people like us at the rally—in Canberra, in Sydney, and in Melbourne, but also especially in Amman, and in Cairo, and in Beirut—are what will make a significant difference. While the Palestinian people are very brave, their leverage isn't that great. Major change in the Middle East will come from what happens in the surrounding countries. The Arab Spring showed what was possible. It toppled regimes and there was a shift towards real support, as opposed to just verbal support for the Palestinian cause. We are in a phase of reaction now in the Middle East, but we've seen what is possible, and those possibilities can be realised when the Arab masses topple their regimes which are *de facto* allies of Israel and the United States, especially in the case of Egypt, which is the most populous, and Saudi Arabia, which is the richest.

LK: The politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is something you've been involved in for many years. You've been a member, for instance, of Jews Against Oppression and Occupation (JAOO). Is there a significance to opposing the occupation from a specifically Jewish standpoint?
RK: I think so. I'm not religious—I'm an atheist—but growing up I had a sense of how Jews were persecuted. Now in Australia Jews are not persecuted. There's some anti-Semitism around, but the people who face serious persecution are Muslims and people who aren't white; and that sense of identity with people who are persecuted was part of my political formation—a sense of solidarity with other people who are fighting against oppression. At university that intersected with what I came to know about left politics. I got involved with a struggle for political economy courses at Sydney University from my first year. That was my initial practice and my initial theory was being involved in the Capital reading group with people who had much more knowledge than I had.

LK: When was that?
RK: That was while I was an undergraduate from '74 to '76 at Sydney University. So the tail end of the student revolution.

LK: Did that have ramifications for Sydney University?
RK: The struggle for courses in political economy was very big and was eventually successful. There still are courses in radical approaches to economics in a separate Department of Political Economy at Sydney University. I took a year off after my economics degree and worked in the public service in Canberra for six months and I came into contact with a revolutionary Marxist organisation and joined it. That is what has sustained me as an activist—being part of an organisation with other people who want to change the world, who are actively trying to change it, and who also have an analysis of what's going on. As an individual you can be terribly clever—which I'm not claiming to be—but even if you are terribly clever, covering everything and knowing about everything is exceptionally difficult. But if you're in an organisation where you share basic assumptions and approaches then the burden on the individuals is eased and you can develop a broader kind of understanding. You're also much more effective in concert with other people, particularly if you have means of disseminating your ideas, like a newspaper.

LK: What was that organisation?
RK: That was the called the International Socialists, which was a forerunner of the organisation that I'm in now, which is Socialist Alternative. That participation, that collective project of trying to bring about change, having a perspective of change that comes from below (because for us Marxism is the theory and practice of working-class self-emancipation)—that's been really important.

LK: On the subject of theory and practice, has your activism been in a dialectical relationship to your scholarship?
RK: My real university education, in terms of developing theoretically, has been Socialist Alternative and its predecessors. I have an economics degree from Sydney University, Honours in politics from Macquarie, and a PhD in Government from Sydney University, but my real education has been through being involved with other people who share perspectives. That has influenced the way that I've approached the world and my reading. Some of my academic studies have provided opportunities to engage in that reading and deepened my understanding of Marxism and how to apply it, while also working towards a degree—and eventually, as it turned out, getting a job.

LK: What are some of the struggles you've been involved with over the years?
RK: I've been involved in quite a lot—struggles for abortion rights; much more recently, since 2004 when the Howard government legislated against equal marriage rights, I've helped organise demonstrations for equal marriage rights and organising demonstrations over that issue; solidarity campaigns such as with the Palestine struggles, on and off since before I joined the organised left. And I've been an activist and workplace delegate, most recently with the National Tertiary Education Union. In the late 70s and early 80s, there was the Movement Against Uranium Mining. I participated in the campaign over Star Wars, which was US President Reagan's rearmament program (Strategic Defense Initiative). I remember marching up Capital Hill, to Parliament House with our daughter in her pram on a summer's day—she would have been one or two. When the Northern Territory Intervention, which curtailed Aboriginal people's rights, was announced the Secretary of Unions ACT, Kim Sattler, and I organised demonstrations in Canberra, the first demonstrations in Canberra against the Intervention.

LK: Marcuse at times speaks of the university as a space for the fermentation of radical politics. Do you think this is still the case today?
RK: The thing about universities is that there is scope for young people who are less ground down by the established order to engage in some exploration of ideas and to experiment and so on. Whether they take advantage of those opportunities or not is another question but there is that scope.

The political climate at universities can change quite rapidly, given the three-year or so cycle of student turnover. In that sense there may be more of a space for people to come to radical ideas than elsewhere. And you can have an impact as a group of students in a way that's not possible amongst workers. A minority of students can really disrupt the university, but a minority of workers who take industrial action—unless they do very strategic jobs—will be screwed unless they have the majority behind them.

