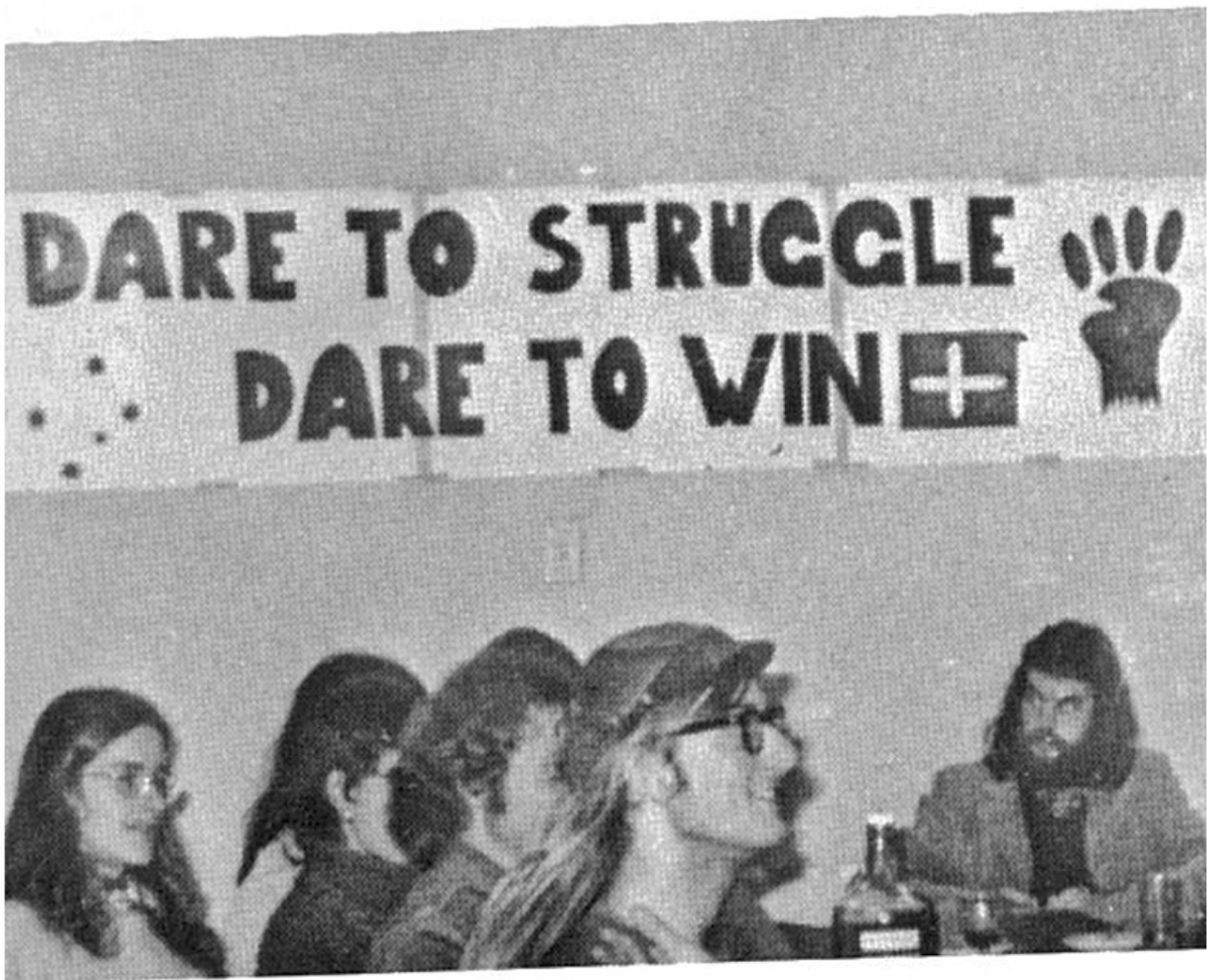


# LABOUR HISTORY NEWS

LABOUR HISTORY SOCIETY (SOUTH AUSTRALIA)  
SUMMER 2025



***50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE STUDENT  
OCCUPATION OF FLINDERS REGISTRY***

**LHSSA SUMMER 2025**

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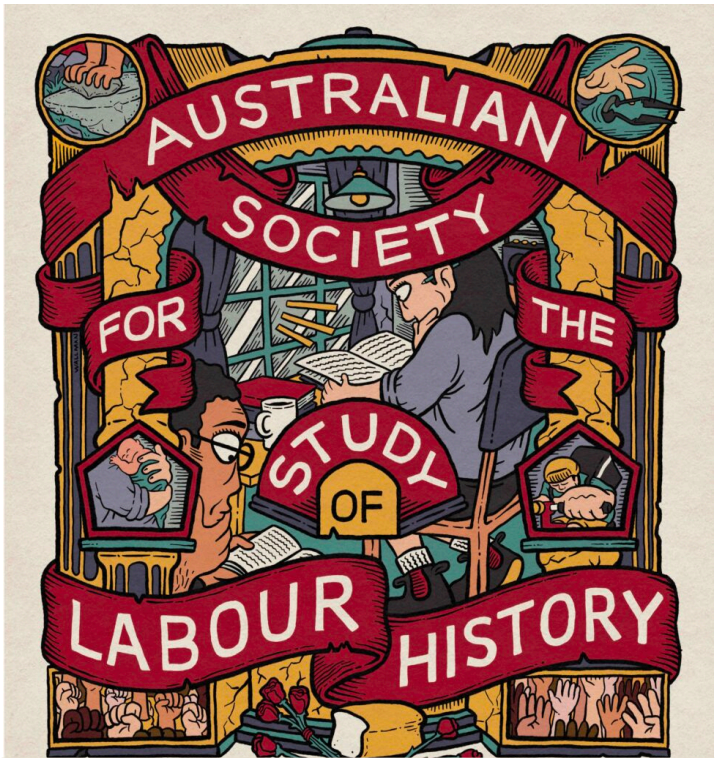
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**“HUMAN HISTORY BECOMES MORE AND MORE A RACE BETWEEN EDUCATION AND CATASTROPHE.”  
H G WELLS, OUTLINE OF HISTORY (1920)**

Medieval peasants worked only about 150 days in a year. The Church believed it was important to keep them happy with frequent, mandatory holidays.



You have less holidays than a Medieval peasant



**LHSSA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2025**

- President:* Ron Slee
- Vice-Presidents:* Vini Ciccarello and Jim Phillips
- Treasurer:* Kevin Kaeding
- Secretary:* Lyn Longo
- Elected members:* Roz Averis, Nix Herriot, Liam Horwood
- Co-opted appointments to Executive committee:* Doug Melvin (*Trade Union Liaison Officer*), Ralph Clarke (*Co-Treasurer*) and Greg Stevens (*Public Officer*)
- Branch Representative on ASSLH National Executive:* Lyn Longo
- LHSSA Newsletter Editorial Collective:* Ron Slee, Roz Averis, Liam Horwood & Ken Bridge

*Labour History News* is produced quarterly by the LHSSA Newsletter Editorial Collective  
**Contributions by members welcomed.**  
 Please forward to  
[labourhistorysa@gmail.com](mailto:labourhistorysa@gmail.com)  
**Attention: Editorial Collective.**

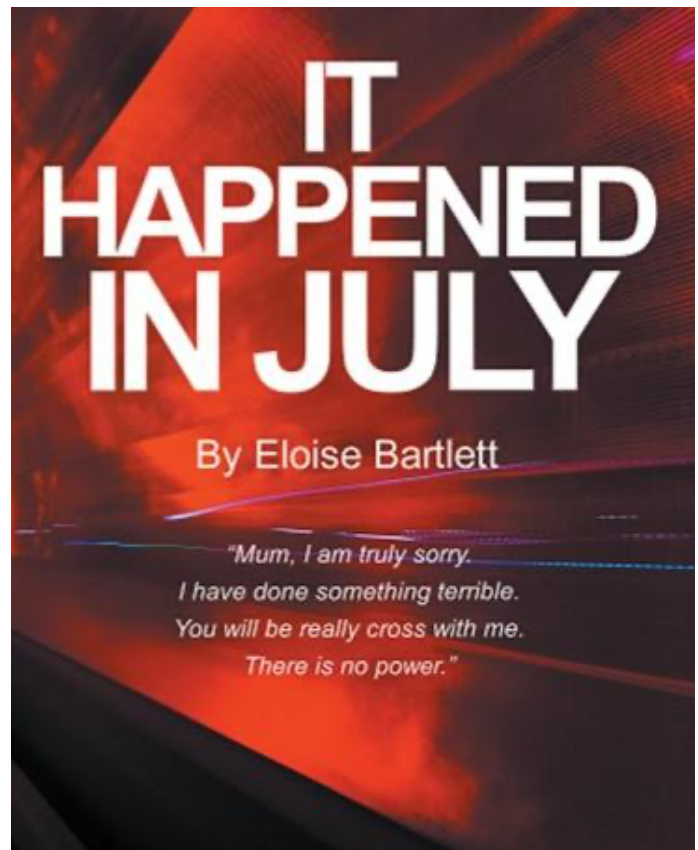
**NEXT MEETING OF THE LHSSA – 2 book launches (with the authors!}  
2PM SUNDAY 16 FEBRUARY  
MINOR WORKS BUILDING COMMUNITY CENTRE, 22 STAMFORD CT, ADELAIDE**

**IT HAPPENED IN JULY  
ELOISE BARTLETT**

On a quiet Friday afternoon, Wendy answers the phone to hear her daughter utter the words no mother wants to hear, “Mum, I just tried to kill myself”.

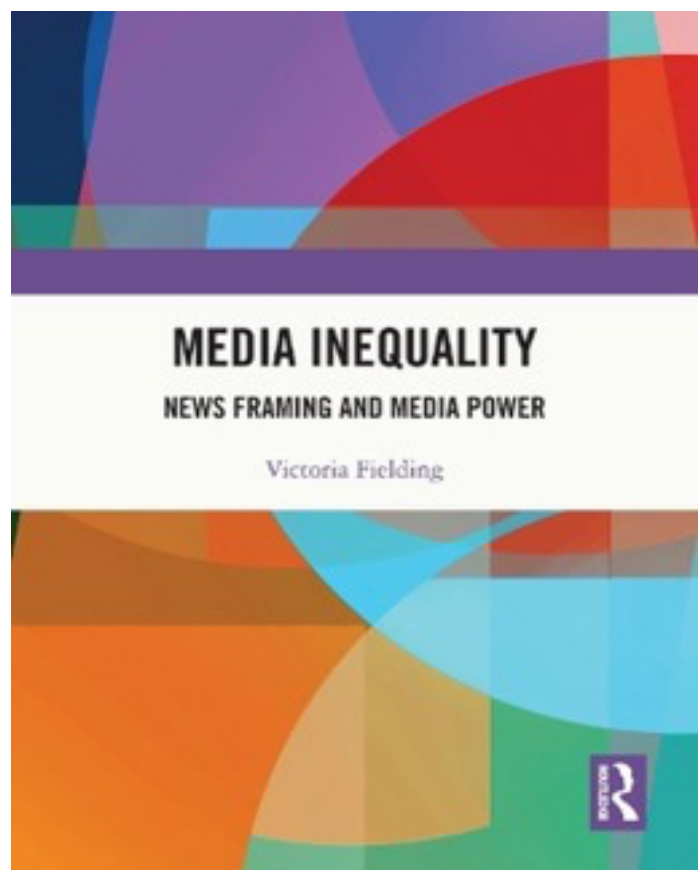
*It Happened in July* is about the emotional and practical challenges a woman faces through a daughter's suicide attempt, her own battle with cancer, and how she becomes a victim of domestic violence when she decides to end her unhappy marriage.

