

**WE
PROTEST!**



CITY OF MELBOURNE







— WE — PROTEST — ! —

I think we can sometimes take our democratic culture for granted. But if you don't turn up in a democracy, if you vacate the public spaces, then bad things can be done in your name.

MARY CROOKS | VETERAN ACTIVIST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

In the 1830s, New South Wales Governor Richard Bourke requested of surveyors that the new southern metropolis of Melbourne should not include a city square, warning that such a space would only encourage ‘a dangerous spirit of democracy’.

However, despite Bourke’s intent, rowdy mobs of impassioned people have frequently and conspicuously occupied roads, parks and open spaces within the city throughout its history. In the perpetual contest for hearts and minds and in the larger campaign for justice, street protest in Melbourne has an illustrious history and a rude vitality.

Some examples. In 1917, the wearers of myriad hats and bonnets, milling on the banks of the Yarra, opposed the introduction of military conscription for overseas service in a bloody war already three years old. Through subsequent decades, speakers delivered partisan oratory to curious or indifferent listeners at the same locality. Annual May Day rallies have promoted workers’ rights but also promulgated a vast array of other dissident causes. And a long succession of demonstrations for Aboriginal rights – more broadly, for truth and reconciliation – extends through to the Survival Day rallies of recent years. Peaceniks, dairy farmers, taxi drivers, loggers, vegans, Sikhs and gay liberationists: all have been compelled to take to the streets, chaperoned – and sometimes confronted – by officers of Victoria Police.

Inevitably, there’s a cyclical character to many of these protest events, the sense of repetition having more to do with the causes being prosecuted than their visual character. Protests frequently address issues that are never definitively resolved. Browsing the historical records, it might appear that the more things change, at least in the costume department, the more they stay the same, in terms of the issues being addressed. A particular battle may be won or lost, but the struggle continues.

Historian Judith Smart has argued that Melbourne’s liberal Protestant culture made it the centre of the Australian peace movement throughout the 20th century. Certainly, Melbourne peace rallies staged in opposition to many military conflicts have tended to be larger than those in other Australian cities, including the anti-Vietnam War and anti-conscription rallies of the early 1970s, rallies against the Persian Gulf War in 1991 and the rally against the war on Iraq in 2003. Huge crowds also took to the streets in response to the dismissal of the Whitlam government in 1975 and to sweeping changes implemented by the Kennett government in the early 1990s. These protest rallies are significant events in the history of the city and, unsurprisingly, they have generated rich legacies of folklore and narrative, sometimes conflicting and often still fiercely partisan.

The vast majority of street protests relate to causes that might be labelled politically ‘progressive’ rather than ‘conservative’. Nevertheless, it is possible to see parallels between industry protests staged by logging-truck contractors, dairy farmers and taxi drivers – groups generally labelled as politically conservative – and protests staged by politically left-leaning groups, such as waterside workers or building unions. There have been protests staged by anti-communist groups and, more recently, by small groups of far-right nationalists but, historically, these have been rare events. However, protests by anti-abortionists have been far more common, and often more virulent.

There is a marvellous paradox at the heart of this episodic, historical survey of street protest in Melbourne. On the one hand, street protest is broadly accepted as a part of the everyday life of the city. Or, to put it another way, it’s accepted as one aspect of the everyday business of democracy. The city’s streets, squares and gardens are, to a large degree, a democratic domain, open to any of us with a barrow to push,

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Greedozer

Part of a costume created by protester and performance artist Benny Zable for his character ‘Greedozer’, early 1980s. Photograph by Jason McCarthy. Collection of National Museum of Australia

PREVIOUS PAGES

The Long Campaign

Anti-uranium protesters rally on the steps of Parliament House, 1978 (detail). Photograph by John Ellis (University of Melbourne Archives)

a placard to wave or a slogan to shout. However, on the other hand, street protest needs to be understood as more than a colourful routine practice. It might sometimes look like a playful carnival – and there is, in fact, often a playful dimension – but the history of street protest is, as Gary Foley suggests, the history of perpetual struggle for justice, on a number of fronts. To take to the streets in public protest is nearly always to give voice to a profound moral concern: a concern for peace (and an opposition to killing and to questionable wars); a concern for equal rights and fairness; a concern for the wellbeing of our planet; a concern for the rights of people persecuted on the basis of their particular ethnicity or beliefs or political status. These are not frivolous concerns. In most instances, street protest is a means for persistent prosecution of deeply held beliefs.