There is some space for students to explore ideas, including radical kinds of ideas. It depends, in part, on whether there are people around who can offer them those ideas. People of my generation who had careers at university that were made possible by the radicalisation in universities of the late-sixties and early-seventies—which was driven by students—are dying out and retiring. In terms of staff who can make those ideas available there are fewer and fewer. So now it's overwhelmingly radical students themselves who are spreading the ideas.

LK: You have an enduring fascination with the work and life of Henryk Grossman. How did you become interested in him and his work?
RK: In the late '70s, or maybe the early '80s, I read a terrific piece by Anwar Shaikh about Marxist crisis theory which mentions Grossman. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, 1989, I started learning German here at the ANU and thought I might apply this skill to the Grossman fellow who I'd read about. A lot of his work wasn't that well-known. There were mentions of him, mainly denunciations. He was widely denounced by both Stalinists and Social Democrats. I got stuck into it after my first study leave from ANU. I've worked on him since then. I produced a biography of Grossman, the first book length biography in English—and it took me a mere thirteen years to write.

LK: What is the significance of his theory of crisis to you as an activist?
RK: In terms of the kinds of arguments we make, it's important because it says that capitalism cannot be fixed, that it's inherently crisis-prone, and those crises lead to significant class struggles. At the moment, unfortunately, it's mainly class struggle from above down on the working class. But it leads to class struggles; it intensifies the horrors of capitalism. In T*he Communist Manifesto,* Marx and Engels wrote words to the effect that the bourgeoisie is unfit to rule because it can't feed its slaves in their slavery, meaning workers. That's not true all the time, but it is true some of the time, and necessarily so, when workers are thrown onto the scrap heap and their living standards are attacked during deep recessions. I think that's an extremely important and powerful argument, but abstract argument doesn't convince many people. You might win over some, but not significant numbers.

The other thing about being in an organisation is that you can participate in struggle more effectively alongside others. And it's through mass struggle that large numbers of people can be radicalised. But any struggle against oppression or exploitation is important. So I was at the US Embassy expressing solidarity with the Palestinian struggle over Trump's provocation on Jerusalem. My comrades in Melbourne are going regularly to the picket line at the Webb Dock. Anywhere people are fighting against their oppression or their exploitation we want to be there, we want to support it, and we want to make arguments about how it fits into a bigger picture—that this individual struggle is a response to the underlying problem of capitalism. The more we generalise those struggles, the more that solidarity is built amongst them, the more effective each of those partial struggles can be and the better the prospects that there will be a struggle that gets rid of capitalism.

LK: I thought I'd ask you about one of your passions—bird watching. How did you come to bird watching?
RK: I got interested in bird watching when I was depressed about my academic career and left-wing politics. Things weren't going so well in the mid-1990s. I thought I needed to do something that I wouldn't do so obsessively; bird watching was it. I might write down some things that I see but I don't have a life list. Bird watching, for me, is about enjoying the natural world and getting some exercise, but it tends not to be aerobic.

LK: Is that passion for the natural world in Marxism too?
RK: In fact, it is. There were some brilliant works published around 2000, such as John Bellamy Foster's *Marx's Ecology* and Paul Burkett's *Marx and Nature*, which recovered Marx as an ecological figure. Because of the environmental movement, and their interest in Marxism, they went back and looked at Marx, finding that he was concerned and wrote about environmental issues. He understood environmental crises as a product not just of human nature or technology, but a product of the kind of society we live in—a capitalist society where production is to make profits not to satisfy human needs. Human beings have biological needs and are part of nature themselves. Therefore, environmental and ecological concerns are fundamental to a humanist understanding of the world. In 1998, I set up a page called 'Marxism and Birds' which touches on these questions, hopefully in a humorous way, through quotes from different Marxists, such as Marx and Engels, Luxemburg, and Trotsky, who in some way mentioned birds.

How to Make Trouble*: Three Climate Activists in Conversation

Left:
Tom Swann at the ANU Students' Association General Meeting in 2014 where Fossil Free ANU moved a motion enabling the group to hold a referendum on divestment.

Right:
Judy Kuo at a Fossil Free ANU protest in 2017.

Image Credit:
Fossil Free ANU

ODETTE SHENFIELD

Odette Shenfield is a co-founder of *Demos Journal*. She recently graduated from the ANU and likes writing and reading about topics involving the intersection between activism, creativity and social theory.

When Fossil Free ANU began in 2011, it was one of the first fossil fuel divestment campaigns in the world. At the time, the coal seam gas company Metgasco was planning on fracking in the Northern Rivers of NSW. Activists from there got in touch with ANU students with news that the ANU was one of the top shareholders in Metgasco. Students were outraged at this revelation, which came at a time when coal seam gas was being increasingly scrutinised for its water impacts and the risk of fugitive emissions. From there, Fossil Free ANU developed into a sustained campaign over the past five years, calling on ANU to sell their investments in all fossil fuel companies.