Wendy's harrowing story engages the reader as she shares raw emotions and thoughts creating a sense of intimacy and connection and giving hope to others in a similar position.



**MEDIA INEQUALITY  
NEWS FRAMING AND MEDIA POWER  
VICTORIA FIELDING**

*Media Inequality* explores imbalanced media framing of industrial disputes to theorise about media inequality in the representation of political, social and industrial contestation. This work identifies newspaper master narratives used in five historical industrial dispute case studies. These master narratives are then mapped to public narratives used by unionised firefighters and their employer in the Australian case of the 2016 Victorian Country Fire Authority industrial dispute. By theorising about the causes of journalists' inequitable framing of contested narratives, *Media Inequality* tells the story of unconscious structural media bias, interrogates the power of news media to reinforce dominant frames, offers valuable theoretical perspectives about the influence of media power on the accumulation of power in society, and provides lessons for groups communicating in competitive contexts.



## SUMMER-AUTUMN CALENDAR

### SCREENINGS OF *TWILIGHT TIME*

Twilight time is a gripping profile of the Australia professor Desmond Ball, who unflinchingly examined Cold War nuclear strategy and advocated for the sovereign defence of Australia.

Employing a wealth of archival footage, documentarian John Hughes captures the heated atmosphere of late-20<sup>th</sup> century geopolitics through a distinctly Australian lens, bearing witness to events such as US ambassador Ed Clarke's 'peppercorn' speech at Northwest Cape, Gough Whitlam's infamous dismissal from office and the civil unrest that rocked the nation during the Vietnam War. Both Screenings will feature a Q&A session with special guest Film Director John Hughes.

**Thursday 6 FEB, 7PM** At Capri Theatre 141 Goodwood Rd, Goodwood, SA.

**Saturday 8 FEB, 7PM**, Odeon Star Cinema, 65 Semaphore Rd, Semaphore, SA.



### LHSSA dates

**16 MARCH** Two book launches (see above)

**19 MARCH** executive committee meeting at 5.30 in Box Factory Community Centre

**11 MAY** public meeting at 2.00pm in Box Factory Community Centre – a talk from Emerita Prof Carol Johnson on how gender equality policy has affected women's employment issues over the last 50 years.

**21 MAY** executive committee meeting at 5.30 in Box Factory Community Centre

## TOM SHERIDAN SCHOLARSHIP 2025-26 APPLICATIONS OPEN

The Labour History Society of South Australia invites applicants for the 2025-6 award of the Tom Sheridan Scholarship which is valued at \$1000. The Sheridan Scholarship is awarded annually to an applicant who best demonstrates their capacity or potential to make a significant contribution to our knowledge and understanding to the history of the Australian working class.

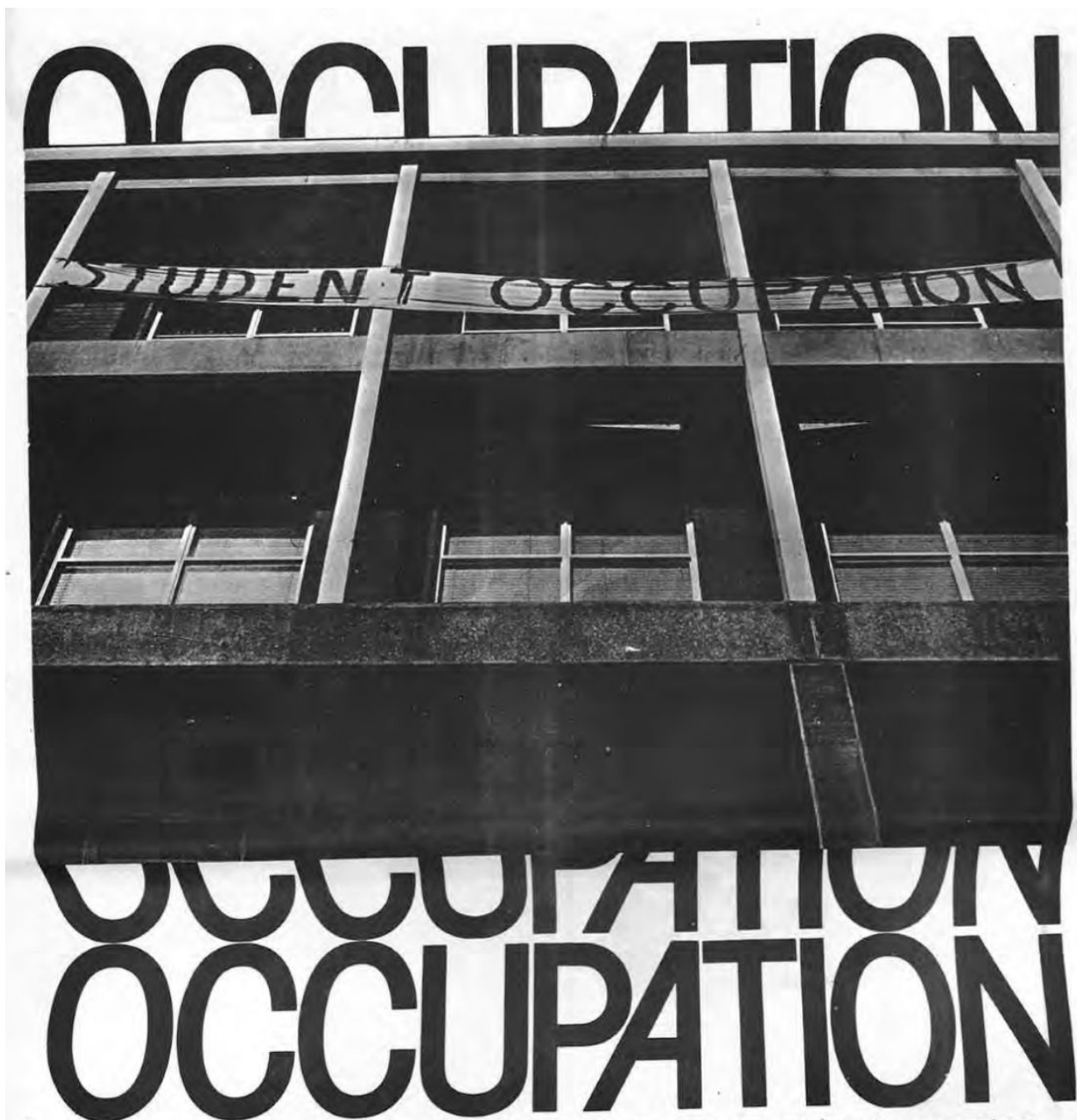
Applicants must be postgraduate students currently enrolled at any one of the three public universities of South Australia. Disciplines of study may include economic, political or cultural history, political economy, gender, minorities or media studies, or any other field of study which contributes to the purpose of the award outlined above.

Applicants must include the name, address contact details (email address and phone number), university of affiliations, details of a registered postgraduate award and research topic a short statement (max 100 words) in

support of the application and the names and contact details of two referees. It must also include evidence of the applicant's research capacity, such as the research proposal accepted by the applicant's registered institution, chapter(s) of a thesis or book, a long form essay or a journal article.

Previous winners include Dr Victoria Fielding (on a century of media mis-framing of industrial action; Dr Rachel Diane Harris (on wartime women's munitions factory work in SA) and Jack Crawford (on the resurgence of the SA labour movement in the Federal Era after the Great Strikes of the 1890s).

**Applications must be submitted by email to the LHSSA executive of the LHSSA by 5:00pm Monday 2 June, 2025.** The successful applicant will be announced at the Annual General meeting of the Society in August 2025. Applicants will be informed prior to the meeting. To submit an application, or enquire further, please email [labourhistorysa@gmail.com](mailto:labourhistorysa@gmail.com)



## FORUM ON 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF STUDENT OCCUPATION OF FLINDERS REGISTRY

On 1 December 2024, Labour History Society SA held a public forum to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Student Occupation of Flinders University's Registry Building. 40 people attended and another 14 sent their apologies and requested we publish a summary of the event.

**Nix Herriot**, whose Honours thesis was based on an oral history of the 4-week long occupation, put the occupation in its historic context – his talk and slides are reproduced below.

Thanks to all speakers and participants for making this event such a success. Special thanks go also to photographers **Phoebe Kelloway** and **Habibah Jaghoori** for their contributions – much appreciated.

For those who wish to read along with Nix's PowerPoint presentation, please click this following link:

<https://url.au.m.mimecastprotect.com/s/F9aqCANpk2FN3wP7rfGfjTGTv->

**KEYNOTE  
PRESENTATION  
STUDENT OCCUPATION OF  
FLINDERS UNIVERSITY  
REGISTRY  
NIX HERRIOT**

On August 1st, 1974, over a hundred students launched a sit-in of the Flinders University administration building. Adelaide's *Advertiser* offered a sensational portrait of the occupied Registry. Journalist Bernard Boucher wrote:

*Students had erected a barricade across the entrance road in readiness to repel any unwelcome visitors, particularly the police. Perched like a keep on the top of the hill, [the Registry] was bedecked with defiant banners and slogans ... 'People's Occupation. Fight Oppression,' 'No Cops on Campus' and 'Kick the Bosses, Coppers Out.'*

Graham Hastings even claims that some radicals, "carried away by the drama ... decided to bring guns, ready for a Eureka Stockade-style fight to the death." In typical Maoist parlance, the building had become a 'People's Registry'. "Come and use it," the students wrote. "Show that a university's resources are for the people and not the bureaucrats and their bosses!".

Now, Flinders might have seemed an unlikely breeding ground for student rebels when

it first opened in 1966 as South Australia's second university. But, by the early 1970s, this new suburban institution had become a cauldron of radical ideas. With its radical culture and Maoist style of politics, Flinders was an epicentre of dissent during what historian Arthur Marwick calls the 'long 1960s'.

The month-long student occupation of the Registry was Australia's longest university sit-in. It was a climactic confrontation between activists and the university administration. The aim of this paper is to place the occupation into historical perspective. In particular, I want to illustrate how, in the years prior to the occupation, Flinders earned a nationwide reputation for radicalism and 'trouble making'.

Historical attention to Australian student radicalism remains insubstantial. The limited literature that does exist is heavily concentrated on Australia's largest cities: Sydney and Melbourne.

In Adelaide, many people of a particular age will know a former Flinders radical or might recall some of the antics which came to define that campus. Yet, although this past exists in local folklore,

Flinders remains almost invisible in the written history of student radicalisation. Understanding the journeys taken by its students helps us

locate South Australia within the broader narrative of sixties protest.

My research uses oral history to understand how students constructed their radical identities. How they furnished Flinders with a distinct political tempo and the local, national and transnational dimensions of their protest. It uses the testimony of 11 former activists to explain how a particular cohort of students became radicals. Documentary records, student publications and newspapers, help reconstruct this past. But, in many ways, the story is limited if we look only to yellowing leaflets in a library archive. Oral history tells us not just *what* happened, but *why*. The more intangible motives and motivations of historical actors.

Enduring myths of the 1960s have flattened political radicalism into a series of aesthetic significations: sex, drugs and rock and roll. *Seizures of Youth*, Robin Gerster and Jan Bassett's influential history of the sixties, offers a cynical depiction of Australian student activists. In their view, students were privileged, hedonistic and naive poseurs.