Getting out in the street – marching and making a lot of noise – is vital to the future of the struggle. And it's vital because, apart from anything else, it's fun. It gives everyone a sense of being a part of something much bigger... It reaffirms everything that you're fighting for.

GARY FOLEY | HISTORIAN AND VETERAN ABORIGINAL RIGHTS ACTIVIST

We might celebrate the fact that, quite simply, protesters are us. (At least protests include many of us, at some time or another.) But we might also take the view that protesters in some way constitute our better, altruistic selves. Protests about particular industrial issues are not simply about the personal interests of the people marching; rather, they encompass a concern for broader issues of fairness and dignity. Similarly, trade unions have historically played a significant role in protests about issues far removed from industrial rights, including,

for example, protests in opposition to the Vietnam War and to cargoes of uranium on ships at Swanson Dock. In fact, most protest campaigns in Melbourne have been concerned with issues beyond the immediate world of this particular city. There is a link to be drawn between anti-nuclear campaigns in the 1970s and 80s and current protests against the proposed Adani coal mine in north Queensland. Another link might be drawn between, say, the local campaign in support of East Timorese independence and protests against the current Australian government's indefinite detention of asylum seekers on Manus Island and Nauru. And there's a link too, of course, between historic campaigns for the decriminalisation of homosexuality and recent demonstrations in support of gay marriage.

Melbourne-born artist and activist Benny Zable is a veteran of innumerable street protests in his home city and all around the world. Assuming the character of 'Greedozer', a kind of post-apocalyptic Grim Reaper, he sometimes displays a hand-painted banner that reads:

WORK
CONSUME
BE SILENT
DIE

I RELY ON YOUR APATHY
IT'S COSTING THE EARTH

Zable's message provides a critical frame for the story of public protest in this city, implicitly paying tribute to those with sufficient conviction to take to the streets.

At Animal Liberation we're definitely fans of disturbance. We do things that people think are disruptive and disrespectful... But if you're willing to pay for the murder of animals, then you should be willing to look at it as well. And if you're willing to feed your children that dead animal, then you should let them see it.

EMMA HAKANSSON | YOUTH ACTIVIST WITH ANIMAL LIBERATION VICTORIA

The distinction between what constitutes 'peaceful protest' and what might be taken as 'disturbing the peace' is inherently debatable. There certainly have been political rallies in Melbourne that have turned violent, but these events have been quite rare; incidents of Monash University Maoists battling with police at anti-Vietnam War protests, of agitated mobs hurling tomatoes at the prime minister's white limousine or of police baton charges at the S11 blockade have been unusual exceptions to the normal run of events. The paintings of Melbourne protest events in this exhibition by Malaysian-born artist Anurendra Jegadeva are largely informed by his acute appreciation of their relative non-violence, in stark contrast to many of the political demonstrations that he's witnessed in his home country.

These days, Victoria Police policy is to engage with groups intending to stage a protest before the event takes place. The process for securing permission for a street protest seems to be well managed and surprisingly straightforward. Officers from the Police Public Order Response Unit might attend a protest in their impressive armour only as a last line of insurance against unforeseen violence. Thankfully, mounted police no longer deploy their horses to mow down demonstrators, as occurred at certain infamous events in the 1960s and 70s; rather, the presence of police horses is now found to

I'd love to do what the French do. Ten thousand farmers drive a tractor into the city. We block every artery. We tip milk down Bourke Street. I think that to really make our point we're going to have to become more drastic.