Tom Swann, Judy Kuo and I represent three generations of Fossil Free ANU activists — Tom Swann helped establish the campaign in 2011 and stayed involved until 2015, I was involved from 2014 – 2016, and Judy has been involved for the past year and a half. On a cold Canberra Sunday morning, I met for coffee with Tom and Judy to hear stories and lessons from their campaign days.

EARLY ENGAGEMENT WITH FOSSIL FREE ANU

Activists frequently speak of their moments of political awakening. These stories often involve emotionally transformative, high-impact events or encounters. For both Judy and Tom, their initial involvement with Fossil

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***With Densely-Footnoted Documents**

Fossil Free ANU in 2013

Image Credit: Fossil Free ANU

Free ANU was comparatively serendipitous and modest. Both recall their engagement arising from friendships. For Judy, she became involved at the request of a friend to paint a mural for the group. Both then attended a few meetings and their involvement grew from there. Tom describes his immediate dedication to the Metgasco campaign: "I spent a fair bit of time on that instead of finishing the assignment I was supposed to do. Which turned out to be the right choice."

THE PECULIAR ROLE OF STUDENT ACTIVISTS

Tom relates several stories involving the campaign leveraging students' unique skills and interests. In contrast to the stereotypical image of student activists as 'feral hippies', he highlights their capacity for rigorous research.

Describing the early campaign to get ANU to divest from Metgasco, Tom says:

"We asked very pointed questions to [former Vice Chancellor] Ian Young very politely at an event. He couldn't answer so we followed up with a very long, very densely footnoted letter—as only students can—pointing out that despite what Ian Young said, Metgasco does indeed frack and was boasting about how much fracking it was going to do. He'd claimed Australian Ethical Investments had given the tick to coal seam gas fracking, but it had turned out that just a week beforehand they had sold their shares in coal seam gas."

This led to an unexpected early campaign success. According to Tom, in reply to the Environment Collective's email, Ian Young sent a two-line email informing the group that the ANU would divest from Metgasco.

Tom recalls their surprise at the email: "We were getting ready to dig trenches [laughs], and get strapped in for a long and silly campaign, and it was over quite quickly."

Later, with the Fossil Free movement taking off across the USA, the group realised they needed to go beyond Metgasco and start pushing for a Fossil Free ANU.

After the initial win, Tom describes how the students' research skills again proved useful.

"I remember my friend Tom Stayner pestered me to put in a Freedom of Information request to find out what was happening with the Metgasco investment and what else the ANU owned. I did that and the ANU blocked access. They said there was no public interest in disclosure, which was pretty outrageous because we were the public and we were very, very interested."

Tom says he became an armchair expert in the Freedom of Information Act and pointed out all the ways the ANU had misinterpreted the Act. We appealed and got access."

When the students gained access to the documents, they learned that concurrently with selling their Metgasco shares, the ANU was buying shares in a self-described industry leader in fracking, Santos. Tom recalls, "Then it was not just secrecy but hypocrisy."

According to Tom, that was when the campaign realised the need to go beyond Metgasco and became Fossil Free ANU.

Judy Kuo standing beside the mural she made for the 2016 forum with Vice-Chancellor Brian Schmidt on fossil fuel divestment.

Image Credit: Fossil Free ANU

THE BELLWETHER MOMENT

In 2014, while both Tom and I were heavily involved in Fossil Free ANU, the campaign caused media and political frenzy when ANU announced it would divest from seven mining companies for ethical reasons, including two fossil fuel companies — Santos and Oil Search. Then leader of the Australian Greens, Christine Milne, referred to it as a "bellwether moment" in the global divestment movement. Then Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, in line with several other Cabinet members criticising the decision, described the decision as "stupid". Analysis of the decision occupied the front page of *the Australian Financial Review* for weeks.

Tom again recalls the serendipity of that decision:

"Because they made such an unusual decision, announced it in such a weird and slightly incompetent way—they were never really able to present a fully transparent account—that was part of why the *Financial Review* and the Government went so feral toward them. Which, ironically ended up making it a much bigger deal than it would have been."

In this way, what was likely not intended to be a significant divestment decision at the time became the most important fossil fuel divestment decision in Australian history.

Fossil Free ANU campaigners set up a makeshift oil rig in Union Court in 2013.

Image Credit: Fossil Free ANU

THE CHALLENGES OF STUDENT ORGANISING

While students may have proficient research skills, Tom also describes the difficulties in student organising. He thinks students have "a surplus of distractions ... Apart study and probably work, there are so many things that are so interesting to be doing at any one time, so the campaign has to be even more interesting than all of those other things they could be doing."