This perspective simply echoes the conservative views of Adelaide's mainstream press, which dismissed the occupation as a "stupid prank" and "silly student caper".

According to Gerster and Bassett, Australian students did nothing more than mimic overseas trends. "Almost all" youth dissent, they write, was "based on forms of protest developed in the United States."

These over-simplistic formulations neglect the much more complex, and indeed interesting, dimensions of student radicalism. For instance, they cannot account for the ways in which global ideas like Maoism resonated strongly within a unique local context.

So, part of my intention is to challenge patronising and dismissive understandings of student activism. Flinders students were motivated by more than just youthful naivety or a desire to imitate overseas protest. They took to the streets in solidarity with struggles in Vietnam and South Africa. Many hoped to make revolution in their own country. And this laid the foundations for battles on campus as activists fought to democratise Flinders University.

Young people could have participated in many activities during the long 1960s. But instead of simply hanging out, smoking dope or chasing romance, many students were attending demonstrations, labouring over a hot gestetner to print radical literature and trying to convince the world that it needed to change. What motivated students to become

politically involved? And what was driving radicalism at Flinders?

Flinders was expected to draw its cohort from students dwelling in Adelaide's southern suburbs. Proximity and convenience were meant to dictate choice. But the experimental culture of this young institution quickly became a magnet for less conventional students who were receptive to radical political and cultural worldviews.

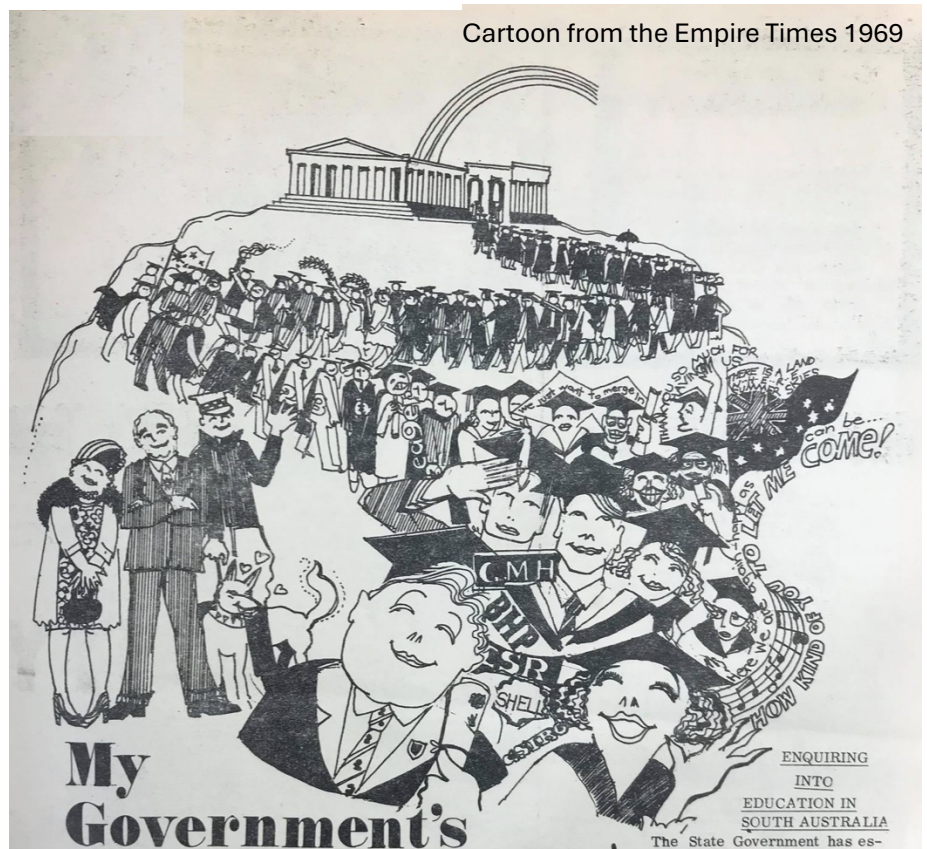
Former student Chris Beasley explained: "Flinders was seen as the new person in town ... where interesting ideas and new subjects like sociology ... would be taught. I thought, obviously, if I can get into university ... I will go to Flinders".

Other interviewees cast their enrolment as a conscious political choice. As high school friends, Jeff Richards and Steve O'Brien both "wanted to go to Flinders". "We could have probably easily gone to Adelaide University," Jeff remembered. "But we wanted to go to Flinders because it already had the reputation for radicalism".

When they arrived on campus, students sought outlets for their ideas. And this was captured best, I think, in a radical print culture.

In 1969, Martin Fabinyi and Rod Boswell purchased a printing press and installed it in their Parkside sharehouse. "Suddenly the household was an editorial office, a printing factory, and a distribution

Cartoon from the Empire Times 1969



centre,” Fabinyi recalled. From their back room, *Empire Times* was born.

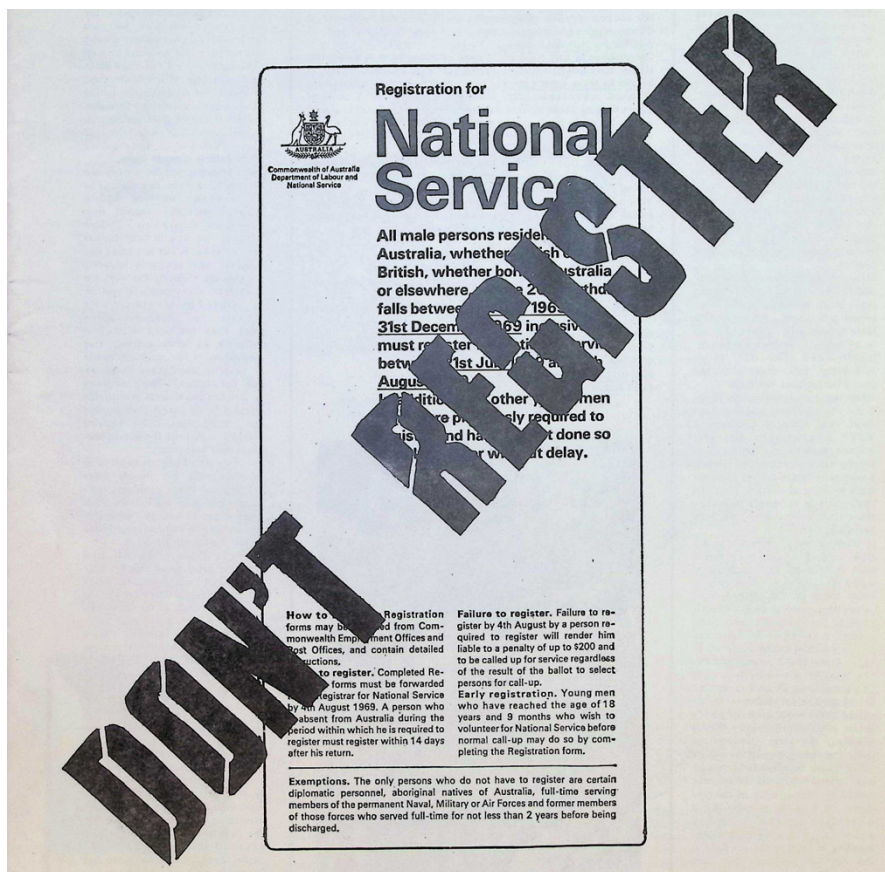
The first issue blasted a censorship threat in an irreverent style which would come to define this young newspaper and Flinders more broadly. “The SRC are licking the arses of the Union Board bureaucrats who want to censor *Empire Times*. We don’t intend to let these bastards wear us down”.

The luxury of owning their own printing press allowed the student editors to foster a polemical and provocative publication which articulated the mood of growing political rebellion. *Empire Times* saw itself as part of this rebellion, taking sides on controversial issues well ahead of public opinion.

Anni Browning, the first female editor, remembered how “causing a stir was really page one for us.” *Empire Times* aimed to shock and it often did, enraging conservative sections of society. This included politicians who condemned the paper in state parliament.

A front page from 1969 openly defied the *Crimes Act* by defacing a commonwealth advertisement and urging 20-year-old men not to register for national service.

Other early editions proudly supported campaigns against racism, against sexism, against militarism and many other issues. Editor Ian Yates



aptly described *Empire Times* as a “weapon to advance causes”.

In 1970, the *Australian* concluded that *Empire Times* was “plucky, brash [and] the most lively” of all university papers.

### **TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY AS AN ENGINE OF RADICALISATION**

In particular, *Empire Times* helped to articulate a globally conscious radicalism among students. In 1968, revolt from Paris to Saigon, from Japan to Czechoslovakia, saw new ideas and reference points enter the student vocabulary. In 1969, the editors offered freshers a “guide to superheroes”, including Eldridge Cleaver, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Che Guevara and other heroes of international revolution.

For many activists, political upheaval abroad suggested that students could act as agents of social change. When we spoke, Andrew remembered how “We’d read about the French student riots in the late ‘60s and found out that they could have overthrown the government if they’d just kept moving forward. That was always at the back of people’s minds, that these things could affect change.”

It was opposition to the Vietnam War that really catalysed student protest in South Australia and stimulated new forms of radical activism. For many young men, the terrifying prospect of conscription was an immediate threat.

In 1969, Flinders student and draft resister Peter Hicks threatened to napalm a dog in protest against Australia's involvement in Vietnam. Hicks generated front-page news headlines and outrage across Adelaide. His threat, of course, was never carried out. In an interview, Hicks explained that his intention was to highlight the hypocrisy of people "horrified by the thought of napalm being used on a dog" but "prepared to condone the burning of humans in Vietnam". The stunt typified the highly provocative and bold style of dissent at Flinders.

Flinders students were not only important participants in South Australia's anti-war movement. They broke from the analysis and strategy of existing peace organisations. Many understood the Vietnam War as a *symptom* of capitalist imperialism rather than a mistaken or immoral policy to be reformed. The military-industrial complex, they argued, had to be destroyed, both at home and abroad.

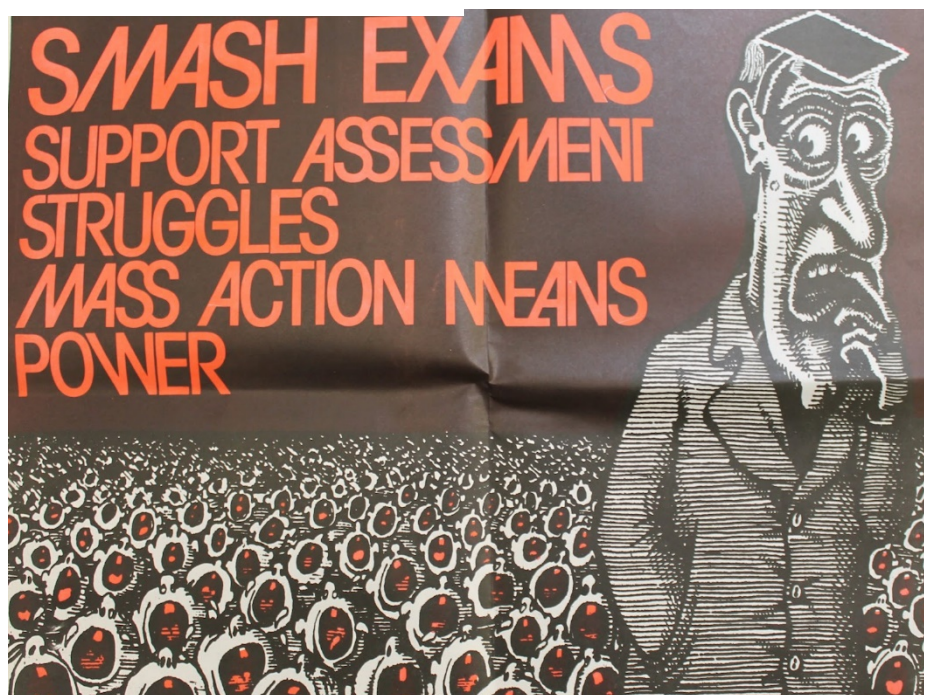
Student protests were militant, confrontational and disruptive. The pacifist chant of 'Peace Now' was replaced by 'Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh, the NLF are gonna win'.