PHIL MALCOLM | DAIRY FARMER AND OCCASIONAL ACTIVIST

have a generally pacifying effect. Police acknowledge the truth in the lyric by the artist formerly known as Johnny Rotten, that 'Anger is an energy', but they have sophisticated and ever-evolving techniques to manage and deflect.

It might seem ironic that a group of women from the Save Our Sons movement was arrested and imprisoned in 1971 for the peaceful act of handing out anti-conscription leaflets while trespassing on government property, because many other rallies and demonstrations have been staged with a deliberate intention to create a far more conspicuous public disturbance. Tactics commonly employed to achieve this aim include the protracted obstruction of thoroughfares and intersections; the introduction of unusual, disruptive items into city streets (for example, tractors, livestock, logging trucks or dead animals); and the making of loud, sustained noise.

Another frequent tactic has been exhibiting signs and banners that are flagrantly, or sometimes ironically, insulting to a particular target of opprobrium. For example, at the protest rally against the Howard federal government's industrial relations laws in 2006:

THE EARTH IS FLAT
IR LAWS ARE GOOD FOR WORKERS
JOHN HOWARD IS TOP BLOKE!

Or, at one of many mass protest events staged during the first term of Victoria's Kennett government in the early 1990s:

JEFF KENNETT – A GRAND PRIX

Or, at a street rally in opposition to funding cuts introduced by the Fraser government in 1980:

PISS OFF FRASER!

There are parts of the world where this sort of behaviour or proclamation would attract criminal sanctions, so we are fortunate not to be subject to the kinds of repressive laws that curtail protest in many other jurisdictions. Which isn't to say, as Mary Crooks suggests, that we should take our democratic privileges for granted.

At Melbourne's May Day rally in 1975, local communists marching in triumphant celebration of the victory of the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam attracted considerable public and press censure. But despite their conspicuous show of support for an official enemy regime, there was no serious suggestion that these demonstrators should be charged with treason or stripped of their Australian citizenship. In the current climate of the 'war against terror', it seems probable that retribution for this particular kind of dissident behaviour would be much more severe.

Of course, street protests have only ever been one part of a larger program, augmented by a raft of additional strategies: petitions, community meetings, the writing of letters to newspapers and to politicians, campaigns of civil disobedience and, more recently, social media campaigns. The efficacy of any particular street protest may always be subject to debate, but Benny Zable argues that 'Street protest is still the most effective way to communicate to a

You can't expect to change people's opinions if you're just staying at home talking to your friends. You actually have to make a very strong effort to change things. You have a responsibility to your fellow citizens. If you think something's really, really bad, then you should do something about it.

JEAN MCLEAN | VETERAN ACTIVIST FOR PEACE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

lot of people at once, and it creates a ripple effect. You don't know who's going to turn up. You don't know who's going to be touched or changed.' Similarly, Gary Foley argues that the annual demonstrations by large crowds marching to define 26 January as Survival Day will inevitably help overturn the official fiction of this date as an occasion for happy national celebration.

Local communists may no longer parade through the city, but May Day marches and Palm Sunday peace rallies persist, alongside Survival Day, as vital annual events. A diverse range of groups with passionate views and long memories maintain vigorous campaigns for justice. This theatre of dissent, encompassing a multiplicity of causes and voices raised loud, is a noble feature of our civic life, effectively 'giving the finger' to Governor Bourke's colonial anxiety.

Malcolm McKinnon

EXHIBITION CURATOR

OVERLEAF
Pitched Battle
Front-page news story of a violent clash between police and anti-Vietnam War protesters in Collins Street, May 1972. Newspaper clipping from John Ellis collection (University of Melbourne Archives)

pitched battles crowded



• BANNER-WIELDING protesters attack a mounted trooper outside the Pan Am office in

PEACE RALLY BUE INTO VIOLENCE

POLICE and demonstrators clashed in a wild battle in Melbourne streets last night.