While he expresses some regret over feeling as though he did not manage to make the campaign interesting enough, he then adds that he also regrets taking on too great a personal responsibility for the success or failure of the campaign. For example, he regrets those moments when he thought that if the campaign failed, it would be because he, "didn't make it exciting enough."

Judy on the other hand—perhaps surprisingly for a climate activist—reflects that she would have liked to be more patient during her time campaigning. "I think Fossil Free ANU has had a tumultuous year, not because the campaign has necessarily changed as such but because the circumstances have changed. One of the things that really hurt the group was discovering about the backflip on partial divestment."

The backflip she refers to is the revelation this year that the ANU has no longer blacklisted the companies it divested from in 2014 and has reinvested in several of them.

Judy continues, "The amount of work that went into making that happen is falling apart. That's not to say it was a waste of time, but it shows that progress doesn't necessarily progress."

Tom puts it more bleakly. For environmentalists, he quotes David Brower, "losses are permanent, wins are temporary."

For Judy, this underscores the importance of "thinking in the long-term rather than thinking in terms of losses and wins." She also highlights the need for students to think beyond the time period of their degrees. She describes the group making a collective decision not to engage in a highly disruptive act of non-violent direct action this year on the basis that in the long-term it would not be strategic or productive. This was despite some campaigners wanting a dramatic, disruptive event to occur before they graduated. I note that it might become strategic soon, as the group has held out for a while.

Both Tom and Judy also lament the difficulties of student organising with the constant turnover of students – not knowing if the campaign will continue when core members graduate each year.

On the other hand, Tom describes the rewarding feeling of seeing the campaign endure despite this threat.

"I remember distinctly, arranging for a question at the Commencement address with Penny Wong in 2014 and collecting signatures outside. I remember seeing Ian Young being so despondent that this thing hadn't gone away. They just hope that between graduation periods, maybe those students have graduated or given up."

GROUP STRUCTURE, CREATIVITY AND CREATING A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP OVER THE CAMPAIGN

On the tension between flat, consensus decision-making and having an organised group structure, Tom is firm on

the need for a coherent structure, recalling frustration at times regarding the difficulties agreeing on the structure of Fossil Free ANU. "If you're outside of that it's demotivating. People who might otherwise get involved see this mess—an effort to impose a structure with divergent views. It demotivates people who are involved and it becomes a *de facto* power structure anyway."

Judy indicates that the campaign now has a greater level of structure, while maintaining a commitment to non-hierarchical organising. "Our structure was based more on different aspects of maintaining the campaign rather than hierarchy, administrative roles versus research or media. We never had coordinators or convenors."

She also describes the vital importance of creating a group structure that creates widespread identification with the campaign. Judy compares her experience with Fossil Free ANU with her work as president of Amnesty ANU.

"Coming from Amnesty—a very established organisation—a lot of their recruiting is about bringing in new people, not necessarily people who'll ever get involved in a core team, just creating and maintaining a general support base."

"We tried to figure out the best group structure so people inside the group don't burnout and people outside the group see us as something they identify with."

Judy also sees creativity as having a unique role in generating a sense of ownership over the campaign. She gives the example of someone creating an artwork or performing a song for the campaign. In both cases, she says the creative act comes with the knowledge that, "It's not just anyone who could've done that particular song or mural, it's really your own."

Tom similarly says the most rewarding part of the campaign for him was seeing other people take ownership over the cause.

He recalls showing up to Union Court, seeing Ray Yoshida, Steph Willis and myself sitting under the cherry blossom trees. Earlier that day, we had been told we could not do a student referendum on the question of divestment, as the ANUSA Constitution had no provision to call a referendum.

"I remember joining that conversation and you were already so far down the train of thinking. That was a cool moment! There was a momentum there and a strategic energy working through problems and owning it. And it [the student referendum about divestment] happened! Not only did we get all the candidates to support it. Not only did we talk to hundreds of people, it was the biggest turnout in a long time to the AGM– it was a beautiful moment. It was the first time the campaign made itself vulnerable in a really public way. I remember thinking – God, what if people think this is nonsense and vote against it, what will happen?"

THE PROBLEM OF BURNOUT

Both Judy and Tom recall experiencing activist burnout. Ultimately, they both consider communication within the group to be the most important thing for managing burnout and supporting others.

Judy outlines, "Saying you need to take a break is so much better than not getting the things done you're meant to do. You're also better off assuming other people are burnt out than not. That's not to say you exclude them but reaching out to bring it to light, even if they haven't picked it up is really important. It can really help stop further disasters. When people feel burnt out but haven't necessarily reconciled with that fact and push on, it's not good for anyone."

Yet, we both also recognise that the emotional labour of checking in on others often falls on the women of the group. Judy says she would advise other activist groups, "to spread that responsibility." She adds, "It's not necessarily a nice position to be the mother of the group in that way."