In addition to Vietnam, many students were motivated to act against racism. In our interview, Ian Yates recalled his growing "international awareness" of apartheid in South Africa. South Africa's

all-white rugby team, the Springboks, toured Australia in 1971 and Ian was among the students who protested the match at Norwood Oval. Other interviewees remembered yelling themselves hoarse and bombarding the players with firecrackers. Anni even defied police and ran onto the pitch. Outrage against injustice in Vietnam and South Africa, she said, "encouraged me to actually break the law."

Articles in the radical press were ecstatic. The Flinders Worker-Student Alliance reported the game like this: "Black Africa won the match at Norwood Oval last night ... Our militancy and effectiveness will be a great morale booster to the progressive forces inside South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe. As Mao points out: 'The joint struggles of the people of all countries support each other'".

Although highly idealistic, this internationalist perspective demonstrates how Australian radicals saw themselves as part of what historian Simon Prince calls an "imagined community of global revolt". Although many students saw Adelaide as the 'backblocks' of global capitalism, they shared an international language of dissent. Militant identification with overseas struggles offered one powerful motivating frame for students taking to the streets during the early 1970s.



## UNDERSTANDING THE MAOISTS

The political worldview of Flinders student radicals was strongly influenced by Maoism. The Maoist Worker-Student Alliance became a dominant force on campus and played an important role in the 1974 student occupation. A 1972 manifesto in *Empire Times* announced the Worker-Student Alliance's radical philosophy: "We are a rapidly growing group of revolutionary workers and students, united in three main principles - opposition to US imperialism, fighting fascism in Australia, and opposition to capitalism."

There is little evidence to suggest that large numbers of Flinders students were members of the secretive and Melbourne-based Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist). However, Maoist politics, and the Chinese Cultural Revolution, had widespread appeal.

Flinders was home to radically-inclined academics like prominent anti-war activist Brian Medlin, as well as young China specialists like Bill Brugger. These academics helped generate an interest and sympathy for Maoist ideas.

With his long, dark hair, NLF badge, beard and moustache, Medlin almost adopted the air of a guerilla leader in the eyes of some former students. Jeff

Richards—a member of the rival Trotskyist Socialist Youth Alliance—remembered Medlin as a "Che Guevara-like character" whose mystique contributed to his perception of Flinders as a "great place" to study.

Former Maoist Mark Rohde told me how "studying Chinese politics" at Flinders was profoundly influential on his development as an activist. Differentiation from tepid social democracy and the 'Old Left' was another decisive factor. Mark explained that "the reason I went towards the Maoists rather than the Communist Party was because the people in the Communist Party just seemed to me not much different from the Labor Party."

The appeal of Third World ideas, of Maoism, challenges Gerster and Bassett's claim that Australian radicals were simply "mesmerised" by American models of rebellion. In fact, for young onlookers in the West, China's Cultural Revolution seemed to suggest that a supposedly socialist society could combat the kind of dull bureaucracy that afflicted Stalinist Russia.

## THE PEOPLE'S REGISTRY AND THE DEGREE FACTORY

All these global events and ideas set the stage for battles *on campus* as activists fought to democratise Flinders University. This culminated in the dramatic occupation of

the central administration building, the Registry, in August 1974.

The spark for the occupation was a dispute in the History Discipline over assessment and student demands to abolish compulsory examinations. "In retrospect," Jeff reflected, "having optional History exams seems like a little thing compared to everything else that was going on in the world. But that seemed to catch fire". So, why were students, only recently radicalised by a war in Southeast Asia, so concerned about something as provincial as university assessment?

To answer this question, it's worth considering how Flinders activists developed a critique of their own institution and its role in society.

Former activists often remembered their time at university as the best time of their lives. Flinders was undoubtedly an incredibly exciting place to be. University "just lit me up", Judith Wotherspoon reflected. "Finally, I had a way to find out the things I'd been looking for".

But nostalgia for the past can obscure the extent to which Flinders was also a site of disillusionment and tension during the early 1970s.

Steve, a participant in the occupation, remembered his first year at Flinders as a rude surprise. "I'd seen my brothers



The trashed office in question

go to university,” Steve explained, “and I had this illusion that it was all hippie-type love and caring and all that sort of thing.” In reality, “Flinders was basically a big, cold, grey concrete structure on the top of a hill”. In our interview, Steve’s metaphor of an inhospitable physical environment drew attention to dissatisfaction with the conditions of university life.

Activists often referred to Flinders as a ‘glorified high school on a hill’. It epitomised the new, mass-production, degree factories of the global 1960s. University was, in their view, little more than “a trade school drawing sharp distinctions between teachers and taught.” Students perceived, within their own institution, a paternalism, an elitism, that they loathed in wider society.

They responded by demanding the democratisation of their

university and with radical ideas about education.

When Flinders first opened in 1966, it would have been unheard of for students to be consulted on course content and teaching methods. But, by 1973, some courses had become pedagogically experimental and politically radical. The Philosophy Discipline, where Brian Medlin resided, implemented group assessment and proclaimed itself a “participatory democracy of staff and students.” As they returned to campus from anti-war demos, students clamoured for more socially relevant degrees. In response, Medlin transformed the curriculum by introducing courses such as ‘Marxism Leninism I and II’ and ‘Applied Philosophy: Vietnam, Imperialism and the Nature of Man.’

In 1973, against the objections of some male academics,

students and staff pioneered Australia’s first Women’s Studies course. Chris Beasley eagerly remembered how “We were asked to come together in tutorials, which might include people from the community who hadn’t finished high school. The idea was to have a genuinely community-based knowledge grouping, consciousness-raising groupings in a way.”

Similarly, Medlin’s ‘Politics and Art’ course saw students collaborate with workers in artistic projects. Medlin wrote of how: “Some brought into the classroom a whiff of factory grease or the smell of saddle-soap and a demand that even the most complex ideas be expressed intelligibly and without pretension.”

Students actively championed a democratic culture through their own actions. *Empire Times* rejected the single editor model in favour of collective groups of up to nine students who were responsible for producing the paper. Bruno Yvanovich even recalled how the Flinders reserve-grade football team “decided that we weren’t gonna have a coach” and proclaimed themselves “the People’s Team”. “I think we were hauled before the League at one stage for bringing the game into disrepute,” he said, but “It tells you something about the ethos of the time, that we had this collective leadership model.”

These innovations expressed a growing desire for a radically

democratic university which might, in the words of the student occupiers, “serve the needs of ordinary Australian people.”

However, there were still plenty of conservative disciplines at Flinders. The intransigence of some senior academics, including in History, frustrated student activists. And this reached a climax in 1974, with the occupation.

In 1971, the School of Social Sciences had established limited consultative committees, in response to demands for student representation. Yet, as Jeff Richards wrote at the time of the occupation, these structures “remained completely powerless to effect any change. This caused an escalation in the struggle by the students to have their demands satisfied.”

On July 31st, 1974, students approached the head of history, Professor Robin Moore, to voice their opposition to compulsory exams. Judith remembered the encounter: “He was walking down the corridor towards his room ... somebody asked him a question, and he turned around and said, ‘You don’t expect me to speak to just a bunch of students, do you?’ I thought, well, this is your employment, I would expect you to speak to a bunch of students! He just went in

and locked himself in and that enraged the students of course.”

Regardless of whether this interaction unfolded exactly as Judith remembered, it affirmed the view of student radicals that “condescending and elitist” academics were unsympathetic to their demands. Frustration with this allegedly “fruitless discussion” sparked their decision to occupy the Registry.

Whereas consultative committees were seen as a formal method of ‘managing’ dissent, students viewed their sit-in as an instance of direct democracy. Mark’s memories of the occupation affirmed a picture of vibrant political discussion: “The meetings that I attended were very democratic. Everyone had a chance to speak, everyone was respected ... There was a lot of discussion, a lot of contention of ideas.” Decisions and demands were debated and voted upon collectively at general occupation meetings, sometimes involving several hundred students. For some participants, this atmosphere of camaraderie was a transformative and empowering experience.

But camaraderie does not always mean equality. Male and female participants in the occupation did not necessarily have the same

experience. Judith remembered “constant problems between blokes and women”. “All the domestic work”, she said, “was left to the women.” Judith’s memory of having her “hands in the sink” complicates Mark’s portrait of participatory democracy. Although few male interviewees recalled gendered conflict within the sit-in, women often reflected on what they saw as the masculinism of male radicals, especially the Maoists. As Chris Beasley told me, “The New Left was looking pretty old in lots of ways.”

After the occupation, Sally Trevena and Belinda Porich penned this letter to fellow radicals. “We are prepared to be militant, and revolutionary,” they said, “but not at the dictates of sexist male revolutionaries.”

Experiences of sexism were common in the global student movement throughout the 1960s. Italian historian Luisa Passerini says that sexism often “posited the problem of women’s liberation in a more urgent mode than before.” At Flinders, like elsewhere, feminism began to develop as a more autonomous political force.

The occupation had taught Sally and Belinda that they could not “automatically view the left as our allies ... our primary political allegiance is to other women.”

## CONFRONTING THE LIBERAL-CAPITALIST UNIVERSITY

By 1974, student radicals had also developed a critique of the liberal conception of education. In their view, university was not a 'community of scholars' committed to the pursuit of knowledge, independent of broader society. On the contrary, universities were institutions of capitalism, churning out obedient graduates to serve the needs of a competitive and individualistic society.

A 1969 cartoon from *Empire Times* illustrates this critique. It shows a winding procession of smiling graduates, pouring down a hill and surrounded by the corporate logos of Holden, BHP, CSR and Shell. Watching on approvingly are a well-dressed couple and a police officer.

What really gave momentum to this critique was the opening of Vice-Chancellor Roger Russell's personal papers during the occupation. Judith, again, remembered: "Somebody went up through the ceiling and broke into Roger Russell's office and they rifled through his files."

Russell was Australia's first American-born Vice-Chancellor. And based on evidence from his files, students alleged that Russell had carried out research for the US military, possibly including biological and

chemical warfare. If assessment had been the original spark, the 'Russell files' were the fire that dramatically broadened the occupation. Graffiti outside the Registry demanded Russell "repudiate or resign".

Some staff alleged that the occupation was a shadowy Maoist conspiracy to wreck the campus. In this view, Russell's research was an entirely unrelated or opportunistic issue.

It is possible that student Maoists harboured suspicions about Russell and wanted to make him a target. However, this narrative ignores how student concerns intersected with their radical critique of the university and society more broadly.

As early as 1970, one student broadsheet had implicated universities in a global system of imperialism. It suggested that "degree shops" maintain a society "which needs Vietnams to maintain itself."