The mounted police and protesters clashed in a BRISBANE demonstration.

The number of police and protesters, about 3000, both gathered in the City Square.

15,477

MAY

44 FLIND

71



**OPPOSITE AND
THIS PAGE**

Not Happy, Jeff!
In November 1992 more than 100,000 people took to the street in protest against policies enacted by the recently elected Kennett state government. Photographs by John Ellis (University of Melbourne Archives)



OPPOSITE

Disarm All Nations

International Women's Day in 1962 was marked by this Spring Street procession, campaigning for peace and disarmament. Photographs from Communist Party of Australia (Victorian State Committee) collection, reproduced with permission of SEARCH Foundation and University of Melbourne Archives

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A Cause for All Ages

An elderly woman and a young child at a peace rally in Melbourne, mid-1960s. Photographs from Communist Party of Australia (Victorian State Committee) collection, reproduced with permission of SEARCH Foundation and University of Melbourne Archives



OPPOSITE

It's Costing the Earth
Benny Zable's 'Greedozer' takes centre stage as the Palm Sunday peace rally proceeds across Flinders Street, 1984. Photograph by John Ellis (University of Melbourne Archives)

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I Am Not an Ingredient
Vegan activists march to promote a compassionate cause, 2017. Photograph courtesy of Animal Liberation Victoria

OVERLEAF

No Blood for Oil
Thousands march down Swanston Street in protest against the Persian Gulf War, January 1991. Photograph by John Ellis (University of Melbourne Archives)



BLOOD

749

Cents per Litre.

WAR:
THE
ULTIMATE
OBSCENITY

WAR
Life

HEY!
BIG "HE"-MEN
WHAT PRICE
PLANET

FREE
STIL
-SHE?

THIS PAGE

Farmers Fighting for a Fair Go

Thousands of farmers converged on the city in July 1985 as part of a national protest against government tax policies. Gippsland dairy farmer Phil Malcolm marched at the head of the rally accompanied by his favourite cow, Supreme, who walked calmly up the steps of Parliament House.

Photograph reproduced courtesy of Phil Malcolm



OPPOSITE

Letters from Hitler 1

Taking an image of angry activists at a rally staged by the right-wing group Reclaim Australia at Federation Square, Anurendra Jegadeva creates an ironic juxtaposition of disparate elements. Collection of the artist, 2017, mixed media on vintage parchment in wooden box, 580 x 480 mm







PREVIOUS PAGES

Marching, Fighting

Members of the Seamen's Union Women's Committee march down Russell and Flinders Streets with banners campaigning against state government penal clauses and against nuclear tests, mid-1960s. Photograph from Communist Party of Australia (Victorian State Committee) collection, reproduced with permission of SEARCH Foundation and University of Melbourne Archives

OPPOSITE

Smash U.S. Imperialism

As the Vietnam War progressed, opposition to the conflict became progressively more complex. A significant focus for those opposing the war was the Australian government's alliance with American foreign policy and the US military complex.

This hand-printed poster promotes a rally in the Treasury Gardens in April 1971.

City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection, acquired from Lyn Hovey

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Stop Work to Stop the War

The moratorium rally, held in June 1971, was the third such event staged in opposition to the Vietnam War, particularly to Australia's involvement in the conflict. Rallies were held in all major cities around the country, but the Melbourne events consistently attracted the largest crowds.