THE HUMANITIES AND ACTIVISM

Perhaps coincidentally, the three of us are all humanities students—Tom has a background in philosophy, Judy has just finished her Honours in sociology and majored in philosophy, and I majored in sociology and did a minor in philosophy. When I ask for their reflections on the relationships between activism and the humanities, their answers surprise me. In my own life, my humanities studies and my activism have mutually informed one another, in a kind of symbiotic relationship. By contrast, both Tom and Judy, immediately highlight the dissonance they have experienced between their studies and their activism.

Tom describes how his training in philosophy initially came into significant conflict with his activism.

> "Organising is very quick and practical, very focused on picking up on social cues and what motivates people and overcoming personal and social barriers. You're not asking questions for the sake of asking questions, you're asking them to make something happen. That was exciting but really challenging for me, it's such a different way of being to philosophy."

Judy similarly argues that constantly focussing on critique can inadvertently lead to inertia for some people.

"Constantly looking for problems and being very attuned to what's problematic about approaches can be unproductive. I think this is the case with a lot of humanities students interested in social change, a lot of the movements around you aren't ideologically or philosophically perfect, there are so many errors, and assumptions made in the rhetoric used, perpetuations of dominant logics are key to a lot of social movements that we witness today."

"This isn't to say humanities students are complacent, but the fact that they care can be debilitating, because theory doesn't necessarily always translate to action."

Yet, Tom also concedes that perhaps his experience of conflict between philosophy and activism merely reflected that he was "doing the wrong type of philosophy." Over time, he said he has managed to bring the two together more harmoniously: "Finding a way to bring philosophical ideas into my activism and to be more strategic in my philosophical thinking in time was a good thing."

Ultimately, Judy has been able to overcome

After ANU partially divested in 2014, this image accompanied several Guardian articles about the decision.

Image Credit: Fossil Free ANU

this contradiction through her drive to improve and learn from mistakes, rather than striving for perfection.

"I'm of the belief that you just have to do it and it can't be perfect, there's always room for improvement no matter what social space you're talking about. Doing it imperfectly is better than not, and being able to address the mistakes is better than not making them in the first place."

Tom underscores this point, responding, "I think it's a really important lesson for university students to learn, it's so easy to just read the books and articles and not have a sense of what it's personally like for those critiques to rub up against what is actually involved in getting stuff to happen."

A GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT PUTTING CLIMATE ON THE AGENDA

When the ANU partially divested in 2014, Fossil Free ANU spokesperson Louis Klee wrote in *The Sydney Morning Herald:*

> [E]ven when Prime Minister Abbott refuses to put climate change on the agenda, the actions of the students of ANU have put it in the public eye once again. And the success of this grassroots movement in creating this crucial moment in Australia demonstrates that the citizens of this country are powerful voices in the debate over climate justice. It demonstrates that they are, ultimately, voices speaking with growing eloquence, urgency and authority for one thing: action to address global climate change.

After interviewing Judy and Tom, I am reminded that—despite the desire of the ANU Chancelry to see Fossil Free ANU disappear—ANU students will not give up the fight for climate justice and will continue to move the debate on climate change in Australia forward.

As three generations of Fossil Free ANU campaigners, we are each testament to the fact that while students may come and go, the campaign for a Fossil Free ANU will endure until ANU fully divests. Imploring the ANU to divest from fossil fuel companies, Former ANU Professor Simon Rice wisely said: "If the ANU can't take leadership on something as important as climate change, who can?" I would add to this that the ANU management has only shown leadership in the past on climate change—and will only in the future—if it follows the leadership of students.

Building Hope That Another World is Possible—SOS

Image Credit: ASEN

RUBY LAGINHA

Ruby is a 25 year old who lives mostly in Warrang (so-called Sydney). Ruby went to her first SOS Conference in 2014 in her early twenties and has been every year since. She believes the melting pot of ideas has greatly improved her as a person and empowered her to participate actively in this world.

SOS is Students of Sustainability, a unique, social and environmental justice gathering held every July by the Australian Student Environment Network (ASEN). It started in 1991, in Kamberra (Canberra) with a small group of ANU undergraduates. Since then it has taken place every year and has grown and evolved over the years. It is an event that continues to inspire people that ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE.

It is more than a conference with workshops. Participants generally camp over the five days at the host university or TAFE or, in the case of the 2014 SOS, at the Canberra Aboriginal Tent Embassy. This allows the students to experience not only what it's like to learn together, but to live with each other, with all the challenges and joys that encompasses.

Let me take you to the SOS Conferences of my memories. You arrive on the site (often a university or TAFE) to find cars packed to the brim with camping gear. Some people have even made the journey

Image Credit: ASEN

on bikes! It's winter so there's usually people milling about with hot drinks, dressed in lots of colourful knitted wear and beanies. Maybe you're excited to see friends from around the country you only see once or twice a year. Or perhaps it's your first year and you are feeling a bit overwhelmed by all the new people and experiences.