One 1974 publication likened the issue of exams to "the tip of an iceberg". It goes on to say: "To begin with, most people saw the occupation as a rather simple matter: it was all caused by the arrogance and intransigence of one particular professor. However, we have come to realise ... that we have to look at the whole nature of the University, and at the function which those in power wish it to have."

Flinders, in their view, had become a loyal servant of the military-industrial complex. The portrayal of Russell as an agent of US imperialism was significant because it chimed with growing concern about American influence in Australian society, especially among Maoists. It reinforced the worldview prevalent among many activists at Flinders.

As the then secretary of the student union, Ian Yates, explained to me, "the reason that the Roger Russell issue had a wider appeal was the concern about American imperialism, its behaviour in different countries around the world."

Indeed, the revelations about Russell could only have had such an explosive effect in the context of the preceding political radicalisation I've described.

At Flinders, many students cast their conflict, in suburban Adelaide, as a confrontation with American imperialism and conventional education. Steve O'Brien laughed when he said: "We wanted to be Che Guevaras." But, as Jeff Richards wrote from the Registry at the time: "the role of the Vice-Chancellor in military research clearly shows that the university is not the 'liberal', 'autonomous' institution that it is portrayed as."

## CONCLUSION

August 28th brought a swift and dramatic end to the month-long occupation. Hundreds of staff stormed the Registry, dismantled the barricades and violently evicted the 50 remaining occupiers. Unfortunately, for the radicals, the timing of their occupation overlapped with university holidays. This meant that there were relatively few students around campus to support them.

Graham Hastings concluded that the occupation proved to be the “last hurrah” of the Vietnam generation. The mid-to-late 1970s are generally understood as a time of disillusionment and decline for Australian student radicals.

While the occupation certainly wasn't the opening act of a new chapter of radicalism, it would be wrong to see it as the end entirely.

On the first day of semester two, Flinders' largest ever student general meeting endorsed the occupation and demanded a response from Roger Russell. This was followed by protracted battles on campus, as activists continued to resist the administration and draconian disciplinary charges against participants. The occupation inspired a wave of unrest at Macquarie, Monash and ANU.

But perhaps the longer-term impacts were felt most beyond the campus and out of historians' view. As Jeff put it: “Radicalism hadn't exhausted itself. It had begun to transform,” spreading further out into the community.

A short march down the hill was the giant Tonsley Park Chrysler factory. There, Maoist radicals from the Worker-Student Alliance threw themselves into rank-and-file agitation. And many other students went on to become trade union members, organisers and militants. Women championed their liberation and feminism became a strong strand of politics, on and off campus.

Contrary to common stereotypes, not all activists cut their hair, abandoned progressive politics and embraced the mainstream. The students I interviewed maintained a pride in their past activism and solidarised with students today facing new challenges like increased tuition fees. Almost all told me that they learnt far more in the

streets and the sit-in than the classroom. Many remain socialists and advocates for social justice. Anni put it well when she said: “The things that happened then made me who I am now ... There's no regrets”.

To conclude, far from a simplistic imitation of American protest, or the naive ‘seizures of youth’, student radicalism at Flinders was a dynamic and globally conscious movement. Activists were radicalised through their militant support for international struggles and they came to develop a democratic critique of their own institution which mirrored their view of society more broadly.

50 years on, much more needs to be done to piece together the story of student radicalism, especially its many afterlives and legacies. At a time when universities are occupied not by students but by neoliberal management, and remain in the service of war and militarism, there is much to celebrate in this radical history.



## FURTHER REFLECTIONS FROM FORMER STUDENT ACTIVISTS

Nine ‘occupiers’ attended the LHSA meeting and spoke about their participation, including Dave Macpherson (who was President of the Student Representative Council and regarded as the ‘ring leader’) and Andrew McHugh (whose printing press and camera were responsible for a contemporary record of the event). Below are written summaries from some of those who spoke.

### **‘HOW A TALK CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE’ DAMIEN COGHLAN**

It’s not often you go to a meeting - of a Labor History Society - and hear a talk that changes your life. To be fair, it wasn’t just the talk, but also the contributions of many people in the comments to the floor that followed, but that’s what happened at the Box Factory on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2024. The timing of the event was significant – this year was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of events at Flinders University, when hundreds of students took over the university Registry building and ‘occupied’ it for a month.

The focus of the Labor History Association meeting was a talk presented by Nix Herriot, a PhD candidate in the Department of Historical and Classical Studies at the University of Adelaide. His Masters dissertation researched links between the labour and environmental movements in Australia since 1975, but the talk he gave that day was a review of his history honours thesis. That thesis combined oral history and archival research to document student radicalism at Flinders University during the ‘long 1960s’, and in his talk he chose to focus exclusively on ‘The Occupation’ at Flinders in 1974.

His talk was a masterful analysis of the Occupation from a variety of perspectives, but a central theme was that the Occupation, while “almost invisible in the history of Australian student radicalism”, was a quite remarkable event that deserves a much higher profile, and was in fact a quite unique response by hundreds of students to a wide variety of local, national and world events. A significant part of the value of the talk was not only the way in which it situated the events of August 1974 within wider political movements, but also showed that it

had some unique qualities which really shone out, even in a university already thought to be ‘radical’.

A key theme of the talk was that although the conservative press was keen to portray the Occupation as a display of student politics which merely followed what had been happening in the USA, what Nix argued was that what happened was actually a quite unique expression of a desire for the democratisation of student life. In his words, what happened in August 1974 at Flinders was ‘a dynamic and globally conscious movement which was focused in a struggle to democratise’ what students (and it turns out many staff) saw as ‘their’ institution.





Ron Slee, Andrew McHugh, Nix Herriot

Another key idea of the talk was the influence of Maoist thought on the way in which the dynamics of the Occupation played out. Some credit for this must go to the late Bill Brugger, whose classes on Chinese politics had a major impact on many students. We must remember that 1974 was towards the end of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution, which was launched by Mao in 1966 (the year Flinders was established) and lasted until his death in 1976. At the same time the American War in Vietnam was generating more and more political anger and disapproval, and the drafting of 19-year-old Australians to fight in Vietnam was sharpening the focus of many, especially those in the ballot to be sent to fight and die in a war which was increasingly becoming seen as an immoral exercise in foolish imperialist over-reach. In this context another important figure on university staff was Professor Brian Medlin, who had already democratised the philosophy department, where students began each semester spending a week discussing and negotiating how they were to be assessed.

In the coalescing of these ideas many Flinders students, especially those involved in the Occupation, were coming to understand the role of imperialism, and the role of US militarism, and they didn't like what they saw. So while the Occupation began over the seemingly trivial matter of assessment in the history faculty, things were about to become more dramatic.

The fact that the Vice Chancellor, Roger Russell, was an American was already problematic. Those of us who didn't know already found out in comments from the floor after Nix's talk that some Flinders' academics, particularly Ron Witton, were already concerned enough about Russell to begin researching his background. When, early on in the Occupation, students found files in Russell's office that provided clear evidence that he had been working as a consultant for the US State Department and the US Defence Department on a variety of topics (one of which was research on how to pacify local populations when the US took over another country) the aims of the Occupation took on a new, sharp focus – enough to force the vice-chancellor to resign. The discovery of Russell's past provided a significant increase in the intensity of the anti-militarist and anti-imperialist perspective of the students and encouraged them to see themselves a part of an "imagined global community of struggle and protest". Combined with the aforementioned Maoist perspectives, this provided students with a set of beliefs, and modes of action – such as all decision-making being made by all the students involved in the Occupation – that gave a lie to the idea that Flinders activists were merely mimicking American trends.

In the 1970s Flinders, a big grey concrete structure perched on top of a hill, was for some an alienating place, but placed well away from the sandstone halls of Adelaide's traditional

university it was also a place that was seeking to do things differently. It was the first Australian university to offer courses in sociology, and later women's studies. And in many faculties, there were students, and perhaps more significantly staff, who were pressing for reform in the way students were taught and assessed. It was one such dispute, and the dismissive attitude of history professors to students' concerns, that led directly to the Occupation.

What came next had a number of significant players, and two of them were seated at the table with Nix that day in December last year. One was Dave Macpherson, to some the 'ratbag' leader of the Occupation, who had by utter chance arrived in Adelaide from New Zealand a couple of hours before. The other was Andrew McHugh.

It would be easy to argue that Andrew played perhaps the most important role in the Occupation, because Andrew had a printing press. He and some friends had initially installed it in a shared house, and began to produce the legendary student newspaper, *Empire Times* – a task he stayed at for 40 years. Once established in the student union building, the printing press, the *Empire Times* and the editor Andrew McHugh provided a powerful means of distributing information to students, staff and the wider community about the Occupation and its aims, and especially about Vice Chancellor Russell.

So how did this change my life?

I arrived at Flinders on a NEAT scholarship, which meant I was paid the equivalent of a low-level government salary to attend. I had recently left a monastic Catholic theological college in Melbourne where students had also been struggling, with some success, against the often medieval rules that governed our lives. In the meantime, many of us had been participants in what became violent anti-apartheid Springbok demonstrations in Melbourne (as had students in Adelaide and across the Australia and New

Zealand), and the vast anti-Vietnam war demonstrations that shut down the city of Melbourne on occasions. Seeing a rowdy crowd of demonstrators crossing the grey windswept area below the library steps, I decided to follow and see what it was about. Even though I wasn't a history student, I joined the crowd, followed them into the Registry and stayed.

Some weeks in, it became obvious that the Occupation was going to run out of steam, and that some sort of resolution was needed. A group of sympathetic staff (including Vic Beasley) and activist students (including me, Ann Smith, Rudi Spacek and Judy Wotherspoon) convened to try and negotiate a settlement. We produced a newsletter (printed by the erstwhile Andrew McHugh) called 'Dialogue', which sought to open up discussions about student concerns. The effort was unsuccessful.

Towards the end of the Occupation there was a late-night knock on the door of my share house, and I was served a document by the sheriff of the Supreme Court. It turned out to be an injunction which threatened that I (and twelve others) would be held 'at the Governor's pleasure' if we did not comply with the term of the injunction: that we would return the files of Professor Russel and not publish their contents. Of course, it was impossible to comply with the injunction – that horse had already bolted.

What shocked me was to find out that as one of the 13 people named, it seemed that I was a 'ringleader'. I had always seen myself as an outsider, an occasional contributor to large-scale debates during the Occupation meetings perhaps, but nothing more than that. In the comments made after Nix's talk, I discovered that the injunction had been sought by the University Council, and that it was never followed up – but it had a salutary effect on me. I decided enough was enough. Soon after I left the Occupation, never to return, the Registry was raided by security guards backed up by police, Dave McPherson and others were beaten up, and the Occupation was over.

So how did Nix Herriot's talk change my life? It caused me to revisit and rethink the days of the Occupation and what it meant, and particularly my role. I've always felt that I had been cowardly in leaving, but one of the things I discovered at Nix's talk was that by the time the police arrived there were very few students there – that had all gone home for holidays. At the time, I felt that the whole thing had been a failure, and I have thought that for fifty years, and I thought little of my efforts in joining the group trying to find a solution to the stalemate over the Occupation.

What I didn't understand was that the people leading that push were significant players on the university staff, and that the failure of that effort was not something I should demean as I had all the years since.

More than anything, Nix's talk, the research behind it, and the review of those times 50 years later by those at the meeting at the Box Factory provided a much wider context for what happened at Flinders that August in 1974, and although the latter part of the 1970s was seen as a deflated time for student activism across the country, the Occupation provided the impetus for significant and long-lasting change at Flinders, both in what was taught and the way it was taught. Russell, of course, had to resign, and the university slowly became a different place, one that was increasingly democratic for students and staff. Like many others, I suspect, this was all new information for which we owe Nix a wholehearted thanks, and it allowed us to see what happened back then in a different light.