City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection, acquired from Lyn Hovey

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Challenging Captain Cook

A young protester at an Aboriginal lands rights rally on 26 January 1976 strikes an ironic pose at Cook's Cottage in the Fitzroy Gardens. Photograph by John Ellis (University of Melbourne Archives)

OPPOSITE

An Army Marches on Its Stomach

Anti-nuclear protesters pause for refreshments at Ma's takeaway food van, mid-1960s. Photograph from Communist Party of Australia (Victorian State Committee) collection, reproduced with permission of SEARCH Foundation and University of Melbourne Archives



WRECK THE DRAFT

FRIDAY JULY 24TH

**DEMONSTRATE
INSIDE THE G.P.O.**

**RALLY 1:00 PM NORTH COURT
MELB. UNI.**

LEAVE FOR CITY 2:15 PM

SATURDAY JULY 25th

**PUBLIC FILL-IN OF
FALSE REGISTRATION
FORMS**

POST OFFICE PLACE

1:00pm

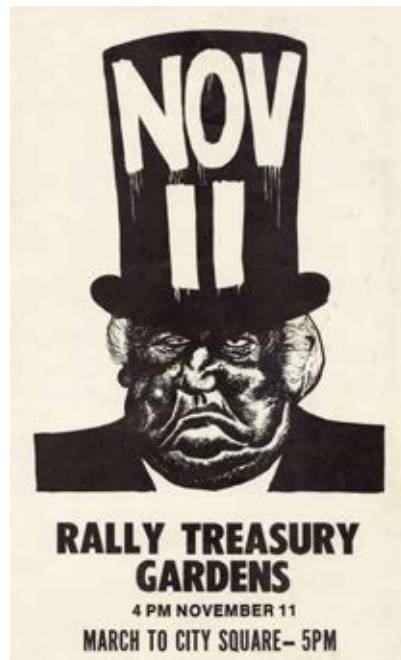
NATIONAL SERVICE ACT 1961-1968
Read carefully the notes to be filled before you fill in the form. Write clearly, and make your answers. This form is to be used as a specimen register.

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

REGISTRATION FORM

CONFIDENTIAL

S.D.S.



OPPOSITE

Wreck the Draft

A major component of protest against the Vietnam War was opposition to military conscription. Draft resistance was encouraged, with one tactic being the completion of National Service Registration forms using false names. This flier promotes an event staged specifically for this purpose.

City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection, acquired from Lyn Hovey

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A Popular Villain

The dismissal of the Whitlam government on 11 November 1975 by Governor-General Sir John Kerr was commemorated with a large protest rally in Melbourne on the first anniversary of the event. Rick Amor produced the artwork for this striking poster. City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection, acquired from Lyn Hovey



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Survival Day, 2018

An estimated crowd of at least 50,000 people assembled for the Survival Day rally on 26 January 2018, marching through the city from Parliament House to Federation Square and then on to Treasury Gardens. Photograph by Malcolm McKinnon

WE PROTEST!

Celebrating the streets of Melbourne as a democratic domain, open to any of us with a barrow to push, a placard to wave or a slogan to shout

11 May to 11 August 2018

City Gallery
Melbourne Town Hall

[melbourne.vic.gov.au/
citygallery](http://melbourne.vic.gov.au/citygallery)

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Inside front cover

Women Against Frazzocracy

A lateral-thinking demonstrator at a rally held in Melbourne City Square on 11 November 1976, commemorating the sacking of the Whitlam government 12 months earlier. Photograph by John Ellis (University of Melbourne Archives)

Inside back cover

Never Forget

Members of Melbourne's Sikh community march along Swanston Street in November 2017 to commemorate the 1984 massacre of Sikhs in India. Photograph by Malcolm McKinnon

Curator

Malcolm McKinnon is an artist, filmmaker, curator and ghost-wrangler, working mainly in the realms of social history and digital media. He has an abiding interest in the labyrinths of living memory and the peculiar beauty of local vernacular. Over the past 20 years his work has encompassed documentary filmmaking, oral history, urban planning, public and community art projects, critical writing and exhibitions.

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Rowdy, impassioned mobs have frequently and conspicuously occupied roads, parks and open spaces in central Melbourne, demonstrating on all manner of political and social issues. Perhaps you have been among them? The city is a democratic domain, open to any of us with a barrow to push, a placard to wave or a slogan to shout.

WE PROTEST! presents an overview of this rude history.