You are greeted at the registration desk by a fellow participant who has elected to do a volunteer shift and pick up a program before heading to set up your tent. Then it's dinner time: a hearty meal prepared by volunteers and the kitchen legend, Bretto. Maybe you'll listen to some announcements or talks or music as you mingle and feel sleepiness slowly greet you over a cup of chai. Eventually you head to your tent for your first night at camp.

The next morning is one of the most important events—the welcome to country by the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting. There's a smoking ceremony. People often remove shoes and socks, connect their body with the earth, take the time to feel respect and gratitude to the people who are welcoming us. Green gum leaves create smoke that cleanses as we create a line and wash ourselves in the smoke and make connections with the elders and other First Nations people we are meeting and being welcomed by. Birds often fly overhead; the quiet silence of the ceremony encouraging reflection.

The next five days are full. Everyday there are workshops (on everything from uranium mining, environmental activism, mental health, gender, feminism, queer politics, critical race, disability activism, political economy, campaign skills, dumpster diving and so much more), excursions to visit nearby food forests and sustainable housing initiatives, parties, open mic performances, dance offs, and all manners of joyful activities in which you can partake. There are also quieter areas if you are feeling introspective or are craving solitude.

It's a full program. But you are encouraged to spend time outside of workshops too. Perhaps one morning you are rushing, compelled to go to yet another fascinating workshop, but on your way you walk past the kitchen and something about the vibe calls you in... you find yourself peeling vegetables while swapping knowledge and chatting to the kitchen volunteers. You feel grounded and centred from using your hands to nourish your friends and the rest of the conference. Helping makes you feel included and proud that you are part of the running of the conference.

Patterns are formed over the next few days as you live and learn together. You might find a buddy who is also filling up their hot water bottle by the fire before bed. Or become part of the early rising crew who lights the morning fire for cups of tea. You might have decided to volunteer for a group such as the grievance collective which calls on your personal and political skills to help those around you.

For me, I often feel a bit overwhelmed at first and unsure of my place, but by the 4th or 5th day, there is a beautiful joyful energy amongst people and a palpable sense of community. I am usually dreading the end and having to go back to "normal life"., Feeling emotionally and intellectually nourished and happy to be living in a like-minded community, I want to stay at SOS forever.

Please keep in mind that I write from the perspective of a white person who has been part of ASEN for many years now. I think that many others would have a very different experience. And whilst I believe SOS has positive impacts on the world, there are always things it can improve on.

What is repeatedly praised and commended at SOS is the presence of incredibly passionate and intelligent First Nations people. Their contribution makes SOS what it is and is probably the most valuable thing about the conference. One example is a workshop called 'Brown Eyes, Blue Eyes', facilitated by Mitch who (with the participants consent) simulates the experience of being Aboriginal in a white settler classroom. It is one of the most sobering and intense experiences I have ever had; awfully real in so many ways. I have never felt the visceral feelings of humiliation and injustice like I did for that mere hour in the room with Mitch. I felt honoured to have been able to experience the pioneering work of First Nations people so generously putting huge amounts of effort into giving white people a glimpse of the perspective of First Nations people.

SOS is, in many ways, an opportunity to have one's privilege challenged and to realise that many people who consider themselves Australians are in fact part of a settler society and that this society is an ongoing occupation of lands. People learn, often for the first time, that this occupation is being resisted. Meeting people who make you think differently and deeply starts you off on what might become a lifelong project.

It's an opportunity for everyone to meet face-to-face and discuss these issues and brainstorm constructive ways to move forward. Whilst it sounds heavy, it's an opportunity to address the horrors on which this society has been built, which is necessary to begin to feel optimistic about our shared future.

At SOS, you come across ideas you might not otherwise be exposed to. For example, discussing in a safe place how to practice consent in your relationships. It is also often, though not always, peer-to-peer learning. So you learn from academics as well as your peers and from elders. If you have something to share you are encouraged to run a workshop. That encouragement is really wonderful and gives people confidence to deepen and share their knowledge. ASEN try to create an environment where people are encouraged to participate—challenging a lot of the barriers and power dynamics often present in wider society. People describe the joys of being together with like-minded people, learning collectively and being able to share opinions and test

new ideas in a safe environment. A lot of vital things are often learned through conversation; learning is relational and we learn collectively.

There is also usually an opportunity to take action on an issue you have learned about, to put theory into practice. This may manifest as a rally or similar action through main streets. There is also a post-SOS road trip that visits communities affected by environmental destruction. This provides an opportunity to meet and talk with a large variety of people working to change society. Students may even get involved in resisting the damage a corporation is doing to the community whilst being supported by peers and activists who have more experience.