Fifty years on, we learnt that what looked like a massive defeat and a great failure, in fact had a considerable impact. Nix's talk confirmed that indeed we can change things, and that in doing what we did at Flinders in August 1974, we made history and created significant change. Fifty years later, I have had a chance to rethink a really important time in my life, and to see it quite differently, this time in a positive light.



### **JUDY SZEKERES**

I took part in the occupation only for the first week or so as I then went home to Sydney for the holidays and was absent at the sad conclusion. My memories are of sleeping on the Council tables (which I then sat around as a student rep in the following year); typing essays on the electric IBM typewriters; manning the switchboard; and generally keeping staff at bay. I do remember long argumentative meetings where we tried to reach consensus on issues but I doubt that I was terribly invested in the issues as I was studying in the Philosophy, Drama and Art disciplines which gave no exams and where group assessment was a frequent method of assessment already. I do think it is interesting to note that the lasting effect of occupations like that at Flinders was the requirement on universities and all higher education providers to include student input into academic decision-making. It is now written in to the higher education standards that they must meet to gain registration.

## **ADJUNCT PROFESSOR PETER SANDEMAN**

In 1974 during my second year at Flinders, I was a very occasional participant in the Occupation and afterwards became General Secretary of the Students Association in 1976 (and later President of the Union).

I too went to Norwood High School and knew of Dave Macpherson as one of the jocks on campus while I was a wannabe student radical, so it was a bit of a shock to go to Flinders and discover Dave was a leading leftie!

In 1975 and 76, I frequently took Mike Clark onto campus in the back of my car after he was expelled and engaged Robyn Layton as the Students Association lawyer to argue against Mike's expulsion and the suspensions of Dave Macpherson and Mark Burford (a later housemate) and others.

Sadly, I was present in the tavern when Mike burst in with several cops hanging off him but the warrant was legal and he was arrested. I saw a bit of Carolyn Sim and Mike in Melbourne where they moved when I ran student services at the then Rusden State College while finishing my BA at Monash.

My small participation in the Occupation ended when I voted against opening Roger Russell's files as I felt the original purpose of the movement had been hijacked. Shortly afterwards the Occupation came to its end when staff stormed the Registry. I suppose I was not sufficiently a believer in revolution in one campus and its ability to inspire an uprising against the state.

Later I helped form the Labor club which challenged the dominance of the Maoists at Flinders but joined with Mike and others against the CPA cadre then controlling the Australian Union of Students. I was always somewhat distracted as a student member of the University Council by memories of how Mike and Carolyn used the council room table during the Occupation!

I learned a lot in the heady days of student politics in the 1970s at Flinders, how to organise, how to build strong coalitions and how collective impact can resist the enduring power of the state.

I returned to Flinders after my sojourn in Melbourne to study a B Soc Admin and MSW and embarked on a long career in the non-government sector where the learnings from student politics have served me well.



## **DAVE MACPHERSON**

I remember making these points at the Forum:

- I acknowledged that the issue of gender equality and gender stereotyping was considered as a bit of an afterthought, if at all, during the Occupation, and was something that the 'male revolutionaries' certainly didn't pay much attention to;
- We were asked 'how we felt' doing the Occupation, or words to that effect - my response was that it was "exhilarating", an event we've always remembered, and has coloured at least some of our political work and life ever since;
- For me it was a real exercise in participatory democracy, and although the decision-making process was sometimes torturous, it led to broader 'buy-in' from those involved

- Incidents/events within and after the Occupation - such as the 'Case of the Crushed Hamburger'\*, the staff/security guard attack on the Registry building to end the Occupation, the expelling and suspension of students, etc - showed the extent the 'state' was prepared to go to protect their interests.
- The excellent (for its time) media resources of the SRC (Empire Times & Andrew McHugh, access for a time to University phone and mail facilities, and our publicity distribution network) was an important element in keeping the students on the front foot for as long as we were.
- The expansion of the key issues for the students and their supporters from 'compulsory history exams' to include 'US War research & US Imperialism' and the authorities harsh and inflexible reaction to the Occupation were key to how the Occupation was viewed as time went on.

I was charged with assault against Psychology academic David Gibbs during the staff/security guard attack on the occupied Registry, and his evidence for that was that he was so fearful (presumably of being hurt) that he himself crushed a hamburger he was holding, after myself & others dropped a large plaster of Paris relief map of the Uni down the stairwell to block his (and others') path up the stairs to attack us. I was eventually found not guilty, and to be fair, I never felt the slightest bit of guilt!



Dave MacPherson



Rudi Spacek

### **RUDI SPACEK COMMENTS ON THE FLINDERS UNIVERSITY OCCUPATION**

The trigger for the Occupation was changing the exam system - to make exams optional - you did an exam if you wanted to, or you could pass by coursework. So, if you're not passing by coursework, it'd be a good idea to do an exam as well. The choice would be made by the student. I thought that would get widespread support from students and it ultimately did.

They say the idea came from History students, but actually it was my idea and I first raised it in Geography. I was on the Geography Consultative Committee, and we battled it out for a long time- I think they only agreed to it so they could go home!

I floated the idea with all the History students I knew too and pretty well all I spoke to were in favour. So, a few of us called a meeting on the Social Science lawns. Attendance was huge and that meeting endorsed optional exams for History.

After that it was decided to maintain a large student presence in the Social Sciences common room. So, the idea was for us to go up there and stay there and talk to the staff. Most didn't want to talk to us - although I did manage to talk to some of them.

But then the general student meeting here put the motion to move to the Registry, and I think that came from the Philosophy students. Brian Medlin was at the University at the time, but I don't remember him having anything to do with it - it was Ian Hunt who was involved. I can't remember who raised the business of taking over the registry. Everything was democratic - if you didn't win a vote you went along with whatever the decision was. During the Occupation all decision making followed proper meeting procedures.

I was there for the whole Occupation, for four weeks! But I wasn't involved in busting open the files and sitting there and going through the files - I didn't contribute to that document - I didn't really agree with doing it. I wanted the focus to stay on exams and not too many other issues. But by agreement they had a small group that did it anonymously, and then they produced what they called the Doorstep Document - it was printed off and it arrived on the doorstep, it was "found" in a box on the doorstep of the Registry!

About Nix's talk on the occupation. It really was more about radicalism, student radicalism. People at Nix's talk gave some anecdotes at the end, I gave them a couple.

One incident was, we took over the switchboard - nobody could ring the university or ring out unless we put them through. So, the university got a bunch of technicians in to bypass the switchboard. And then this guy appears from science - I've forgotten his name but he was working on the electric car concept, which I couldn't fathom at the time. And he said, I'll put it back for you. Within about half an hour, we had the control of the switchboard again - all the phone calls in and out!

We had rosters for a lot of things. When it was my turn to be on the switchboard one night I got a call from Mark Oliphant, he was Governor of South Australia at the time and I think he might have been Chancellor of Flinders University too. He threatened to call in the Army. I told him in various ways that wouldn't go over very well

against unarmed students, that he'd be better off organising a meeting between us and the relevant University decision makers who had been refusing to negotiate.

I didn't think towards the end that the Occupation was fizzing out. It was holidays with fewer students on campus, but quite a few people who were there almost all the time had been coming and going all along, most returning after dealing with the other things in life that they needed to attend to. I did the same. Many were continuing with their courses, as I was, and quite a few needed to catch up. Some were parents, etc. But things were a bit quieter then.

Part of the problem in thinking about the Occupation is that it was so long ago. Everyone has the problem of remembering detail after 50 years. But a lot of people got up and talked about how it affected them pretty much for the rest of their lives and turned them into social activists and they continued in some way. It had a huge effect on me, the Occupation experience. You know, all my life from then on I've been very active politically. But it was also the university experience in general plus whatever I gleaned from the courses I did that made the difference.

Did the Occupation change me into a radical? Or was I already that way? It was the experience of all of that, it was a bunch of things together. I mean, I already had some socialist tendencies before Uni - I got that from my father, I think. And then a lot of it was confirmed by what I learned in university, I was doing all the right courses to get the social analyses and to deal with a lot of issues that were important, you know.

What I mainly learnt from the Occupation was how to organise, how to 'work it', you know, how to get things done and how to be more effective in meetings, get what you want to a large degree - obviously not all the time, but how to be effective and not put up with bullshit. That was an important life skill and could be applied anywhere, especially in the workplace.

# BARRY JONES: 2024 – A YEAR IN REVIEW

## 2024: a year of racism and lying to ourselves

[Barry Jones](#), *Pearls and Irritations*, Dec 27, 2024

*Anthony Albanese appears to be strikingly lacking in ambition. I am convinced that making some bold decisions, and explaining them, would strengthen his prime ministership significantly. Some influential Australians now call for moderation and “centrism”. This would be a grave mistake. What is the “centrist” position on killing children in war zones, child sexual abuse, domestic violence, corruption, torture, the death penalty, cruelty to refugees?*

## Racism, The Voice and lying to ourselves

The defeat of the Constitutional Referendum on the Voice in October 2023 demonstrated political paralysis on one side and reckless moral destitution on the other, and its echoes rolled on throughout 2024.

When Mark Twain visited Australia in 1895, he reported conversations with people who regarded the elimination of Aborigines as inevitable and shrugged off evidence of their murders. H.G. Wells’ novel *The War of the Worlds* (1898) begins with references to the slaughter of Tasmanian indigenes. On 12 March 1913 the site of Canberra was dedicated as the future national capital: ironically our only capital city with a First Nations name. William Morris Hughes – ‘Billy’ Hughes – then Labor Attorney-General, later Prime Minister and a Labor deserter, spoke at the event. His words were deeply shocking: “Here we have a symbol of nationality... the first historic event in the history of the Commonwealth we are engaged in today without the slightest trace of **that race we have banished from the earth**”. [My emphasis].

Hendrik Willem van Loon (1882-1944), an American journalist and historian, born in The Netherlands, was a powerful intellectual influence on me as a child, and shaped my thinking. He had the cartoonist’s gift for explaining complex subjects with powerful images. *The Home of Mankind* (1922) was a world geography. He deplored the “incurable vice of nationalism” and the horrors of what he called “the Great Era of Exploitation”, during the Imperial expansion of the 19th Century. Then came three sentences, which horrified me, when I read them first, at the age of 6 or 7:

“The man-hunts with horses and dogs organised to exterminate the Aborigines of Australia are rarely mentioned in the histories devoted to the early years of that distant continent. Why go on? I am merely repeating what **everybody** knows.” [My emphasis].

Well, I did not know, nor did my teachers. Nor did textbooks record it. Significantly, although I read few books by Australians or about Australia as a child, I remember that in promotional material for the Sesquicentenary of European settlement (1938) Australian Aborigines had been included in a list of fauna. That did seem odd. “The great Australian silence”, as W.E.H. Stanner called it, followed for decades. Then a policy of “assimilation” followed from 1937 to 1967, demonstrating the proverb about the road to hell. This was the time of “the stolen generation”, suppression of Indigenous knowledge, language and history. The much under-rated Prime Minister Harold Holt took a new approach after Menzies retired, securing passage of the 1967 Referendum to count Indigenes in the Census.

The High Court's recognition of Indigenous land rights led to a cynical revival of racism by John Howard from 1996, taken to new depths by Scott Morrison and Peter Dutton. Having a voice to address Indigenous disadvantage, raising life expectancy and reducing incarceration rates to the national average, improved access to education, health, housing and employment was attacked as conferring preferential treatment. "Division! Division! Division! We can't have division," Dutton parroted with cynicism beyond measure. Truth became an invention – a projection.

### **The ABC**

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation has had a profound influence on my life since childhood, but now faces unprecedented challenges, from social media, incessant vindictive attacks by the Murdoch empire and hostility from powerful vested interests. Its audience share is falling, ageing and can be characterised as elitist. But no other Australian radio or television network has the range, analysis and depth of the ABC: investigative reporting, foreign affairs, health, science, sport, law, philosophy, religion, history,

children's programs, music, economics, agriculture, art, gardening and Indigenous affairs.

Its high achievers include John Lyons, Robyn Williams, Norman Swan, Andrew Ford, Alan Kohler, Laura Tingle, Geraldine Doogue, Louise Milligan, Andrew West, Paul Barry, John Barron, Sarah Henderson and Tamara Oudyn. The ABC has played an essential role in covering emergencies – bushfires, floods and Covid-19. Its rural and regional coverage has been vital, even lifesaving.

*Late Night Live* is an outstanding example of what the ABC does best. Phillip Adams hosted the program on ABC Radio National from 1991 and his last program, with Laura Tingle, was on 27 June 2024. He interviewed thousands of major figures and often pursued unpopular causes. He was a driving force, endlessly curious, opening up dark and mysterious places. He was largely responsible for the revival, exhumation even, of the Australian feature film industry, and chaired the Commission for the Future 1985–90 which attracted international recognition for its work on climate change. David Marr became Phillip's non-apostolic successor at *Late Night Live* and has maintained its intellectual curiosity and challenge.

In March 2024, Kim Williams was an outstanding choice by the Albanese Government to become chair of the ABC, with his powerful intellect, driving force and exceptional range of interests. He faces enormous challenges, not only securing more public funding but recruiting new management and talent. The ABC has some problem areas: programming where the bland are leading the bland, cooking shows, showbiz people talking to showbiz people, news bulletins headed by local human interest stories. But if anyone can redirect the ABC, Kim Williams is best placed.

### **Effects? Always. Causes? Never**

Liberal democracy is under threat across the globe. Even New Zealand is playing with Trumpian tropes. Canada's Justin Trudeau is



likely to fall. Germany and the Netherlands may turn hard right. India and Indonesia have authoritarian leaders. Keir Starmer's victory in the UK has to be seen in the context of massive indifference, street violence and other dark forces.

In 2024 there were more elections than any year for the past century, and there were heavy swings against incumbent governments: India, the United States, Japan, United Kingdom, Germany, France, the Netherlands, with short-term factors, especially the cost of living and antagonism to refugees being central, while longer-term issues, notably climate change, fell down, or off, the list. The rising cost of food, fuel, housing, transport, insurance makes voters angry, and political polarisation by Oppositions emphasises effects, in the here and now, and refuses to acknowledge causes, most of them long-term and influenced by external events, or demographic changes.

The ageing of Australia's population, the cost of fixing Robodebt, the NDIS, tackling the scandalous quality of aged care, preoccupation with housing/real estate as the primary aim of investment, the effects of policy failures with Covid-19, including a record Budget deficit of \$91.3 billion in 2021-22, disaster relief, disruption of international trade, the flattened economy of China, our largest trading partner, between \$268 to 368 billion for submarines, beginning the transition away from fossil fuels – all these were inherited by the Albanese Government, not created. But the Coalition refuses to acknowledge any of this and insists on its superior skills in managing the economy.

The Coalition's policy proposal to build seven nuclear reactors to provide baseline power has received surprisingly favourable responses in opinion polls, despite failure to provide plausible details about costs and timing. Dutton and his Shadow Minister Ted O'Brien, both Queenslanders, have had very gentle media treatment. They have pointed to Ontario with its 18 reactors as a model. But that is a very odd choice. Ontario can be covered with snow in winter, something I suspect, which is rare in

Queensland. Sun and wind come free in Australia, and are abundant. Dutton and O'Brien assert that the reactors will be economically successful, but the entire cost of \$331 billion over 25 years will be met by government (i.e. taxpayers), with no private or corporate investment. So much for a market solution, as offered with solar panels and wind farms! Critical analyses of the nuclear proposal and its costings by CSIRO, the Australian Energy Market Operator and the Grattan Institute are dismissed as "political", and the Opposition relies entirely on estimates by a firm called Frontier Economics.

Albanese's considerable skills are largely internal and hence invisible. Oddly, Albanese from the Left proved to be more cautious on reform than Bill Shorten from the Right. In the 2019 election, the aggregate vote for the ALP (33.3%) was higher than when it won in 2022 (32.6%). There were two factors in the changed outcome: Scott Morrison and the Teals. In 2019 voters didn't know Morrison and were prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt. In 2022 they did and they weren't.

Albanese appears to be strikingly lacking in ambition. I am convinced that making some bold decisions, and explaining them, would strengthen his prime ministership significantly.



He could begin by bringing Tanya Plibersek in from the cold, experimenting with democracy inside the ALP, tackling the corrosive causes of Australia's gambling obsession, addressing our grossly unequal education system, taking stronger action against racism and Indigenous deprivation, taking a far stronger line on all forms of terrorism, and a foreign policy grounded on morality, not just trying to avoid giving offence. He made a ritual visit in the hope of pleasing Rupert Murdoch (he won't succeed here), decapitated the Nature Positive Bill to satisfy the mining industry, pledged to maintain the Tasmanian salmon industry and remained loyal to gambling lobbyists. Will it gain him any votes? Doubtful. Will it alienate ALP activists? Yes. Australia has 137 billionaires and 3.3 million people living below the poverty line, including 761,000 children. Will the word "equality" be

raised in the 2025 election by either side? Very doubtful. Despite the swings to the hard right globally, Australia may become an important outlier. Some influential Australians now call for moderation and "centrism". This would be a grave mistake. While attracted to having more collaboration and courtesy in political life, "centrism" is more like a tape measure that can be used to settle on a midpoint between two dubious policies. What is the "centrist" position on killing children in war zones, child sexual abuse, domestic violence, corruption, torture, the death penalty, and cruelty to refugees? We need far more courage, not less.

### **Barry Jones**

*Barry Jones was Minister for Science 1983-90 and is a Fellow of four of Australia's five learned academies. His book "What is to be done" was published in 2020.*

## **IS THIS THE BEGINNING OF THE END FOR RUPERT'S EMPIRE?**

*Where does this bombshell Nevada court finding leave the future of the century-old conservative media empire — one that meddles ferociously in the politics of the US, the UK and Australia?*

*Eric Beecher, Crikey, Dec 10, 2024*

<https://www.crikey.com.au/2024/12/10/rupert-murdoch-news-corp-nevada-court-case-what-happens-next/>



A scathing legal finding released to a sealed court in Reno, Nevada, last Saturday has sown the seeds that could unravel the global Murdoch media empire. Its architect — Edmund J. Gorman Jr (known as "Joe"), an obscure probate commissioner in Nevada's Second Judicial District Court — has set the stage for the denouement of the century-old Murdoch dynasty with his conclusion that Rupert and Lachlan Murdoch acted in "bad faith" when they tried to alter the family's irrevocable trust. This change would have given Lachlan control of the empire, instead of adhering to the trust's terms that divide control equally among Rupert's four oldest children, Lachlan, James, Elisabeth and Prudence — referred to in the proceedings as the "objectors" — after his death.

## STARBUCKS BARISTAS STRIKE IN 3 CITIES DURING XMAS RUSH



Union members walked out of stores in Los Angeles, Chicago and Seattle beginning Friday morning — with the expectation that strikes will expand to hundreds of stores from coast to coast by Christmas Eve.

The Washington Post,  
December 19, 2024

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2024/12/19/starbucks-strike/>

## BRIAN ABBEY POINTS US TO JENNY HOCKING'S INQUIRY INTO THE STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE OF GOUGH WHITLAM'S FILES

*And it is not just Gough Whitlam's ASIO file that has been "culled" by the National Archives of Australia. The relevant Government House Guest Books at the time of the Dismissal have disappeared and the entire archive of Kerr's prominent supporters, including Lord Mountbatten, was accidentally burnt in the Yarralumla incinerator.*

As readers may recall Prof Jenny Hocking has been the most industrious and persistent questioner of the behaviour of people in high places re the unprecedented unseating of Gough Whitlam in 1975. Her recent article in *Conversations* (Jan 2, 2025) continues the story by unearthing a string of "regretted accidents" impacting key evidence regarding the Whitlam affair. <https://johnmenadue.com/the-continual-cover-up-jenny-hocking-on-the-strange-disappearance-of-gough-whitlams-asio-file/>

Prof. Hocking is still on the trail and reports her {very understandable} surprise and suspicion at finding that on different occasions many highly-relevant official documents had been "mistakenly" or "accidentally" destroyed, rendering key questions about that era and that moment forever unanswerable.



**This story, to my mind, offers two insights:**

1. the need, given the weight of other remaining evidence, to keep serious doubt about the Dismissal alive
2. To understand that such accidents have a tactical place in the conduct of all sorts of bodies - governments, big corporations, masters-of-the-universe and so on, right down to the tax avoider who lives a few doors down from you.

Enlarging the list reminds us of the prevalence of defensive deceit in human conduct, should we need reminding, but does not by any means reduce the far greater and less forgivable odium to be attached to those in high office.

**Brian**

# COUNTERING THE FAR RIGHT: DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE AUSTRALIA (DAA)

Readers may recall that last year LHSSA convened a panel session followed up by a special-edition newsletter which focused on the growing influence of ‘Neo-Fascist’ groups, or others with right-extremist ideology, in Australia. The potential for violent terrorist act(s) to occur in Australia within the next twelve months, through misplaced ideological fanaticism, is very real, to the extent that ASIO has classified this as *probable* (Australian Security Intelligence Organisation website 2024). In recent days we have witnessed an escalation of unacceptable and violent acts towards Australia’s Jewish community, doubtless given momentum by the Israel-Palestine conflict.

With the next Federal election looming, the emergence of populist right political parties, and politically conservative action groups, is of further concern. Their agendas are couched in ‘nationalist’ or ‘patriotic’ sentiment – to attract electoral credibility for subversive objectives which undermine social cohesion and respect for democratic institutions. Such political movements share many core values and are gaining increasing traction around the globe. Decades of neoliberal economic rationalist policy, and the ‘rolling back’ of the

welfare state, have left many people feeling disenfranchised. Populist right parties here in Australia, such as One Nation and the United Australia Party amongst others, have fortunately had limited electoral success compared with overseas counterparts. Nonetheless, their emergence similarly reflects popular disenchantment with politics overall. It is evident too that extreme right values are becoming more deeply entrenched in the conservative side of Australian politics. It would be difficult to categorise the Liberal-National Coalition as ‘mainstream’ under Peter Dutton’s leadership.

Organisations like Advance, active lobbyists for the ‘No’ campaign in the Voice Referendum, also pose tangible threats to democratic stability as they seek to normalise right-extremist values via a strategy of misinformation, disinformation and propaganda. Advance is part of a powerful, well-organised and well-funded anti-progressive international franchise. In Australia, Advance is generously supported by some of the nation’s wealthiest industrialists and business interests.