SOS is a diverse mix of many different types of activism and justice issues and is run by a new group of people every year. The conference's recurring nature means it stays up-to-date and people are continually upskilled. ASEN focuses on anarchic political practices and decentralized, non-hierarchical organizing. For example, everyone is encouraged to learn facilitation skills and other techniques that reduce and challenge hierarchies as they appear and encourages organisational self-examination. SOS is a place to learn some foundational skills for the world we are trying to build where power is not guarded by the few and democracy actually exists. The politics and skills learned at ASEN spill out more widely in society and in other organising spaces. For example, activists express criticisms of NGOs who may have undemocratic, hierarchical organising methods. SOS is lucky to have long-term connections to diverse counterculture communities across so-called Australia—people who have been resisting oppression in their own community and in their own ways. This is one of the ways that SOS experiments with DIY and horizontalism.

People have commented that they find SOS camps more grounded than your typical academic conference. There is a relaxed vibe, nature and campfires. Which is good because it reminds us that we humans are connected with nature and puts that into practice. It's a workshop conference, but it's also a celebration, a camping trip, and simply a nice place to live for five days. Many people make connections that last years or lifetimes because of the meaningful experiences they have exploring issues they care about.

When thinking about changing the world, the fact is that the world is changing, but for who? Or in whose interests? SOS is a reminder that we are not just observers of that process but active participants and co-creators, should we so choose.

It is a demonstration that humans are generally much more capable than our capitalist culture of passive consumption and obedience would suggest. The students run the conference, they have collectives to deal with conflicts. This initiates and builds strong relationships and community links, which often continue in other community work and projects.

One of the most powerful things SOS has done for many people is to provide hope. It is a demonstration that the world we exist in could be more communal and a nicer place to live. That humans are capable of more.

For more information go to http://asen.org.au or search Facebook for 'ASEN organisers'.

Image Credit: ASEN

From Vietnam to Now: Has the Student Activist Disappeared?

Students protest on University Ave. Date Unknown.

Image: Woroni

CATHERINE MCLEOD

Catherine is an International Studies student at RMIT University and is currently interning as a research assistant. She likes writing and making things.

For over fifty years, the collective voices of student activists have echoed up from Australian universities to our policy makers. From the Civil Rights movement and the 1965 Freedom Ride to advocating for Aboriginal rights in rural New South Wales, championing second-wave feminism and then fighting for equality for the LGBTQIA+ community.

For most, the notion of early student activism in Australia conjures a grainy image of the late '60s and early '70s when tertiary students in their thousands united to protest South African apartheid and the Vietnam War.

Australian university activism, however, has its origins dating back to the early twentieth century and the first student union groups. Graham Hastings documents the history of these clubs and early activists in his 2003 book, *It Can't Happen Here: A political history of Australian Student Activism*. According to Hastings, the maiden student political association, the Labor Club,

was founded at the University of Melbourne in 1925 and was soon followed by other groups around the country.[1]

In the decades following the First World War, the workers' struggle and the effects of the Great Depression inspired student radicalism for the first time in Australia, leading to the creation of leftist groups across campuses. These early progressive factions collaborated to form the National Union of Australian University Students (NUAUS) in 1937.

The Union developed in size and authority, and was an overarching democracy despite the differences in radical student politics across universities. The circulation of their newspaper, *National U*, eventually peaked at around 50,000 and shared news of student political activities.[2]

Widespread anti-Vietnam sentiment allowed the student movement to really gain traction. The late '60s until the mid-'70s was a period of widespread protest and calls for peace, much of which was driven by Australian universities.

In 1966, after Prime Minister Harold Holt's announcement of an increase of troop numbers and 500 new conscripts for Vietnam, students at the University of Melbourne held a sit-down protest at a parade during Moomba festival.[3]

On July 4, 1968, 4,000 students from Melbourne, Monash, La Trobe, and RMIT Universities demonstrated outside the United States Consulate. Violence erupted between the protesters and mounted officers, sparking a turbulent period of arrests and distrust of the police.

Students who were not activists joined forces with students who were, and took to the streets *en masse* with other concerned citizens. The NUAUS, which aided and mobilised young activists, became the more radical Australian Union of Students in 1971.[4]

Moratoriums were held in Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane across 1970 and 1971 that saw almost 100,000 people march through the city centres, holding placards and calling for an end to conscription and Australia's support of the War. Tens of thousands more protested in cities around the country.

As I was researching this article, I interviewed Col Nicholson, an old friend and former activist who immersed himself in campaigning for the anti-Vietnam movement, while an engineering student in Brisbane. According to him, about a third of the student body at the University of Queensland took part in the moratoriums. He was not part of a political society at university, but said that most people he knew took part in the marches whether they were members or not.