Right-extremists and conservative action groups including Advance (ostensibly claiming to champion the rights of the ‘mainstream’) seek only to

advance private interests over public good, promote social and economic conservatism, and arrest action on climate change – some even claiming the latter to be a hoax or conspiracy theory. Underpinning this agenda are erosion of labour standards; further dismantling of the social safety net; austerity budgets and low tax regimes; and disrespect for human diversity including racism, xenophobia and discrimination on the basis of gender and sexuality. To this can be added the sanctioned expansion of the fossil fuels sector, the vilification of renewables, and the refusal to acknowledge that climate change and adverse weather events are driven by human activity.

## **Democracy Alliance Australia (DAA)**

DAA was recently established in South Australia **to counter the growth and influence of neo-fascist and right-extremist groups, movements and political parties whose divisive actions threaten social cohesion and democratic rights.** DAA envisions an Australian society that values transparent democracy, human rights and human dignity, diversity, equity and social justice, as well as respect for the environment.

DAA is not aligned with a political party but may seek to influence political parties to achieve progressive outcomes.

Work has commenced in pursuit of DAA's mission to **raise community awareness and direct attention to activities aiming to undermine democratic values.**

Ongoing activity includes:

- *Establishing a knowledge base of Far-Right groups and Conservative lobbyists.*
- *Monitoring their statements, actions, allegiances and funding sources.*
- *Forging a national coalition of interest, developing a broad and diverse base of*

*progressive individuals and organisations who will contribute through:*

- Knowledge sharing and dissemination
  - Developmental education, training and community engagement
  - Ongoing identification of threats and opportunities.
- *Developing a multi-faceted communications strategy to appeal to new supporters and inform and update members regularly.*

Work with and through the union movement has also commenced in recognition of

the extreme-right's antipathy to organised labour as well as the stated intention (by the Liberal-National Coalition) to deregulate existing Australian workplace standards.

Anyone interested in being in the work of DAA or wishes to become involved is invited to contact

[democracyallianceaust@gmail.com](mailto:democracyallianceaust@gmail.com) for further information.

## **SUBMISSION TO SENATE INQUIRY RE RIGHT WING EXTREMIST MOVEMENTS IN AUSTRALIA**

<https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=333a244c-8392-4588-98cb-18b1b4cc020e&subId=753887>

Richard Stone and Doug Melvin highlighted this submission (one of 45 which were submitted to the Inquiry). It is a collaborative effort compiled by four Australian academics whose research intersects with this subject (Dr Jordan McSwiney, University of Canberra; Dr Imogen Richards, Deakin University; Dr Kurt Sengul, Macquarie University; and Callum Jones, PhD candidate, Monash University). It addresses each of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference and is comprehensive in its coverage.

The Report of the Inquiry was presented in December 2024. The Government is yet to address its recommendations.

[https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportsen/RB000315/toc\\_pdf/RightwingextremistmovementsinAustralia.pdf](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportsen/RB000315/toc_pdf/RightwingextremistmovementsinAustralia.pdf)

# OBITUARIES

## **DAWN SENDY**

**1929-2024**

**Long-term CPA member, Dawn Sendy, died on 12 November at the age of 95.**

In 1951, at the height of the Cold War, Dawn – then a typist – went to China for over two years as part of a study group of Australian communists led by Eric Aarons. It was a highly secretive operation as travel to China from Australia was outlawed. They travelled via Europe and then the USSR. She later married one of the comrades, John Sendy, an organiser from South Australia. In the autumn of 1942, when the CPA was still illegal, the Sendy family had joined *en masse*. John was then 17 years old.

From 1956-1962, Dawn became the full-time unpaid secretary of the CPA's youth wing, the Eureka Youth League (EYL), in Adelaide. She exhibited great organisational flair. Under her tutelage, the EYL basketball club grew to have 70 members. It was one of the biggest clubs in the South Australian Women's Basketball Association and Dawn, also an able senior player, was elected to its executive. The EYL junior team became the best in the state.

The EYL basketball achievements declined when Dawn (reluctantly) accompanied John to Melbourne where the CPA had directed him to serve. It was a time of great tension in the Victorian Branch where the Sino-Soviet split resulted in Secretary Ted Hill leading a walkout and forming the breakaway CPA (Marxist-Leninist). Dawn and John went to live in Hawthorn where numerous communists – and Jim Cairns – lived nearby.

Through the sixties and seventies, John became increasingly critical of the direction the CPA was taking, though he had become the National President. After the tumultuous 1974 Congress, he stood down from all Party positions and from full-time Party work. John and Dawn moved to live in Kingower, near Bendigo, where they grew grapes and were involved in local community activities. John died in 2004. Dawn outlasted him by 20 years.

*The details of Dawn's life are sketchy, since while John wrote his memoirs in *Comrades Come Rally!* (Thomas Nelson Australia), Dawn did not.*

## **JOHN SENDY**

**1924 – 2004**

**Reflecting on his 26 years as a CPA organiser or functionary, John Sendy noted that when he joined the Party in 1942 it had 10,000 members. Less than three years later it had 23,000 members, as it had become a mass organisation with real influence in the Australian community. When he stepped down as national president and from full-time work in 1974, it had barely 2,000 members.**

John's story reflects the Party's rise and decline, illustrating what attracted people of diverse backgrounds to join it, and what convinced many to remain life-long members. It demonstrates the resilience and determination of those who stayed and who sought to ensure that the Party adapted to changing social, political and economic environments. Sadly, it also shows the impact of internal disputation. As he notes in his memoirs, *Comrades come rally*, he largely spent his first 15 years in the Party trying to win broad political support and organising other members to pursue that aim. However, the following 15

years were “devoted primarily to ideological squabbles within the Party, to endeavours to keep members ‘on the line’ and to the search for some meaningful up-dating of that ‘line’”.

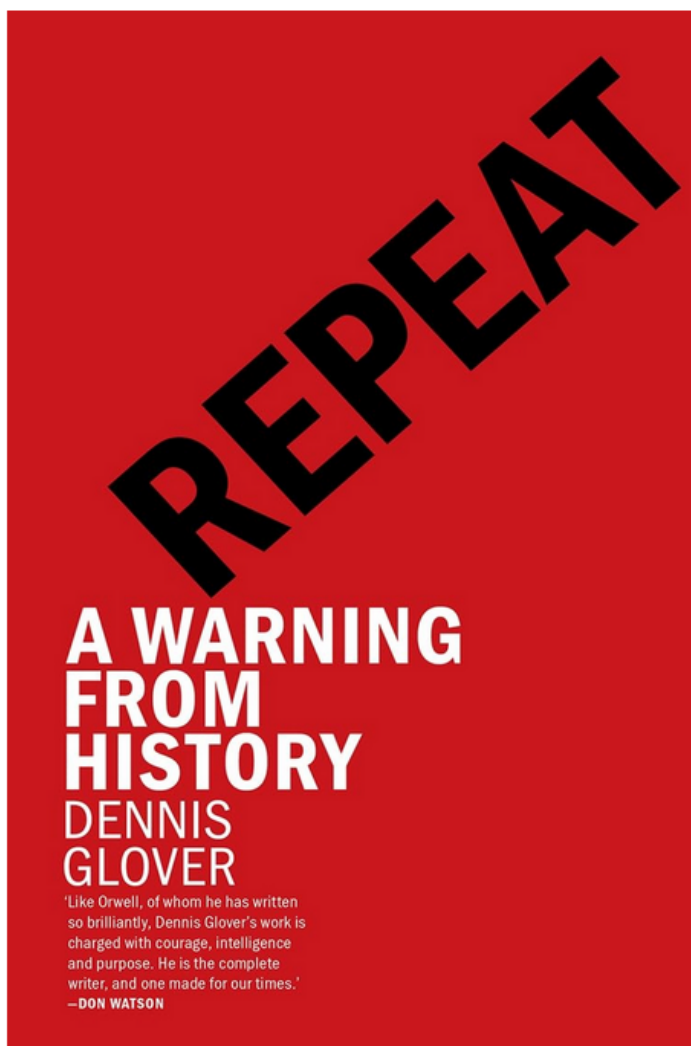
John’s father was a grocery shop owner and later a market gardener in the Adelaide Hills, who avidly followed world events and would “argue or discuss politics with all visitors”. The family regularly attended Rationalist Association lectures and discussion groups organised by the Left Book Club where communists were prominent. While the Party had been declared illegal, with leading members arrested, it continued to function, especially after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 led to its existing in the half-light of semi-illegality. In the

autumn of 1942, the Sendy family joined the CPA *en masse*. John was then 17 years old.

So began a life-long commitment to Party activities at various levels, including speaking tours in rural South Australia (SA), spending three years studying in revolutionary China, helping run a Eureka Youth League netball team, and playing a major role in two critical internal Party battles. Yet John was never a prominent public figure and was relatively unknown outside the Party. He acknowledged his qualities as an official lay in his reputation for “reliability, loyalty and steadiness,” rather than for any particular intellectual ability.

*Search Foundation published [JOHN SENDY](#) in [Communist Biographies Project](#)*

## BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

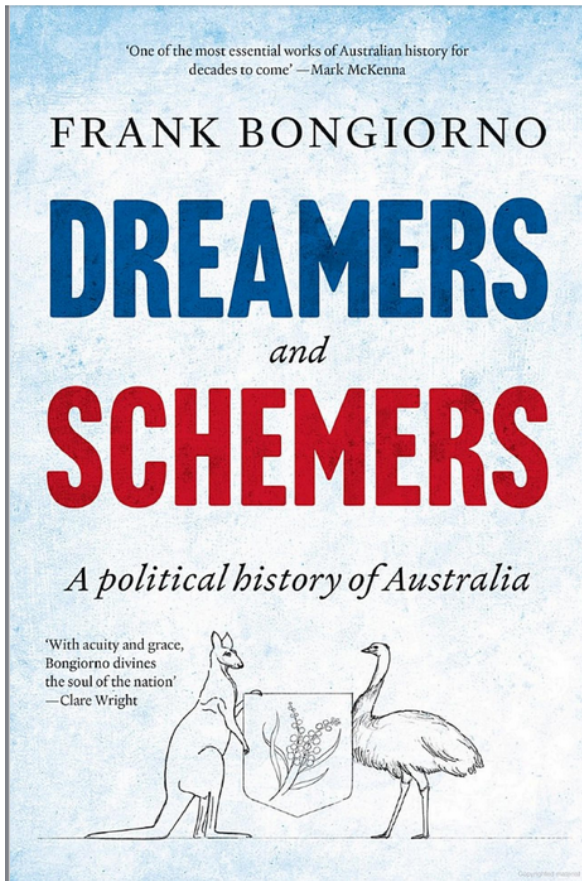


### ***Repeat: a Warning from History, Dennis Glover***

Are we about to see history repeat? 'Do you ever stop and ask, 'Is it all going to happen again?' - Siegfried Sassoon

We live in an age that seems eerily familiar. A time of dictators, populists, organised lying, European wars, grabs for territory, ideological extremism and even antisemitism, a time when things are falling apart and the centre is struggling to hold. It has all happened before, in the 1920s and '30s. History is sending us a warning, and unless we heed it, history will have its revenge as we repeat the disaster of the 1940s.

The world needs to learn the lessons of these decades, and fast. Dennis Glover retells the story of the interwar years in a series of lessons drawn from unfolding events and the unheeded omens of those who spoke out but were ignored.



**DREAMERS AND SCHEMERS:  
A POLITICAL HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA**  
**FRANK BONGIORNO**  
**2023**

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<https://www.blackincbooks.com.au/books/dreamers-and-schemers>