Students then protested against mandatory conscription and the disruption of people's lives by a war Col calls "a complete waste of time." He sees the overall movement as being organised by society rather than the universities, but that tertiary political groups were excellent organisers that ensured students were a fixture at every march.

The 21st century brought new global challenges and political unrest in Australia, lending new causes for activism in our universities. Successive government policy has been partially responsible for this resurgence, notably the Liberal government's attempts to reduce university funding.

Notable in 2017 were: the successful campaign for marriage equality during the Turnbull government's plebiscite, the ongoing fight for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, particularly against the closure and subsequent removal of the male asylum seekers left in the Australian-operated detention centre on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea. The ongoing and critical issue of climate change has also been cause for activism. In Australia this year, this took shape in the campaign against the Indian mining conglomerate Adani and its proposed Carmichael coalmine. Adani already operate the Abbot Point coal terminal, which sits next to the Great Barrier Reef.

There has been a noticeable shift, however, in student activism in the past forty years. This shift is not only in terms of the issues faced, but also the tactics used. One of the more marked differences between the Vietnam era and today is the way that technology and social media are used.

Facebook is now both a ubiquitous information source and a public forum. Students who might not necessarily take part in activism with university union-affiliated groups still use social media as a platform for discussion and expression. It is a way to engage with issues of concern.

Sharing thoughts and information online can raise awareness in the same way that handing out a brochure on campus can. Online participation brings people into the fold, opens up dialogue, and eventually leads to more people participating in offline demonstrations.

For example, activist groups use social media to connect with supporters. At RMIT University, groups like Fossil Free RMIT and Socialist Alternative can be found in the student union directory and on Facebook. Campaigners talk to students and passers-by outside the State Library, and keep interested parties updated via their social media channels.

For those involved in protest in a physical sense, the internet is still used to incite action. Students often find out about rallies via their social media channels; the modern word-of-mouth. Movements are given a hashtag as they gain momentum.

Nevertheless, students today are less involved than they were in the '70s and face-to-face contact may still be best. There are those who argue that student activism has disappeared, despite there being higher numbers of university students today than ever before. In 2011, 18.8% of the population aged 15 or older had a Bachelor's degree or higher, compared to just 2% in 1971.[5] According to senior research fellow at Curtain University, Tim Pitman, however, this means a greater

1. Graham Hastings, *It can't happen here: a political history of Australian student activism (Adelaide, South Australia:* Students' Association of Flinders University, 2003).
2. Alan Barcan, "Forty Years On: The Ghosts of '68," *AQ: Australian Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (2008): 31-40, url: http://www.jstor.org/stable/20638557.
3. Verity Burgman & Sean Scalmer, *Protest!* (Melbourne, Victoria: University of Melbourne Archives, 2013).
4. Hastings, Graham. *It can't happen here: a political history of Australian student activism*
5. Nick Par, "Who Goes to University? The changing profile of our students." *The Conversation*, May 25th 2015, https://theconversation.com/who-goes-to-university-the-changing-profile-of-our-students-40373.

"diversity of opinion, experience and belief [that] often makes unified action much more difficult."[6]

Student Unions continue to register and fund political clubs, but the focus has shifted to welfare provision. Unions in universities around Australia deliver cafes, meeting rooms, social events, food, student newspapers and accommodation advice. They give grants to their various associations, but they are not at the frontline of activism in the way they once were.

Students today also spend less time on campus than students in the '70s, and most today work at least casually while they are studying. Many modern students are still engaged with political issues and current affairs, though some are undoubtedly apathetic.[7]

At the other end of this spectrum are the members of student groups who campaign tirelessly for issues of social justice. While these numbers have dwindled, student activism today does not necessarily mean a subscription to a union-affiliated group.

Instead of lamenting the disappearance of the student activists, perhaps we should think of them as assembling differently. Col pointed to what he sees as a "sense of hopelessness" in today's students, though I'm not sure if this can be said for all.

Students I spoke with had all participated politically in some form. Most of them had had attended multiple demonstrations for various issues that they felt passionately about, but never joined the university union or, if they had, did not use its services. Students were ardent in their support for marriage equality, asylum seeker rights, and improved environmental conservation. None were happy with the current state of politics and policy in Australia.

Of student activism today, Col says he rarely hears about it. This could be due to smaller numbers at marches. Protesters also fail to gather the same media coverage they did during the Vietnam era. Despite this, he thinks that students today are involved for the same reasons as students back then - because there are issues they care about.

It is unsurprising that student activism has transformed, at least on surface level, as new technology and student demographics deliver a very different academic and political landscape.

Although there has been change in discourse and methods, the underlying reasons why student activists take part remains the same. Although it may be on a smaller scale, young people still join movements that resonate with them, whether online or on campus.

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